

The Guide

A Guide for Youthworkers
on
How to Support Youth Leaders
in
Creating Transformative Dialogue



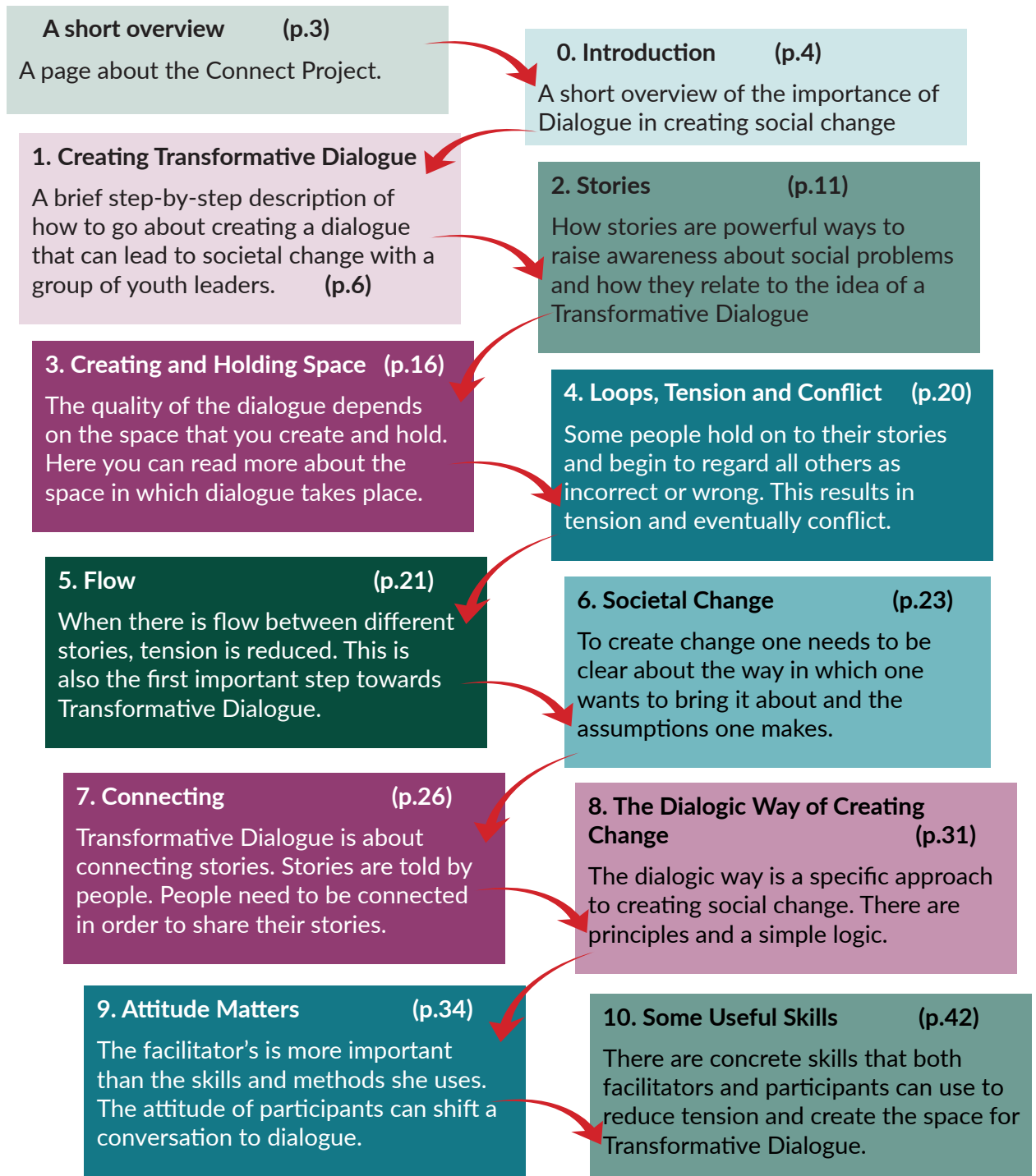
CONNECT



Erasmus+

How to Use this Guide

This Guide is a result of a journey with three groups of youth leaders during the Connect Project and is made up of several parts. You do not have to start at the beginning and read through the guide. Read the sections that interest you and extend from there. The parts are:



A Short Overview

The Connect Project focused on equipping youth workers and youth leaders with the understanding and skills to affect positive change in society using dialogue.

The project was severely affected by the Covid Pandemic and needed to be replanned and shortened.

It consisted of three multi-national meetings and dialogue events in each of the three participating countries: Finland, Spain and Sweden.

We intended to use stories to focus the attention of each group on the change they wanted to see and to engage key actors in dialogue. The stories - in video and written form - were about challenges identified by the teams. The participating youth leaders produced them under the guidance of youth leaders and project leaders.

When the groups met, they engaged in dialogue, first to identify challenges, and then to give form to the stories they wanted to tell.

We continued on the theme of stories as we moved to the next phase of planning meetings with key actors in local societies where challenges would be addressed.

Each group decided on the form of the dialogue and was introduced to skills, methods and essential attitudes

required for a constructive, transformative dialogue. They

were offered advice on how to design the dialogue events or processes and supported in planning these. It was, however up to each group to decide how they wanted to conduct these.

Two groups chose to emphasise advocacy followed by dialogue at single events and one chose to enter into a series of meetings with local actors.

Contrasting these approaches was one of the critical areas of learning for both the participants and the course leaders.

Besides the videos, the public events in Terrassa and Eskilstuna, and the dialogue process in Oulo, the project resulted in this guide and a story-based summary of the journey individuals and groups undertook.

As often is the case, there have been results that were not planned. In Oulu, the dialogue has continued. In Terrassa, the Greenfluencers have continued their work by raising awareness around environmental and climate challenges. In Eskilstuna, we await follow-up action.

Dialogue between officials, youth leaders and youth workers will continue during three planned visits by Finnish groups to Sweden, and a follow-up project is being planned, building on the learning gained from this project.

Some factual information

Connect is a Erasmus+ project financed by the European Union.

The participating groups of youth leaders were:

- RKI in Oulu, Finland
- La Vibria in Terrassa, Spain
- Young Revolution in Eskilstuna, Sweden

In total there were 14 youth leaders, 4 youth workers and three project coordinators involved in the project. xx people participated in dialogue events by the national teams.

Due to the Corona pandemic the actual work with the teams started with a meeting in Catalonia in June 2022. The next meeting was in Eskilstuna in October and the last meeting in Helsinki in November. The project ended in December 2022. Several planning and replanning meetings were held by the project coordinators.

Introduction

Dialogue is a concept that is used to describe many types of conversation.

Sometimes, the word is used to describe little more than a monologue or a series of monologues. We use the term Transformative Dialogue to describe a particular kind of conversation: one that leads to change on a fundamental level.

It is a rather ambitious task to affect change on a fundamental level in six months. It is perhaps even more ambitious to expect that young people would take to the idea

of delving deeply into the challenges they experience and then convince people in power to engage in a serious dialogue with them.

What impressed us most was the depth of insight into societal problems and the commitment of the participating youth leaders and youth workers. Each of the groups actively took up the challenge of telling their story - the first step in a long journey towards transformative dialogue.

From Story to Dialogue

Individuals and groups tell many stories about challenges in society.

They abound on social media and in other forums. They are met by other stories that challenge, contradict or regale them. They are all characterised by the desire for change, but those who tell the stories rarely meet to explore differences, similarities and possible synergies.

Dialogue is a way to create change. It is not the only way. It is, however, a way that counteracts fragmentation and distrust. It is a way that seeks collaboration and co-creation in dealing with complex problems in society. Transformative Dialogue goes further. It aims to effect change.

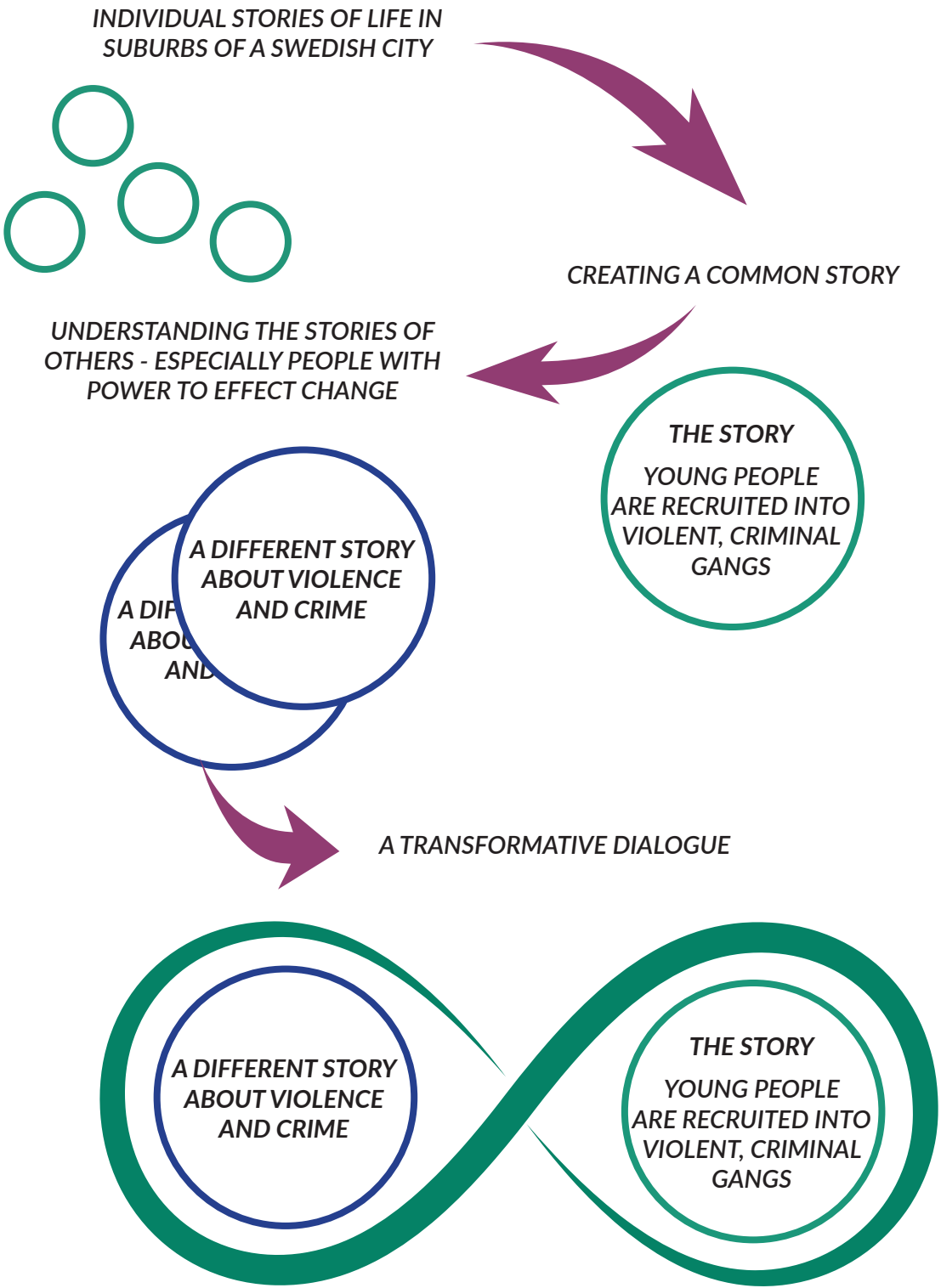
The task we set the teams in this project was first to tell their individual stories. We asked them to somehow combine these into a common story. Then we helped them to tell the story in a way that would make an impact. A more challenging task followed: to consider the other stories that were being told about the problems they identified - and to ask who was telling the stories that were dominant and powerful.

