

Reflection worksheet | From debate to dialogue community engagement workshop

Reflection 1 (15-30 minutes)

Reflect on your experiences with dialogue and debate.

Debate	Dialogue
Oppositional: Two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.	Collaborative: Two or more sides work together toward a common understanding.
Winning is the goal.	Finding common ground is the goal.
Listening to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.	One listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning and find agreement.
Affirms a participant's own point of view.	Possibility of enlarging and changing a participant's point of view.
Defends assumptions as truth.	Reveals assumptions for reevaluation.
Causes a critique of the other position.	Causes introspection on one's own position.
Defends one's own position as the best solution and excludes other solutions.	Opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.
Creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.	Creates an open-minded attitude: openness to being wrong and an openness to change.
One submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.	One submits one's best thinking, knowing that other peoples' reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.
Calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.	Calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.
One searches for glaring differences.	One searches for basic agreements.
One searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.	One searches for strength in the other positions.
Involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feeling or relationship, and often belittles or depreciates the other person.	Involves a real concern for the other person, and seeks to not alienate or offend.
Assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.	Assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution.

Sources:

- Catherine Flavin-McDonald and Martha L. McCoy, *Facing the Challenge of Racism and Race Relations: Democratic Dialogue and Action for Stronger Communities*. Pomfret, CT: Topsfield Foundation, 1997, p.47.
- Adapted from a paper prepared by Shelley Berman, which was based on discussions of the Dialogue Group of the Boston Chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR).

What patterns do you notice? In what situations and places are you more likely to find one of these modes?

Reflection 2 (15-30 minutes)

Reflect on your own comfort with being in a dialogue mode:

Behaviours that support dialogue:

Suspension of judgement when listening and speaking.

When we listen and suspend judgment, we open the door to expanded understanding. When we speak without judgment, we open the door for others to listen to us.

Respect for differences.

Our respect is grounded in the belief that everyone has an essential contribution to make and is to be honored for the perspective, which only they can bring.

Role and status suspension.

Again, in dialogue, all participants and their contributions are absolutely essential to developing an integrated whole view. No one perspective is more important than any other. Dialogue is about power with, versus power over or power under.

Balancing inquiry and advocacy.

In dialogue we inquire to discover and understand other perspectives and ideas, and we advocate to offer our own for consideration. The intention is to bring forth and make visible assumptions, relationships, and gain new insight and understanding. We often tend to advocate to convince others of our positions. Therefore, a good place to start with this guideline is to practice bringing more inquiry into the conversation.

Focus on learning.

Our intention is to learn from each other, to expand our view and understanding, versus evaluate and determine who has the "best" view. When we are focused on learning we tend to ask more questions, try new things. We are willing to disclose our thinking so that we can see both what is working for us and what we might want to change. We want to hear from all parties so that we can gain the advantage of differing perspectives.

Source: The Dialogue Group. Retrieved from:

https://uactgco.weebly.com/uploads/2/7/0/2/27026981/what_is_dialogue__the_dialogue_group.pdf

What behaviours do you find easier and harder? What opportunities do you see to foster these skillsets?