



## **The Network for Peace through Dialogue Why Dialogue? (and when, and how, and where?)**

### **Online Intercultural Dialogue and Facilitation**

[Soliya](#) is an organization which uses videoconferencing technology to facilitate online dialogue between U.S. and Middle Eastern college students. This session, led by Gabriel Koehler-Derrick, Program Officer and Reem Marto, Development and Outreach Officer, focused on Soliya's experience in leading online dialogue sessions. Since 2002, Soliya has been working with a wide range of university partners throughout the Middle East and the U.S. and has gained a great deal of experience in leading intercultural dialogue and facilitation trainings in an online environment. Soliya provided a brief introduction to its mission and objectives as an organization committed to cross cultural online communication. A discussion of lessons learned from their four years of work, best practice, organization and training followed, along with comments from Karen Ross of the Network for Peace through Dialogue's online dialogue team, who shared her own experiences with a listserv based online dialogue.

*Below are one participant's notes on this workshop:*

- Soliya currently has 7 full-time staff- all facilitators

Background:

- Soliya grew out of need to amend negative perceptions/lack of understanding between Arabs and Muslims.
- Wanted to connect university students, gain media skills, increase knowledge and understanding, promote engagement.

Connect program:

- 8 participants, 2 facilitators
- Meet every week over the course of the semester
- Video/Audio technology
- Part of university coursework

Use of:

- Webcams, headset, high speed internet, video conference software (developed for Soliya)

Academic component:

- Connect program = accredited

- Academic curriculum = reunited each semester
- Taught by partner professors

#### Video project:

- Students see raw footage of a specific event (i.e. Lebanon-Israel conflict)
- Produce edited media clip (1-5 min.) using video editing software
- Sense of how easy it is to be biased.

#### Articles:

- Students work with one another "across the divide" to write editorial pieces. Soliya works with Search for Common Ground to get the best editorials published.

#### Evaluation:

- Pre and post test for students, facilitators, professors in order to measure the impact.

#### Facilitators:

- From 24 countries
- 2 per group; 1 from the West & 1 from the Middle East
- 16 facilitation training programs
- Have access to "coaches" who can provide feedback on different situations.

#### Biggest challenge:

- Facilitators recognizing the warning signs of groups going off track
- Face-to-face meetings are not built into the program
- "high capacity at low cost"-can support thousands of students
- 30 universities: U.S., Europe, Middle East, so far over 750 students have participated

#### Work with universities:

- Contact the initiated professors; have to go through beaucroatic procedures at all universities
- Work with technical coordinator at each university
- Soliya provides administrative support

#### Asynchronous communication:

- Student blogs
- Personal profiles/ homepages
- Attempt to create a broader social network (possible attempt to make it public after initial private launch).

#### Questions

- Any evaluations of how students stay engaged after the semester/connect program ends? This is just starting-Soliya Network seen as key component of this. Also facilitation training, blog editors, collaborative projects.

INCENTIVE STRUCTURE for participation? Certificate program.