From here they had the possibility to create a space for their own story and for that of others - to allow these stories to interact. Dialogue is about the interaction of these stories and the people who tell them.

Dialogue and Transformation

How does Transformative Dialogue lead to transformation? We hypothesise that they will change when people truly engage in dialogue in a spirit of mutual respect and openness. Their views of others will change. Their view of the world might change. And their view of themselves and their role in the problems they are addressing will change.

This change happens because transformative dialogue allows (and encourages) people to let go of fixed ideas and strongly held positions. It allows them to hear how others see and experience a particular problem or challenge.



1. Creating a Transformative Dialogue

Four Steps to Create Change

PREPARE

Gather your group of youth leaders and get them to identify the change they want to see. Explore a theory of change with the group. Introduce the concept of Transformative Dialogue.

STORIES

Gather the individual stories and weave them into a common story for the group. How will it be presented? Explore other stories related to the issue and identify actors.

CREATE SPACE FOR DIALOGUE

Who needs to speak to whom about what? Where will they meet and how? Plan the conversations that are needed and connect with key actors. Introduce the skills required.

TRANSFORMATIVE DIALOGUE

Follow the four-stage dialogic process logic: Listen, Explore, Seek Potential, Concretise. Ensure implementation and follow-up.

Step 1: Prepare

Good preparation is an investment. Negatively stated, inadequate preparation can result in problems further along. The Connect Project resulted in several important lessons regarding this preparation stage. Here are some aspects of the preparation phase.

Gathering the Core Group

The first task for the youth leader is to identify a core group of young people who feel strongly about an aspect of society that needs to change. This group will work together to gain clarity about their story and then engage with key actors they identify.

It can be demoralising if the core group constantly changes, so emphasising commitment to the process is an important aspect at this early stage.

The advantages for the group are that they will learn about social change processes, and connect to each other and people they might want to have contact with later. They will learn more about dialogue, negotiation and facilitation during the process. They

will learn about teamwork, collaboration and how to resolve conflicts that may arise in the group.

The thing was, to create a group, where these single persons could feel more powerful, when they are surrounded by other people – like us. And to give the confidence to the people that they can actually do something, change something on their own. Little by little.”

**Léa
from the Terrassa team**

Goal, Purpose and a Theory of Change

A good way of starting off is to get the members of the core group to talk about themselves and what they see in society that they wish to change.

The youth worker might want to explore the causes and effects of the problems they observe before examining the potential for contributing to change. This initial dialogue can be concluded with the group deciding on the change they wish to focus on.

Having identified the change they want to see as a group,

the group needs to take stock: what is the current situation and what should they see when the process is over?

The gap between the present and their common goal is the change process. What needs to happen for change to take place? Who will be involved in creating change?

The youth worker can constantly check the assumptions being made about the change that will occur and those they determine to be essential to this change.

A useful method to use initially is to do a joint actor and issue map.

It is not the right moment to make concrete plans for HOW the change will occur. Try to stick to the task of setting goals and keep the theory of change discussion on a general level. This is not always easy with a group that is rearing to go and has concrete ideas of what they want to do. Ask the enthusiastic participants to note the ideas they have. These will be useful in the next stage.

Understanding what Transformative Dialogue is

It is important at this point to clearly understand the nature of Transformative Dialogue and its central role

in creating change. Read more about this in the sections following this one. (page 27)

Step 2: Stories

In this step the core group will consider what they want others to understand and how they best can inspire decision-makers and others to be part of a dialogue about change.

The Purpose of Story in this Process

Stories are powerful. A well-told story can create awareness of the need for change. In this context, stories can be used for different purposes. In the Connect Project, stories were used in three different ways:

1. To motivate people to attend a meeting and join a cause.
2. To raise awareness of a problem and stimulate

conversation.

3. To get different groups to relate to a shared problem and find common solutions.

Each of the groups experienced that the process of developing their story helped them to become clearer about their views, their perspective and to some extent about the views of others.

We grappled with the question of what role the stories ideally should have in a process where Transformative Dialogue is the ultimate aim. This raises the question of the role of advocacy in such a dialogue process. You can read more about this question in a discussion below.

Ways of Telling Stories

There are many different ways to tell a story. It can be told verbally, written, communicated in a pod or a video.

The story's form, tone and content will depend on what the group wishes to achieve with it and who the recipients will be.

Three stories on the Connect website might inspire your group to create its story.

1. A story about young people getting involved in criminal activities from Eskilstuna, Sweden
2. A story about the anxiety caused by climate change and the importance of joint action from Terrassa, Spain.
3. Several stories about problems experienced by immigrant youth, teachers and parents in schools in Oulu, Finland.

We would like to encourage you to read the stories of the different national teams on the Connect Project. You will find them here:

<https://rauhankasvatus.fi/connect/>

Other Stories about the Same Issue

A very useful exercise during this phase is to find out how others are talking about the same problem from other perspectives. What do people who disagree with

the group say? How do they express themselves?

Why do they hold these views?

A classic example is how authorities view the ways to deal with crime. One perspective is that one should work with prevention while the other favours control.

Step 3: Create Space for Dialogue

The space that is created for the dialogue will largely determine how effective it will be in creating change. The “space” is partially physical and partly psychological. Another aspect of this space concerns the people who will be present and the attitudes they bring into it.

Creating and Holding Space in the Group

You can read more about creating and holding space below (page 16.). The Youth Worker could introduce this step by exploring with the group what it means to them to hold space for others and what one can do to create a space for a good dialogue.

They can be encouraged to listen to each other and create a safe space they can express themselves freely.

Match this by facilitating conversations in a group that illustrates this important aspect of dialogue.

Our view is that dialogue is not just a mechanical process where people exchange views. It is a process of being able to meet on a deeper level as human beings and share experiences, feelings, values and beliefs.

It is not possible to relate on this level if the psychological space is not safe and those who participate are not willing to speak openly and truthfully to one another.

Who Needs to Speak to Whom?

It is useful as a facilitator to constantly have the following questions in the back of your mind when you design and facilitate transformative dialogue: “Who needs to speak to whom? What do they need to speak about? How would they best do this?”

These questions will lead the group into a discussion of which conversations are needed, who needs to be present in these

conversations and what they will be about. This is the first step in designing the dialogue process.

We say process because there may be the need for conversations with individuals and homogenous groups before inviting them into the same space to speak to each other. Transformative Dialogue is not an event, but rather a process consisting of several conversations.

The Physical Space

A lot can be said about how the space can be furnished and what kind of space is best for a good dialogue. Is it a space where everybody will feel comfortable, a neutral space? Will there be

something to eat and drink? (It is important to consider the timing for conversations to suit all those who need to be present).

Step 4: Transformative Dialogue

It is in dialogue that shifts in attitude and understanding can lead to sustainable change. How the space is created and the dialogue facilitated are crucial. It is also important for the core group, which represents a clear perspective, to contribute to the dialogue in a constructive way.

The Dialogue Phase

Everything up to this point has been to prepare for meetings between the youth and others who have the power to contribute to change.

It is difficult to predict how these conversations will unfold. Sometimes one meeting may lead to new ones. At other times decisions or agreements are reached quickly.

The Four Dialogue Phases

Each of the conversations could follow the basic phases of Transformative Dialogue. These phases are explained in detail on page....

Instead of making observations and immediately moving to “solutions”, the dialogue phases aim at deepening the common understanding of the problem(s) and jointly exploring potential for change. The concrete agreements or decisions arise out of this joint exploration and are based on participants taking individual and joint responsibility.

Dialogue does not always lead to change. When groups come to the conclusion that they disagree and cannot find common ground, the youth leaders then need to decide what they want to do next. They might need to gather support, put more pressure on those in power or involve other people who may be able to create change together with them.

This approach can be used in one-to-one conversations and in larger groups. It is a way of designing a dialogue process. It is a way of thinking rather than a method.

Read more about the dialogic process logic on page 27.

It is quite fashionable to speak about dialogue today. Of course, all forms of contact are better than no contact at all. But having a good conversation does not necessarily lead to change.

For change to occur people need to let go of their fixed ideas about issues, situations and, above all, about each other. Transformative Dialogue aims to create an environment and support a process by which people can change the way they see the world and each other. When this occurs - even in small, seemingly insignificant steps - change will occur.

Sometimes change is obvious. Decisions are made to change a structure or a system, to provide a meeting space or build a playground. But sometimes change is less obvious. It will occur long after the dialogue because somebody has begun to think differently of and relate differently to people belonging to a certain group. This is the unpredictable aspect of Transformative Dialogue.

2. Stories

Stories have Power

Stories - as we use the word in this text - include many narratives. They may be somebody's perspective on something that took place, an attempt to explain emotions, an expression of ideology or simply a dreamed-up fantasy. Stories may be fact or fiction, myth or reality.

Yuval Harari speaks about stories or myths we create in his book, Sapiens. He calls them myths.

He suggests that Homo Sapiens became the dominant species of humans and gained mastery over the planet through stories or myths.

He says that many people who do not know each other can cooperate successfully by believing in common myths.

Harari uses the examples of money and a corporation like Peugeot. These are not real things, but rather myths created and supported by many people. They have become very real forces even though they are fictitious.

Stories can unite people and provide them with a common motivation to act. They enable humans to unite behind a common idea. And as we know from history, when the masses support an idea, change becomes possible.

An opposite scenario makes this clearer. A nation or larger group becomes weaker when divided or fragmented. Resistance and infighting hampers the group from acting effectively.

Ever since the Cognitive Revolution human beings have lived in a dual reality. On the one hand, the objective reality of rivers, trees and lions; and on the other hand the imagined reality of gods, nations and corporations.

Yuval Harari



Stories to Influence People

Stories concerning society are used in different ways. How they are told and how they arise depend greatly on the intention and attitude of those who use them.

Stories are commonly told to others. Somebody determines what should be conveyed and tells a story.

The purpose, of course, differs from story to story. Our politicians tell stories of how they view society and what they propose to do to solve problems that exist. They paint pictures of how they want society to be and trust that people will support them in implementing these visions.

The media tells stories of events that occur to inform

- and influence - people. The film industry tells stories to entertain people and earn money. Activists tell stories to influence things they wish to change.

All these stories have one thing in common: they consist of one-way communication.

Their purpose is to inform and influence. They are often used to raise awareness of an issue or convince somebody to change their thinking or actions.

These stories are commonly referred to as advocacy. The purpose of advocacy is to influence others and change a particular audience's thinking and/or behaviour.

In the Connect Project two groups used advocacy as a way of influencing others. One group advocated for greater understanding and inclusion of city youth. They aimed their communication at politicians, local authority officials, teachers and community leaders. The other group sought to influence local citizens and the local authority towards a greater awareness of climate change.

ADVOCACY is defined as any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others.*

* https://mffh.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AFJ_what-is-advocacy.pdf

Advocacy and Monologue

Advocacy takes on different forms. Essentially they have the same purpose: to influence others. Even when an issue is discussed or debated and creates an open exchange, the intention is to advocate a particular point of view. Two sides engage in monologue aimed at convincing the other

Monologue is another way of saying that the conversation flows in one direction. One cannot say that there is no listening. But the purpose of listening is to formulate counter-arguments to better that of the other side.

One-way Storytelling

There are several forms of one-way communication.

INFORMATION involves telling others something one wants them to know. It is an example of an advocating story that flows in one direction.

In a **DISCUSSION**, one side advocates something that the other opposes. the purpose of a discussion is to convince the other. It

is essentially an exchange of monologues or one-way communication.

DEBATES can be viewed as a battle of words. As in a discussion, arguments are presented and opposed. The purpose of debates are often to convince others of the better, stronger or more moral argument.

By no means should one-way storytelling be seen as something negative.

Information can be essential. Debate and discussion can lead to clarity. As can the act of listening, and allowing somebody to speak freely.

TYPES OF EXCHANGE

Conversation

a way of exchanging information

Skillfull conversation

an exchange that stimulates new thoughts and insight

Discussion

an exchange aimed at convincing somebody of something

Debate

a battle with words

Dialogue

an exchange where issues are explored together and where synergy can arise

Why this is Important

While there is value in all the forms of communication named above, there is also a very real risk that they will lead to polarisation. The stronger the message from one side, the stronger the other side reacts. Information on its own can create a sense of marginalisation - the feeling that "we are spoken at" rather than being included in a meaningful conversaton and being allowed to contribute.

On their own, the value of one-way stories are limited. Used skillfully together with real exchanges such as skillfull conversation and different forms of dialogue, they can be very useful.

An Open Exchange of Stories

In contrast to one-way storytelling, there are other forms of conversation where stories are exchanged and where they interact with each other. Where stories flow into each other and create new insights.

In CONVERSATION, stories are exchanged. A story from one side is followed by one from the other. The informal conversation may simply have the purpose of connecting to another. We exchange stories about the weather or comment on current events.

A deeper conversation may stimulate new thoughts or create a common picture of an event or situation. A common story might arise as two stories are exchanged. This is sometimes referred to as SKILLFULL CONVERSATION

DIALOGUE, on the other hand, differs fundamentally from discussion and debate. It is a way of exploring an issue together with others.

The purpose of dialogue might be to understand a problem better to resolve it, or to manage a conflict that has arisen.

A good dialogue usually results in some form of learning. Those participating in dialogue may learn about each other or from each other. They might even learn something about themselves in such a process and gain new insights from exchanging stories and their efforts to understand what lies behind (or beneath) them.

**TO CREATE FLOW BETWEEN
STORIES, WE NEED TO
CREATE A SAFE SPACE - A
SPACE WHERE THAT WHICH
NEEDS TO BE SAID CAN BE
SAID**

**Do we hold
space for
others or do
we take up
space?**

3. Creating and Holding Space

A lot can be said about creating space for stories to flow and interact. Much of the art of facilitation and listening depends on creating such a space.

Creating - or holding - space is the opposite of taking - or occupying - space. When we fill the space with our thoughts, words, and agendas, we don't create space for others to tell their stories.

The quality of the space we create depends on several factors. Physical factors have to do with the place where stories are told. And some things make the term "holding space" more apt. These depend on the attitude we bring as facilitators and indeed as listeners.

SOME THINGS THAT ALLOW YOU TO HOLD SPACE FOR OTHERS

- Allowing enough time
- Listening with interest
- Not judging
- Being empathetic and supportive
- Being present
- Asking open questions
- Being inquisitive (not for your own sake, but to help the other tell more of their story)

Reflection

Ask yourself how you hold space for other people. How often do you allow others to tell their stories without somehow trying to add your own thoughts.

And ask yourself if your processes are about advocating your own ideas or whether they allow others to contribute.

When decisions are made, do you try to convince others of your point of view or are you open to the influence of others?

What could you do to be better at creating and holding space for other people?

When Stories Intersect...

Each Story has its own life. Sometimes it belongs to an individual and is coloured by their life experience and culture. Sometimes we hear the stories of groups - perhaps a connection of many individual stories with the same theme.

One way of thinking about stories that intersect is to imagine the forest after a rainstorm. Small streams of water flow down between the roots of trees. They meet each other and become a bigger stream, until they flow into a brook or a river.

Another way of thinking is that the stories remain separate but influence each other. A rather bizarre (Swedish) picture comes to mind.

Pizzerias are popular here. The Italian pizza has found its way here - perhaps via the USA. Then many of these pizzerias were taken over by immigrants from the middle east. They added kebab (doner) to the menu. Now, you can order a pizza that I imagine is unique: The Kebab Pizza. It is still partly pizza, but is topped with kebab and a creamy kebab sauce. Any true Neapolitan Pizza connoisseur would cringe at the thought!

Here the Italian and Middle Eastern stories have influenced each other and resulted in something which has become a uniquely Swedish story:

KEBAB PIZZA

POLARITY

Every strong opinion will inevitably give rise to an opposite reaction. When some people speak about climate change, there are those who deny it. It is not always an equal, opposite force, but there will be a view that differs.

This is normal and natural. We gain a complete understanding if these opposite stories intersect or interact with each other.

...and When they Don't

Stories can also remain separated from each other. This doesn't mean they don't affect each other but remain true to themselves. They often become even more potent when a counter-story arises.

An example of this is the climate debate. The story that has developed around how our climate is changing and threatens our survival on Planet Earth is one with a lot of power. Clever people have thrown their weight behind it, and it has gained strength. Greta Thunberg is a clear voice for aspects of this story.

At the same time, the counter-story has developed.

The story denies climate change and paints climate activists as opponents - even enemies. This story opposes the Green Movement and all that it represents. It has found an ally in conservative political groups and woven a story of opposition.

The physicist, David Bohm, calls this phenomenon (of becoming attached to one's own story and in opposition to others' stories) **FRAGMENTATION**.

We'll return to fragmentation when we address conflict in the **LOOPS, TENSION AND CONFLICT** section below.

POLARISATION

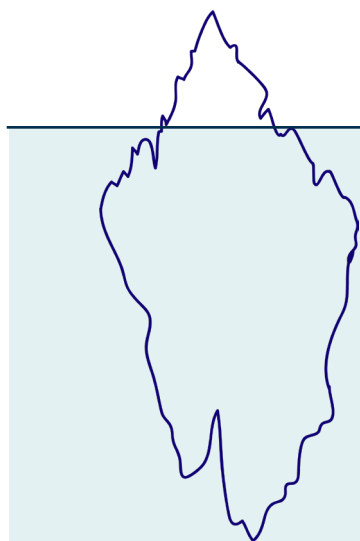
Polarisation occurs when one or more polarities become fixed. In practice, this means that one side holds onto its view and is not open to any other view or argument. In the above example, it might mean that those claiming that the climate is not changing refuse to accept any arguments supporting climate change (and of course, the other way around too)

Above and below the waterline

In any conversation - in fact, in any exchange between people - there is a part of the conversation that those involved are aware of and a part that they are not.

The part that everyone is aware of is the words that are spoken and the actions of the people concerned. These can be observed. They are heard and seen. We could imagine this part to be like the visible aspect of an iceberg.

The invisible part of the



iceberg is that which lies under the waterline. It is there, but it cannot be seen. All unexpressed thoughts, ideas, emotions and dreams form part of this unseen dimension of a conversation.

We refer to these two dimensions, the seen and unseen, as the primary and the secondary processes. For every primary process, there is a secondary process that affects it to a greater or lesser degree.

Above the waterline are those things that everybody sees and that are allowed by the group.

Below the waterline is everything that is avoided or censored by the group and thoughts, feelings, values and beliefs that are not expressed

One example of the conversation under the waterline is gossip. In the project there was plenty of gossip outside of the joint conversations. This is quite normal. We speak about the conversation in the large meetings to those in our own groups. It need not be negative. The point is that everybody is not aware of these conversations, and yet they affect the group process.

Stories that we tell also have this quality. There are stories that everybody is aware of, and those that are not expressed and swirl unseen below the waterline. In some cases, we are not even aware of the unseen stories within ourselves. These stories below the waterline affect the story that is visible for all to hear.

This is all very abstract. The example of racism

can illustrate it.

In Sweden, it is uncool to be seen to be racist. So, in our conversations, we tell our stories in a way that denies any form of racist bias. It is a non-racist story and may even be anti-racist. At the same time, racism in Sweden is very real. The story of that racism lives its own life but is seldom spoken about in groups that consider themselves

non-racist. The hidden racist story will express itself in other ways. It surfaces as hidden discrimination or is built into structures and systems. It will be projected onto those considered to be racist. The racism in the group is denied and is never discussed. Those who experience it are powerless to address discrimination because

“THE GROUP IS NOT RACIST!!”

How Stories below the Waterline affect those above it

Psychology teaches us that suppressed emotions and thoughts creates stress and saps energy. Our subconscious - the area where these emotions and thoughts reside - influences our conscious thoughts and actions.

The same principle applies to groups, organisations and society. That which is suppressed in a group or in society gains strength and is likely to express itself in a more destructive way.

History shows us that marginalised groups grow

more and more frustrated and, if they remain marginalised, move towards resistance, protest and even violence.

We speak of the suppressed or marginalised issues as being "below the waterline". They are not visible, not spoken about openly. Yet they influence the mood in groups, conversations, actions and decisions. The longer they remain hidden - or unexpressed - the more destructive they risk becoming.

Take for example a situation where two groups are trying to talk about recycling. The one group sees those who engage in all activities regarding the environment as left-wing activists. They don't say so, but their attitudes and challenging statements and questions dampen the mood and affect others who are still undecided about recycling or climate change.

Primary and secondary processes

In every situation, group and conversation there are usually two things happening simultaneously. We call these the Primary and Secondary Processes

The Primary Process

All that is visible, that everybody is aware of, is part of the primary process. These are the words people say to one another, what is written and communicated and the actions everybody are aware of.

The Secondary Process

The secondary process concerns the hidden thoughts, the private conversations, the unexpressed emotions. In the iceberg metaphor, this is everything below the waterline.

Why this is important

No matter which kind of interaction occurs, the two processes will be present. If we only pay attention to the primary process, we miss a great deal of what inspires action, informs decisions and motivates (or inhibits) people.

When there is a strong discrepancy between what is visible and what is kept hidden, the seeds of distrust and conflict are sown. We call this double messaging - one of the causes of conflict and also a destroyer of trust.

4. Loops, Tension and Conflict

Some stories seem to get stuck in a loop. They repeat themselves over and over again. They never seem to change.

This often happens in relationships that have become stagnant or conflictual. In groups, we often notice this when some tension is not resolved. We hear the same thing over and over again in meetings. In the end, people stop listening as soon as the story begins because they know exactly how it goes.

Looping stories are most common in situations where tension has arisen. It could be a sign that there is some tension present. People on different sides become stuck and tell and retell their stories - often increasing the volume or intensity with each telling.

In a conversation, a story that has become a loop tends to result in an opposing story that gets stuck in its loop. When this happens, tension is likely to increase.

We call this phenomenon of looping stories **FRAGMENTATION**. And fragmentation is one of the prime causes of conflict and its escalation.



An example

"We have been speaking about this issue for ages now. Every time we meet, we seem to end up talking about the same things. There is no change on either side, and the conversation gets stuck. If this continues long enough, tension will build, and the conversation will either stop altogether or devolve into a more damaging conflict."

5. Flow

Change occurs when a story that has become a loop opens up to experience another's story. The actual story may not change, but something changes in relation to other stories. Instead of tension between two isolated loops, movement or flow now appears.

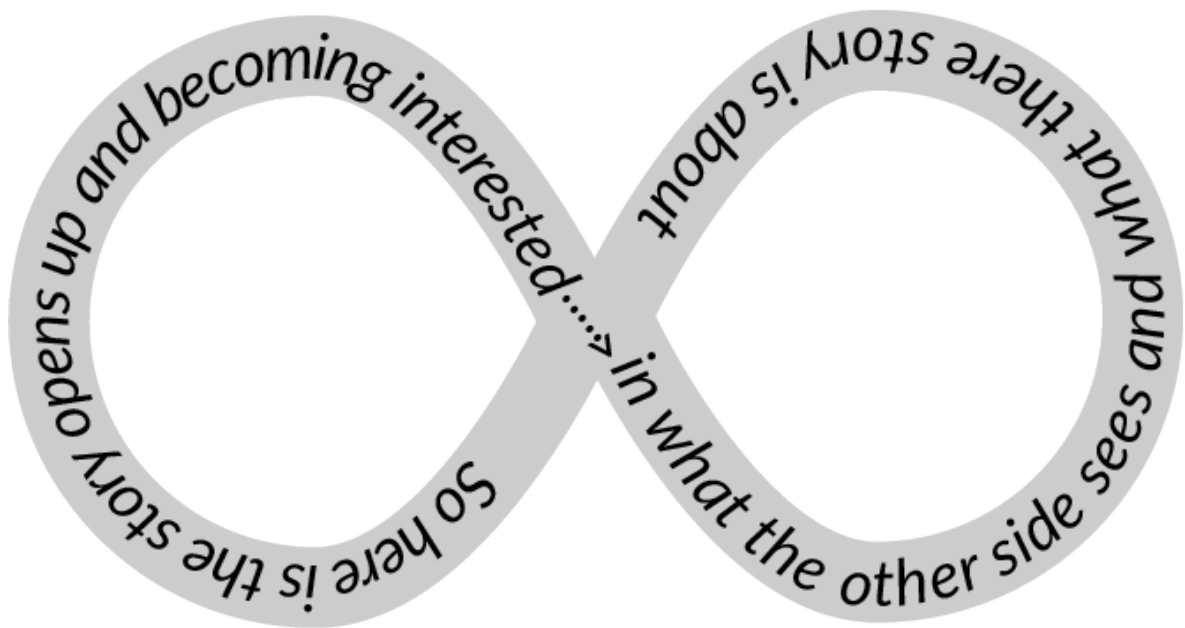
The increased openness to hear and understand the other's story will likely create some shift.

A shift might take on the form of reduced animosity or tension. One might accept that there is another way of viewing a situation.

A more significant shift that might occur is that one's story changes. It becomes broader or deeper as new insights are gained.

One of the purposes of dialogue is to enable this flow between stories that may have started looping. Such dialogue can lead to insights about oneself, others or the world around us. Some form of learning is usually involved - even if it only involves seeing things more clearly.

Dialogue aims at creating flow between two stories that have become stuck. It requires openness and the willingness to listen to the other's story - which doesn't mean that one agrees but rather than one acknowledges that there are different ways of viewing the same situation.



**How do
we create
connection
in a
disconnected
world?**

6. Societal Change

A Theory of Change

In reacting to something we see as harmful or destructive in society, we often leap straight into brainstorming the actions we want to take. We react without considering the assumptions we are making or the possible one-sidedness of our perspective.

A theory of change helps us consider what we wish to achieve. We ask ourselves the following: What change do we wish to see?

It then asks the question: where are we right now? This question helps us to take stock of the situation we find ourselves in.

Between these two poles lies the journey towards change. The question here is: what do we need to do to get from where we are to where we want to be at some point

in the future?

But a theory of change also challenges us to examine our assumptions regarding our actions. Will these actions produce the results we are seeking? And how does this process of change work?

A good theory of change will also ask who needs to be involved so that the change we envisage will come about.

One way of starting this process with a group is to ask it to visualise the change. What will be your victory speech? Who will be there? What will they do (or what have they done to get us there)?

Such a process takes time. It is, however, worth the time invested.

In the Connect Project, two groups had different theories of change.

One group reasoned that those with formal power in their community (the politicians and officials) must understand how young people feel and why they opt for a life of crime. They assumed that the problem was a lack of understanding by the politicians and officials. The way to create change would be to inform them (use advocacy).

Another group had a different theory of change. They argued that if you get people to meet each other and talk about the lack of trust in society and the weak connections between people, trust would be built by meeting and speaking. They assumed that if only people met each other, they would be able to create change together. y were concerned about the same issues.

Where we are right now



The change we want to see



The Process of Change

What needs to happen to get from A to B

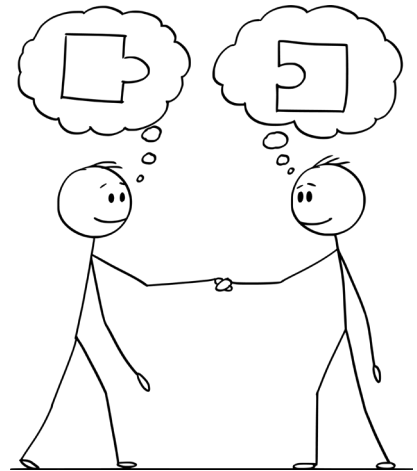
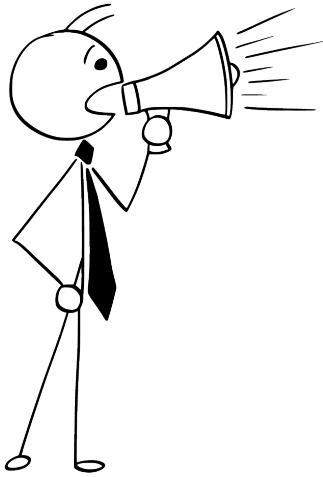
Assumptions we make regarding what is needed

A theory of Change in Oulu

- At the moment there's no trust in Oulu between different groups of people, youth, schools and officials, and this is causing a lot of damage especially for people with immigrant backgrounds.
- If there would be more trust between different groups of people, it would
 - be easier to ask and offer help when needed.
 - reduce the harmful cycle of rumors and misunderstanding
 - reduce the number of immigrant background youth and children, who fall outside of the society's safety net
 - reduce the harmful impact of the segregation
- In order to create trust, people (immigrant background youth, parents, teachers, youtworkers and officials) need to meet and have meaningful dialogue with each other.
- To achieve this, it's necessary to bring people together to discuss difficult subjects.
- In order to get people to talk, it's necessary to create safe space for everybody and give people personal invitations. To reach this, it can be a good idea to talk each group separately and only in the end, bring everybody together.

Read more about Oulu's story: <https://rau Hankasvatus.fi/connect-oulu/>

Advocacy or Dialogue?



We mentioned the difference between stories that advocate and those that allow intersection and interaction.

If we are to create societal change, which of these should we choose? What effect does each of them have?

Asking these questions invites us to examine our assumptions. Will we achieve the change we want by influencing others - those we want on our side or those in power? Or will

we get there by involving them? The difference is significant and hinges on the question of what creates change. Is it persuasion, or is it inclusion? Or perhaps the answer lies in a combination of these two. In that case, how do we achieve the mix between advocating and following a more dialogic approach?

Reflect on these questions

When you have succeeded in creating change (whether it was big or small change are not important), which approach has worked best for you?

What has happened when you find common ground with a person you wish to influence?

What has happened when you put pressure on a person to change?

7. Connecting

The Connect Project had a clear aim: to create more connection in a fragmented and polarised society. Connection is necessary to counteract fragmentation and polarisation.

Connecting Theory and Practice

Theory and practice don't always match up. The theory we based this project on was that Dialogue is a way to create a connection between people AND counteract preconceptions of each other, assumptions that are made and especially the fixed positions that contribute to the polarisation we see in Europe and around the world today.

Our idea was to test the hypothesis that young people could contribute to

change by engaging those with the power to make important decisions in dialogue.

The assumption is that dialogue contributes to openness and clarity. It creates a connection. And this connection is essential for people to change their thinking - especially if they are attached to a particular point of view.

We wanted to test this assumption.

Connecting People

Stories may create a connection, mainly if these are people sharing aspects of their own lives. Such stories could even - by themselves - create a shift in the person hearing them.

Our vision with the project was to view the stories told through video, sound or writing, which would create an opening for exchange between people with different viewpoints. This exchange would happen in a safe space where people would have the courage to share their stories. Not only would they share thoughts but also feelings, needs, values and visions.

Disconnection between people easily gives rise to distrust. Dialogue creates connections and often leads to increased trust between people. They do not need to agree. But sharing their fears and dreams and seeing each other as fellow human beings rather than opponents or enemies is a shift towards peace. In this sense, Dialogue and War are opposites to each other.

It is important to say that the Dialogue we are discussing here is not simply a conversation or an exchange. It is far, far more than that. We will explore this in the next section.

The Logic of Dialogue

Monologue is communication that flows in one direction. Telling a story is a form of monologue. Advocacy is a form of monologue. Even some conversations consist of a series of monologues - one side trying to convince the other of something.

Dialogue has a different logic. In dialogue, the conversation flows from one side to the other. It is an exchange. But more than that, it is an exchange that shifts the perspectives of those who participate in it. A true dialogue leaves nobody unchanged. It leads to new insights or a better understanding of oneself and the other.

We think of dialogue as a process rather than an event. It is a way of speaking and a way of thinking. In that sense,

it is an adjective: dialogic.

In the Connect project, we presented a dialogic approach with four steps.

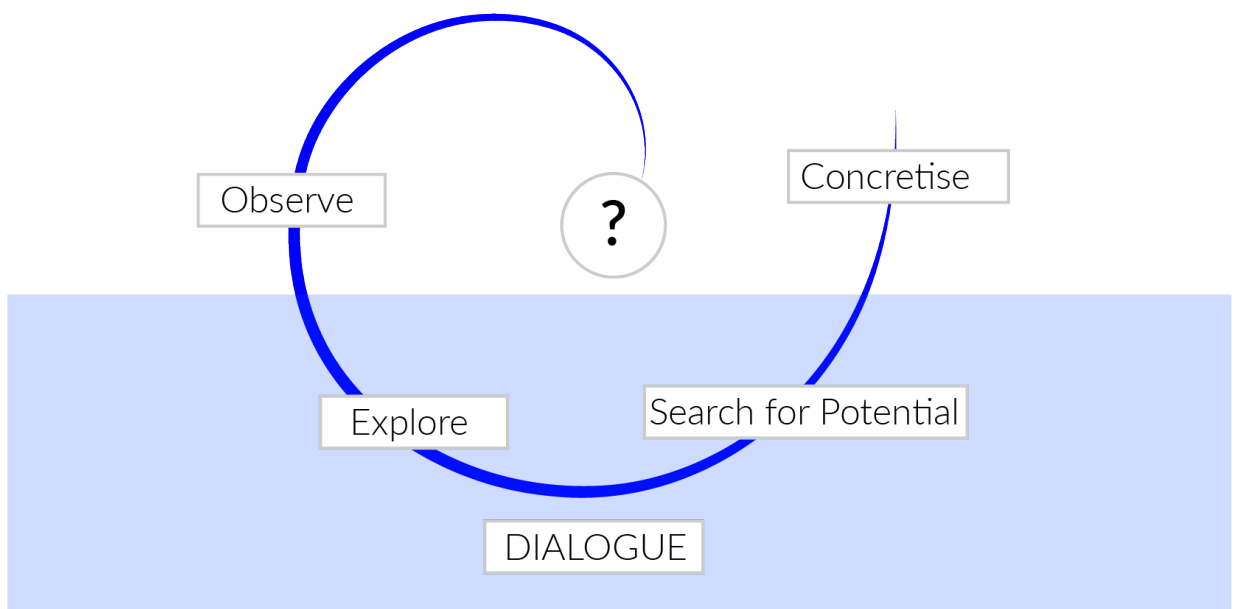
- The first step is to Observe. We can ask the question: what do we see from our perspective?
- The second step is to Explore. We ask ourselves: what are the causes and effects of what we see?
- The third step is to Search for Potential Change. We ask: having understood the causes and effects, what could contribute to improvement?
- The fourth step is to Concretise. The questions we can ask are: Who will do what? When? How?

This dialogic approach has evolved over the past 12 years in Sweden and has been used in many different contexts to tackle complex social problems and conflicts.

It is not particularly unique in the four steps that it suggests and there are many similar step by step approaches. What does distinguish from many others is that it suggests deepening the dialogue before moving to concrete solutions or agreements.

The approach was developed with inspiration from William Isaacs, Rookien Podesta and Myrna Lewis.

The Four Phases of Dialogue



Getting people interested and involved

It is one thing to say that dialogue is a way of healing the fragmentation and polarisation we see around us and quite another to involve those who need to be part of the dialogue.

Who needs to be part of the dialogue? Surely those who are part of the polarization. The whole idea is to get the two sides to interact with each other. There is a risk that we somehow avoid involving those who need to be part of the process or substituting them with people who speak on their behalf.

We perhaps need to turn the question around and ask ourselves why people resist being involved in a dialogue.

How do we get people to be involved? There are three main reasons:

Apathy (or disinterest) means that they don't think the issue is important enough or that they cannot contribute anything to improve the situation.

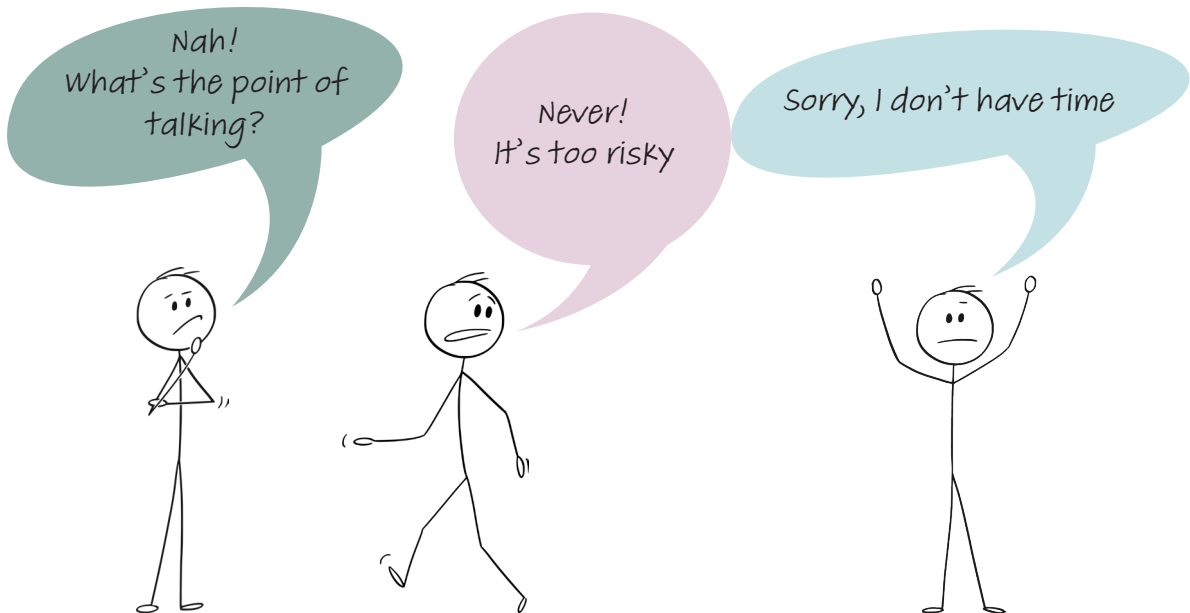
Risk implies that the idea of open dialogue is too dangerous for various reasons.

Time (or timing) links in part to the first issue. "I don't have time" may mean, "I don't think this is worth my time." It may also mean, "sorry, I am booked next week and can't attend your meeting."

In the Connect Project, all of these factors were present. In Eskilstuna's case, young people involved in criminal gangs were afraid of being exposed.

In the case of the group from Terrasa, the challenge was to confront apathy: what does climate change have to do with me?

In Eskilstuna, the focus on a single meeting, a set date and late invitations made it easy for decision-makers to say they didn't have the time.



Addressing Apathy, Risk and Time

There is a primary and secondary process here. The Primary (visible) process is the excuse for not being part of the dialogue process. The secondary process is the deeper reason for the excuse. To get people resistant to participating to be part of the process, you must take the time to go deeper. You may not succeed in getting a specific person to be part of the dialogue, but you may get a substitute - somebody who can also represent that perspective or voice.

The Excuse (the Primary Process) and the Deeper Reasons (Secondary Process)



Possible ways to deal with the resistance

- *Make personal contact. Arrange a meeting. Talk face to face.*
- *Listen, listen, listen and emphasise the importance of the person's perspective. Don't judge!*
- *Allow enough time. You need time to prepare and to meet people in advance.*
- *Ask the question (early on): "what would you need in order to participate?"*
- *If there is still no movement, ask: "who else might be a good person to ask?"*
- *Ask about doubts. What would make it safe to join the dialogue?*

**DIALOGUE
IS A WAY OF
THINKING
AND ACTING
RATHER
THAN AN
EVENT**

8. The Dialogic Way of Creating Change

What is the Dialogic Way?

We often speak of dialogue as if it is a thing or an event. It is, however, much more than that. It is NOT a meeting, an event or a project. At the very least, it is a process or a verb. “We need dialogue” might mean that we need to engage in the dialogue process. Similarly, we might say: “let us dialogue with each other.”

Better still is to think of dialogue as a way of thinking. It then becomes the adjective

or adverb: DIALOGIC.

When we think dialogically, we will follow certain clear principles. We will avoid one-sided assumptions. We will refrain from trying to control the process to suit our wishes or needs. We will not exclude people, groups or perspectives relevant to the challenge we are addressing.

This is the Dialogic Way.

Seven Dialogic Principles

- **Inclusion.** All people, groups or perspectives are part of the process. All aspects of the human being - thoughts, feelings, values and beliefs - are included in the conversation.
- **Listening.** Respecting the views of others as legitimate perspectives and allowing the space for them to be expressed.
- **Showing up.** Being present and speaking one’s truth. Avoiding speaking on behalf of others or making statements such as “we all know”, “everybody thinks...” and more.
- **Suspension** means to pause. It requires us to take a breath and not react immediately. It also means to “hang something” (like a chandelier) - in this case, it means to allow others to see what you are thinking in the moment.
- **Exploring.** Being curious about deeper causes and effects of something you observe is one aspect of exploration. The other examines the underlying emotions and feelings behind a statement, an idea or a decision.
- **Generating.** Looking for the potential for improvement or transformation. Searching for synergies and connections.
- **Following.** Allowing the process to unfold without seeking to control or force it. Following rather than directing a group

A Common Story?



to be regarded as TRUTH.

The dialogic way of thinking is premised on the view that there are many ways of seeing the same reality. None of these is complete. To form a complete picture, we need to find more perspectives - in other words, other stories.

Allowing different stories to interact in a safe space opens the possibility that they will somehow affect each other. At the very least, they will become aware of each other.

This is a common misconception of the purpose of dialogue. A common story does not mean that there is agreement or compromise.

It does not mean one perspective is better or more correct than another. It simply means that a new, more nuanced, richer story emerges.

In some cases, dialogue results in a completely new story emerging. Those involved may come to new insights and create a new story together. This should be seen as one possibility amongst many rather than the aim of dialogue.

In Terrassa, the youth leaders heard stories that were somewhat similar and stories that were different from theirs. More than anything, they were struck by the fact that the stories were separate - like small loops everywhere. Their vision was to create a common story.

“We need other people like us.” says Marina, “We need to unite with other groups like us. Otherwise, we are just small groups around the city who don’t know each other. We might have similar goals, but if we want to be heard by the environmental department, we need to join the rest.”

“It would be very good to arrive into more political space, so we would discuss with politicians to make things bigger and create change. But also, for now, the objective is to send a message to people that it’s a good idea to find people like you and create action.”, Carla adds.

Read more here: <https://rauhandkasvatus.fi/connect-terrassa/>

A Story from the Project ...

The Connect Project showed an example of how two different stories met. It concerned the use of the Dialogic Approach and an approach based on Advocacy.

One group decided they did not like the idea of using dialogue. They preferred advocacy and maintained that it was what was needed. The project team had another idea and proposed that an open dialogue with politicians, the police, teachers and city officials would have a better chance of leading to change. Because both believed, for a while, that their story was the best way of doing things, tension arose between the team and the group of young people.

Fortunately, some in the project team lived up to the Dialogic Way. They encouraged the team to look at alternative possibilities. The team decided not to hold on to its own story in a rigid way. It decided that the youth team should follow the way they had chosen: to inform and hope for spontaneous contacts that would lead to improvements they wished to see.

Another group chose the Dialogic approach. Aspects of the dialogic approach were taken into the first youth group's action and contributed to it. The project became a space where two stories could co-exist. So, yes, there

was a small shift.

But the project team changed its story. Instead of insisting on following a rigid project plan, it used the learning gained from comparing two approaches and their results. This enriched the project significantly.

The lesson: the dialogic approach will not always lead to a new joint story. It didn't do so in this project. Nor do the different stories need to change and compromise. Sometimes the process leads to new insights and hopefully to ones that will lead to improvements or to learning (or both).

In this case, the tension that arose could be caught early on, before it escalated into a conflict. Adjustments could be made - if only from one side. The project team could find a way to accommodate an alternative approach through its own dialogue.

In the end, we did learn a lot. The youth group reflected on the outcome of their meeting with those in power and recognised that they might have had a different result if they had engaged in dialogue. The project team could compare two different approaches and incorporate the lessons into this guide. All in all, the outcome was different to what was anticipated or planned, but it did, in many ways, lead to greater insight and learning.

... and a painful lesson from a project leader

I really wanted the youth groups to follow the dialogic approach. I was worried that advocacy would result in decision-makers resisting the important story the young people wanted to tell about the causes of violence in the city's troubled neighbourhoods. I was quite adamant and fixed in my view and became irritated with the young people who I thought "always know best."

The tension I felt was probably quite obvious, leading to the youth group becoming more adamant. Fortunately, my colleagues were wiser than me. We went for a walk and spoke at length, looking at different options. This dialogue revealed some important things I was missing: that

this project was about learning, not proving a pre-determined thesis; that conflict would not help the project or the other participants; and that it is that important to be right.

The insight I gained was this: I was using advocacy to promote my view and expected others to join me in my story. Yet, I was suggesting that they do not do the same. I was not walking my talk. How could I expect them to behave any differently? When my (wiser) colleagues reminded me of this, everything changed. A painful self-realisation and insight into my own blind spots.

9. Attitude Matters

What are Meta-skills and why are they Important?

Another way to describe the attitude we bring to dialogue and story-sharing (or perhaps story-weaving) is to think of a collection of skills. We call these attitude-related skills meta-skills to differentiate them from practical skills and tools - which we consider below.

Without the meta-skills, practical skills and tools are less effective - if not counterproductive.

A good example is the skill of listening. If listening simply involves hearing the words somebody says,

without the meta-skills of presence, empathy and non-judgement, it could have an alienating effect. You may have experienced somebody pretending to listen but not being interested in your words. How did that make you feel?

You could think of skills, tools or methods as frames - like the frame and shell of a wooden house. The meta-skills are the furniture, ornaments and undefinable quality that makes a house a home.

Reflections from Oulu on the value of Meta-skills

Empathetic listening without judgement, holding space for others, and the possibility to use one's own language in the process was also crucial. With the help of the skills Faiza, Anna and Sari had gained in the process, they could create a space where they could build and maintain trust between the participants and where different points of view could be heard and understood. People were able to ask questions and explain different aspects of the problems. Faiza also worked as an interpreter and mediator, achieving common understanding and concrete, peaceful discussion.

<https://rauhankasvatus.fi/connect-oulu/>

The Meta-skills

We will consider some of the most important meta-skills below. They are:

- Relationship
- Inclusion
- Non-judgement
- Showing up
- Openness and Empathy
- Creating space.

Which meta-skills are important depends on the situation. It is essential to show up in a dialogue to say what you need to say. But it is also important to listen without judging the other. You move from saying what you need to say to listening, and as you do, you move from clarity (about your view) to non-judgement.

Relationship matters

The Connect Project focused on connecting as a way to create change. The hypothesis it wanted to test was whether change could be achieved if people with fixed views could connect through dialogue.

Another way to think about connecting people is to consider the relationships between them. Is there a positive flow from one to the other, or is there a blockage or even separation?

It is helpful to go back to the theory of fragmentation. Fragmentation occurs in society when people holding one view refuse to open up to other views and see these as incorrect or immoral. They begin to see others as ignorant, stupid, resistant, hostile or evil. When this happens, the conflict escalates. As long as those in power hold on to their views, very little will change.

However, imagine that the relationship quality between the two groups changes. The groups become more open to hearing and understanding the other. They even open up to shifting their strongly held opinions of each other and adjusting their strongly held views. When this happens, change becomes possible.

There may be something to be said for advocacy and even protest. Sometimes the heat that is generated by a conflict leads to a situation where a powerful group becomes more open. There

is, however, a risk that they will become more repressive. We need only look at some countries with repressive regimes today. Relationship requires openness from both sides. The question is whether such openness is best created by one side being open and willing to engage or whether it is created through pressure.

The dialogic approach has a clear answer: openness begets openness. When one side opens up, the other often does too. That is not to say that the dialogic approach is the only one, but here we focus on this way of thinking and acting.

Which relationships?

Relationships within a team wanting to create change are important. Very little can be achieved when there is a division (fragmentation) within the team.

Relationships with those we seek to engage with to create change are important. Our premise is that change is unlikely if a real connection is not made. The question we need to pose is: how do we best create a deep connection with others to move into a dialogue that will lead to transformation and change?

There is a wonderful story of a black man, Daryl Davis, who succeeded in changing hardened racist members of the Klu Klux Klan. At age ten, he experienced racism when he participated in a scout parade, and people threw rocks at him. He asked himself, "How can you hate me if you don't even know me?"

Davis was a jazz pianist and used his music to connect with and start conversations with members of the Klu Klux Klan. He was convinced that their racism - towards him as a black man - was only because they didn't know him. When they did, they changed. He says that it is not he who changed them; he only created the impetus for them to do so themselves.

Daryl Davis is a living example of how the quality of relationship can lead to radical change. We do not change others by creating an open relationship; we simply allow them to make the changes themselves.

You can read about Davis here: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/mar/18/daryl-davis-black-musician-who-converts-ku-klux-klan-members> Or watch a Youtube video here: <https://youtu.be/ORp3q1Oaezw>

Thinking Inclusion

The meta-skill of inclusion is another attitude that is essential to dialogue. In its simplest form, it means that we don't act in a way that excludes a person, a group or a point of view.

Inclusion is also a way of thinking. In this sense, it means that we need to consider all the parts of a situation to truly understand it. If we do exclude parts of the whole, we only have a limited view and may make poorer choices or decisions.

We don't think and act inclusively, only to be kind or nice to others. It is more practical than that. Excluding a person or a group (also called marginalisation) is one of the causes of tension, resistance and conflict. Inclusion inevitably leads to a reduction of that conflict.

Another - related - cause of conflict is fragmentation. We break contact when we exclude a point of view or those holding it. There is a clear risk that it will become stronger and more insistent. In the end, it can lead to a destructive conflict.

When we cut a branch off a tree, the tree might survive, but the branch will probably die. Psychology tells us that suppressing feelings, excluding them, usually doesn't cause them to disappear, but rather that they grow stronger and play a more destructive role in our lives. Until we recognise them and deal with - or

integrate - them.

Include what?

What needs to be included? Can we actually include people who disagree with us in a dialogue? Can we allow people to express views that insult us or cause hurt or anger? These are difficult questions.

Contrary and offensive views exist in society. They are out there and affect the world we live in. Ignoring them doesn't make them go away. By including them, we open the way for them (or us) to change. This is the point of dialogue.

We do, of course, need to ensure that people are not harmed - physically or psychologically. For this reason, we strongly advise those responsible for dialogue processes to prepare conversations in advance. This may include conversations with individuals, a discussion on what might be harmful to others and preparation of participants on how they might react or respond to people who hold views they find offensive. Following the attitude of inclusion, a facilitator might start with a conversation about the conversation: about formulating ground rules regarding what we say and how we act.

"I think all this violence and organized crime is really embedded in harsh environments. I think the biggest reason for it is the segregation and poverty and mistrust and a feeling of being an outsider for your whole life.

I think it's hard for anybody to feel safe here in Eskilstuna. You hear the news, even though you may live in nicer places of Eskilstuna, you still know of this. And then it's very easy to become judgmental towards people living in these places, because - of course. Crimes are committed in those places every day. What are you supposed to think about that? So, the people outside of the segregated people feel unsafe and judge people living there, so it's almost like two-sided hate. And it's not just about the hate. It ends up in both parties feeling unsafe. And the society feels shaky and not stable. And it's quite scary to think about it, because you never think it's getting that bad, but that's how it really is."

Hanan from the Eskilstuna team

The Difficulty of Not Judging

Saying that non-judgement forms part of a dialogic attitude seems to become a contradiction when you simultaneously claim that dialogue is a way to effect change. How can you refrain from evaluating and making judgements and still try to change something you judge to be wrong or broken?

We constantly make judgements. We would not achieve anything if we did not make choices. The simple choice of getting up in the morning or remaining in bed is a judgement we make. Staying in bed will lead to certain results, while getting up will lead to others. At that particular point, we make a judgement.

We think of non-judgement (and the other meta-skills) as a role we step into. We choose, at a certain instance, to be non-judgemental. At other times we refrain from stepping into that role.

A good listener - for example, a therapist - listens without judging. While she is listening, she steps out of the zone of judgement and into the non-judgemental zone (or role). If she gives advice, she is no longer in that zone. She chooses to say certain things to her client.

It is the same for a facilitator. A facilitator has the easy task of remaining in that non-judgemental role while helping a group have a conversation.

It is far more difficult for somebody who participates in a dialogue. They have to constantly move from non-judgement to speaking their truth. When they say what they believe, they do so with a clear judgement that that is what they believe. They might shift to non-judgement a second later and ask what others think, but in the moment, they are outside of the non-judgemental role.

The difficulty with this constant shifting from judgement to non-judgement is that it goes against much of what society has taught us to believe. We live in a society which is characterised by judgement. For many of us, it is our default mode. Having to move into a space of not judging or evaluating is difficult. It takes practice.

Non-judgement is a meta-skill that is essential to dialogue. An intermediate step is to pause your reaction. Instead of reacting or responding immediately to what someone says or does, pause your reaction and wait. You are creating space. While you may still be judgemental in that space, you are choosing not to act on your judgement. If you can take another step and shift to curiosity (rather than judgement), you will have moved out of the judgement zone.

The Curiosity Switch

Try this the next time you are provoked by what somebody says or does: imagine you have a switch that you can activate that shifts you from judging the person's actions or words into a space of curiosity. You could ask yourself: "What makes this person act this way or say what he is saying?" Test this and see if it makes any difference.

The idea of the Curiosity Switch is inspired by the Polyvagal Theory. Stephen Porges, a neuroscientist, says that our nervous systems allow us to be open and social or to be defensive. It is, he says, impossible to be defensive and open at the same time. Curiosity is an aspect of the open social state. We may shift from one state to the other in a millisecond, but we cannot be in both simultaneously. Being curious about another's motives or attitudes makes it impossible for us to judge or criticise them.*

Showing Up

Showing up includes both being present and speaking your truth directly.

Facilitators

For facilitators, the focus is on being present. As a facilitator, you usually do not express your own views regarding the content of the conversation. You can, however, share your reflections on the mood or the quality of the conversation (in a meta-reflection). You may also honestly express your feelings if you lose neutrality and feel that you cannot hold the space or have favoured one party.

As a facilitator, your presence is very important. You need to be aware of what is happening in the room - the visible stuff and all that is not openly expressed. You need to be aware of your responses, participants' body language, signs of tension and the words spoken and participants' actions.

It is no easy task to be aware of so many things simultaneously. It may be wise for the inexperienced facilitator to ask a colleague to co-facilitate. As a co-facilitator, she would focus on the secondary process and be a backup in case you miss something important or become affected by the process.

Participants

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Showing up - or being genuinely present and speaking your truth - is an attitude that is often missing in our society.

With all the distractions around us, being present is a challenge. Social media is partially responsible for being that which distracts. It is also partly responsible for the tendency towards quick, unreflected responses and quick judgements.

Under the section on skills below, you might be interested in reading the page on listening.

Being Open: Empathy and Flexibility

Openness includes both the ability to understand others and being flexible in regard of their own perspectives.

Understanding others

Empathy is the ability to put yourself in the shoes of another - to imagine how they see the world and what they are feeling.

Participants can be encouraged to try to understand others' points of view and the experience they share- rather than judge. They can be asked to suspend their judgement and try to put themselves in the shoes of the other when listening.

For a facilitator, empathy is key to supporting participants in a conversation. Being present, non-judgemental and empathetic provides a sense of safety. It is also a way to set a good example for those they are facilitating.

Flexibility

Flexibility is all about not being rigidly stuck to your perspective. Needing to be right makes the other wrong. It is important to press the pause button and open yourself up, even if only temporarily, to the views of others. Consider that you might not have access to all the views, all perspectives and that there might be other ways of seeing the same truth.

This advice is mainly aimed at participants in a dialogue. As a facilitator, you are constantly pausing your own opinion. Your views don't matter. It is not about you. You are there to allow the perspectives - the stories - of others to meet - and intertwine if possible.

There is a difference between empathy and sympathy.

Sympathy (which comes from the Greek sym, meaning "together," and pathos, referring to feelings or emotion) is used when one person shares the feelings of another; an example is when one experiences sadness when someone close is experiencing grief or loss. Empathy is also related to pathos. It differs from sympathy in carrying an implication of greater emotional distance. With empathy, you can imagine or understand how someone might feel, without necessarily having those feelings yourself.

www.merriam-webster.com

Reflect on these questions

Are there examples of how creating relationship with another has resulted in change?

What signs do you see of how inclusion releases tension and creates positive energy?

What are the things that prevent us from being non-judgemental?

What things can you change to be more present to other people?

Do you know somebody who shows real empathy? How do you notice this?

Would you describe yourself as a flexible person? What makes you less flexible at times?

How the Meta-skills are Applied

Neutrality

We may refer to the word “Neutrality” as a necessary characteristic of a good facilitator or an attitude needed when you listen deeply to another person.

Neutrality in this context is a collection of several meta-skills: non-judgement, presence and empathy.

Holding Space

Holding space for others is the prime task of a facilitator and essential for those who want to truly listen to others.

The opposite of holding space is occupying space. If you occupy all the space in a conversation, there is none for the other to contribute. Yet, you must show up if you are participating and clearly speak your truth.

As a facilitator, you always

Learning and Transformation

True dialogue is an experience that results in learning. The mere fact that one might understand another better is an aspect of learning. Understanding your views and emotions better is also learning.

If you adjust your view because you have gained new insight or understanding, something shifts inside you.

Nobody is neutral - in the sense that they do not influence a process, they are part of. We do not use the word in this sense. Neither does it mean that one is cold, rational and objective.

If the word creates difficulties for you, don't use it.

hold space for participants and refrain from occupying space.

To hold space for others means listening, being present, being non-judgemental and ensuring that the space is safe by being supportive and empathetic. It also requires practical aspects such as ensuring that there are no unnecessary disturbances and that physical needs such as breaks, food and comfort are met.

These shifts are important to notice in dialogue. They might be small, but they are always significant.

Nobody leaves True Dialogue without having learned something new. In the best of dialogues, shifts occur. These shifts are what is meant when the term Transformative Dialogue is used.

Neutrality is an important meta skill for any facilitator. It is also an essential quality in a good listener.

A facilitator's task is to hold space for others. She does not occupy space but makes it safe for others to express themselves.

Holding space for another person is a way of showing caring and respect.

Dialogue might not always have dramatic results. Many changes occur only later and in ways you would never expect. This is because of the small shifts that occur within those who have been part of the dialogue.

The Wisdom Inside the “NO”

A group might have a majority that supports or restricts particular views. It could also be the dominant culture that excludes certain perspectives. The meta-skill of inclusion can be extended to also contain the awareness of the secondary process (the part of a conversation or interaction which is not visible to everybody).

If this minority voice is excluded, it does not disappear. It often expresses itself more destructively further along the way.

Keeping a minority voice “below the waterline” requires energy. The more strength it gains, the more energy is required. Psychology teaches us, however, that including this voice releases energy. This is also true for a group that includes the minority voice.

We maintain that the minority voice - the “NO” - contains wisdom for the majority in a group. When this wisdom is included, energy and creativity is released. The group becomes stronger and more resilient.

The “no” is not only the critical, oppositional voice that loudly says no when many say “yes”. It is also the voice that is dubious about the decision or the quiet voice that doesn’t feel comfortable expressing itself. It can be the quiet voice that is often overlooked.

We first seek to make the “no” visible to reduce tension and avoid destructive conflicts. If we suppress or marginalise a particular perspective, we risk adding to the tension and escalating conflict.

It is important to create safety for the group around the expression of the “no” - this applies both with respect to the person or group expressing it and to those who are in the majority.

This vital principle applies not only to groups but also to society. A society that represses the voice of a certain group of people will see resistance in one form or another. It may not show up as protests or violence. It could equally result in apathy and withdrawal. In either case, it results in that society becoming more fragmented.

As a psychological principle, it applies to us as individuals too. As long as we banish a particular voice to our subconscious, we experience stress. When we integrate it, we experience a release of energy and creativity.

Note: The Wisdom inside the “NO” is inspired by Myrna Lewis’s book “Inside the No”.

On a personal note

We are often guilty of ignoring our own “NO”. It is that voice that is doubtful or the voice that always gets ignored because something more important must be done.

You might want to be more aware next time you experience stress (because stress is often a sign that there is a “no” that is not being heard).

Sit quietly and allow yourself to hear the doubtful, self-critical or resistant voice. What is it saying? What does it feel?

If it is being ignored by a stronger, more pressing or more convincing voice within you, ask it this question:

“What would you need to come along this time?”

Listen to its wisdom and honour its wishes.

A brief example: I feel ill but decide to go to work or school. I ask the question. “If we come home early and rest” is the reply to the question.

Remember, there is wisdom in the “no”!

10. Some Useful Skills

Whose Skills?

In the context of the Connect Project and, indeed, change projects with youth groups, there are two groups of people who may have use of the skills we describe below:

FACILITATORS can use the skills when engaged in dialogue and conversations

with groups and individuals.

PARTICIPANTS in dialogues can be encouraged by facilitators to develop the skills. Groups that meet often can even begin to facilitate their own conversations by using these skills.

In the event hosted by the team from Eskilstuna, there was a panel discussion which was very well facilitated by Racil, who asked excellent questions. Many of her questions prompted reflection.

Then, towards the end of the discussion, something happened. The participants had been quite clear in their criticism of society (implying the majority of society and those in power). Then one young person spoke up clearly and said, "I have said that society needs to take responsibility for the crime we see. But we are all part of this society. We all need to take responsibility."

The use of skills creates shifts in others.

Facilitating by Using Questions

Our approach during the Connect Project was to teach participants to use open questions to facilitate. Even some of the classic facilitation skills can be framed as questions.

The thinking behind this comes from the idea of dialogue as a weaving of stories. When somebody tells you a story, you may ask questions as they speak: what happened then? Why did she do that? Who else was there? What did you feel?

These kinds of questions come from a place of genuine curiosity. They show the person telling the story that you are interested in what they are saying. They help the storyteller to elaborate and to deepen their story. In short, they help create and hold the space needed for constructive dialogue.

For the facilitator, the skills are a way of holding space for others. For the participant, it is a way of helping a dialogue move forward.

When members of a group begin to facilitate the conversation, the facilitator can take a step back and allow them to manage their own conversations.

If it Gets Tense: Slow It Down

Many conversations that involve societal issues, which a group feels strongly about, and might want to address, can become heated quickly.

The first step is to help the group understand that an overly confrontational approach will cause those they confront to become defensive. When this happens, they might shut down, withdraw or retaliate.

It is not always possible to maintain this approach. Conversations get heated. When this happens, remember:

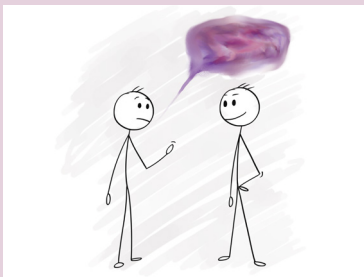
Slow it Down!

There are many ways of slowing a conversation down to make it less threatening - or safer - for those involved. A well-timed question from either the facilitator or a participant can create space for the tension to subside - even if only for the moment.

Here are different ways of slowing a conversation down. All of these will be explained in more detail in the skills that follow.

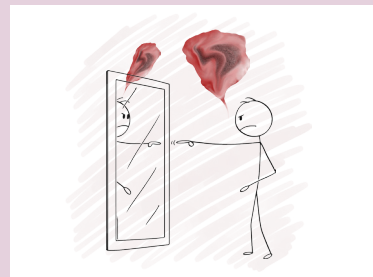
When words start to fly - the way a table tennis ball flies forwards and backwards in a professional match - people tend to feel unsafe.

Slowing the conversation down helps to create a sense of space and managability.



LISTENING

Simply refrain from reacting or responding and take time to listen to what the other says



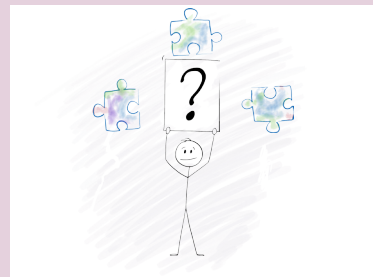
REFLECTING OR MIRRORING

Checking that you have understood what the other person is saying



SUMMARISING

Pause to review what has been said in the conversation



ASKING OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

An open-ended question is one to which the response is more than yes or no. There are many such questions you can ask.

Listening

“Deep Listening” distinguishes the kind of listening we refer to here. Listening is essential to both participating in and facilitating dialogue. It involves more than just hearing what a person is saying.

The first step in listening is to keep yourself from reacting or responding. Hit the pause button - if only for a while.

Deeply listening to somebody requires you to suspend your judgement. It requires you to be present and to seek to understand the other by being empathetic.

Being an empathetic listener involves imagining what it would be like to be them. It might then require you to ask questions to understand them better. What are they feeling? What do or did they experience? What is important to them?

You will have gathered

that deep listening requires a set of meta-skills. Without these, listening becomes a mechanical activity. Compare it to a transcription application where a machine listens and transcribes what is said.

In fact, listening to another is an unselfish act that confirms their worth as fellow human beings. While that might sound like a statement that overemphasises a simple act, consider how often we truly listen to others. How often do we make quick judgements? How often do we make assumptions and jump to conclusions? And how often do we not even create the space for the other to finish speaking before formulating a response?

Listening is key to all the other skills. This will become apparent as we look at them one by one.

Try to remember the last time you felt that somebody truly listened to what you were saying. What did they do to give you the feeling that you were being listened to? How did you feel?

Now contrast that with the last time you felt that you were NOT being listened to. What happened? How did the person act? How did that make you feel?

Questions you could ask

While listening does not directly require us asking questions, there are a number of questions we might ask ourselves:

- Can we quieten our own impulse to say something, to agree or disagree or come up with something smart to say?
- Are we able to refrain from judging or evaluating what the other is saying?
- Are we able to listen without being distracted - either by external stimuli or by our own inner voices?
- Are we able to put ourselves into the shoes of the other
- How do we show another person that we are interested in what they are saying?
- Is there any way in which we can tell that the other person knows that we are truly listening?

Mirroring

Mirroring, in this context, means saying back to a person what you have heard them say. It is always directed to a single speaker directly after they have spoken. It is either followed by a question checking whether the mirroring statement is accurate or phrased as a question.

We will illustrate this by way of an example.

A participant at a meeting says with strong emotion: "I really hate the way you always pretend to be so politically correct, and at the same time, it is clear that you disregard what I - and all the other women in the room for that matter - say."

Here are some possible ways of mirroring this statement.

Can I see if I understand you? Do you feel (strongly) that his words are a pretence and that his actions show disregard for what you and other women say? Is that correct?

So, are you saying that he is giving a double message? On the one hand, he says politically correct things,

and on the other, his actions disrespect you and all other women here (phrased as a question).

A much shorter version:

He shows no respect for women?

You could then follow up by asking for examples or an explanation of how the person perceives both his words and actions.

Notice that the mirroring is either a question or followed by a question about the accuracy of your mirroring statement.

The person may correct you or add to her statement.

This does not necessarily mean that you got it wrong. It might mean that she did not want to express herself in this way and wishes to change the statement or explain what she meant.

Even if you got it wrong, others might have heard the same thing, so you are providing clarity both for the speaker and the rest of the group. In addition, you are slowing the conversation down.

It might seem like an easy thing to do, but it requires practice to use mirroring in a natural way.

If you use it all the time it can feel to others as if you are practicing a new technique on them.

Use it when the conversation gets tense and needs to be slowed down. Or use it when it becomes confused and you genuinely want to understand what the other person is trying to say.

Some tips for using mirroring

- *If you don't manage to mirror because the person keeps talking, just let it go and provide a short summary at the end.*
- *You may need to ask someone who wants to respond to wait while you mirror the statement.*
- *Don't repeat the statement word for word. Use your own words and focus on the part that has most energy.*
- *The short version repeats only the last few words. Be careful not to overuse this form of mirroring.*

Open-ended Questions

There are many different questions you can use, either as a facilitator or a participant wishing to play a facilitative role. These questions should always be open-ended. That means that they cannot be answered with a yes or a no. It is a question (or statement) that requires a longer response.

Here are some open-ended questions that can be used for specific purposes in a dialogue process - either by a facilitator or participants. All of these questions are used in response to a statement by somebody participating in a dialogue or a conversation.

Questions for elaboration

When a person makes a short statement or says something that needs to be elaborated on, these questions are helpful. Here are some examples:

- *Can you elaborate on ...?*
- *What do you mean when you say ...?*
- *Can you tell me more about ...?*

- *What happened then?*
- *Can you give an example of ...?*

The list is endless and depends on what is being said. Your intention is always to help the speaker to say more or clarify something they have said.

Exploratory questions

These questions help you to find out more about the assumptions, thoughts, feelings, values or beliefs that inspire what a participant says.

here are some examples:

- *What did you think when ...?*
- *How did you feel when she said that you ...?*
- *You seem to feel strongly about this. Could you say more?*
- *Why is this important to you?*

- *Why do you think you have this opinion on...?*
- *Why do you think you feel this way about this issue?*
- *Where did you get your information about this issue?*
- *Where did you get this idea? Where did you learn about this?*

At first it may only be the facilitator who asks questions. But sometimes participants catch on and begin to ask open-ended questions too. When that happens the groups begins to facilitate itself. It may not happen often, but when it does, the quality of the dialogue improves and the group becomes stronger and more connected.

If you have the luxury of coaching a group that will participate in a dialogue for change, encourage them to show up - to be present and speak their truth. Also encourage them to listen and ask open-ended questions. You will see what a difference that makes to the meetings you have with those you believe can help to create the change the groups wants to see.

Questions that Make statements More Direct and Personal

You might have noticed in meetings that someone can make a very strong statement in a vague, roundabout or generalised way. This may create frustration, particularly if somebody feels accused or judged. You can then ask a person a question that makes the statement more direct.

Here are some examples:

- When you say that (*everybody is dissatisfied*), is that something that you feel too?
- You say that research says that ... doesn't work, what do you think?

- You ask when (*the authorities*) intend to do something about the problem, what do you think needs to be done?

Sometimes people ask questions that are really disguised statements.

For example, somebody asks: "*do you really think that is a good idea?*" What they really mean is "*I don't think it's a good idea*". You can (respectfully) check this with them. It might sound like this: "*When you ask if it is a good idea, what is your view? Do you think it is?*"

When preparing a group to participate in a dialogue you could ask them to be direct and not make generalised statements. You can also encourage them to ask questions that help others to be more personal and direct.

Comparing Questions

It is helpful sometimes to ask a question that compares one situation with another, one time period with another or one group with another.

Such questions could help somebody to elaborate or be clearer about what they are wanting to express.

For example:

- What was it like ten years ago (or sometime in the past) ? Can you see a difference?

- How do others think about this?
- Are there times when it is different? Why do you think that is so?
- What do people in other areas of the city experience (or think)?
- What would it look like if this problem was solved?

One idea behind these questions that make use of comparison is to help participants in a dialogue to think more broadly and to include other perspectives.

Summarising

Summarising is a useful skill to use in all kinds of conversations - even formal discussions and business meetings. It helps keep the conversation on track and provides a sense of order when it becomes fragmented and confused. In addition, it is an excellent way of slowing down an exchange that has become tense.

A summary is not a resume of all that has been said. It simply names the main points

- as briefly as possible - and could point out contradictions or areas of disagreement.

A summary must always be followed by a question to check whether it was correct or anything was left out.

You could also ask the group to help by contributing to the summary. Be careful not to slip back into the conversation in that case.

If you are facilitating a more formal meeting with a speaking order, you could put yourself on the list of speakers from time to time and use the opportunity to summarise the conversation. If the conversation is fragmented, you could follow up with question: what do we need to focus on?

Questions for Meta-reflection

Meta-reflection is a way for the facilitator to help the group reflect on the conversation it is having. The purpose of meta-reflection is to raise the awareness of the group about HOW they are speaking to each other and even about what is happening individually.

The facilitator can reflect on the conversation but, better still, ask the group to share their reflections. Here are some of the questions you could ask:

How do you think the conversation is going?

What are your thoughts about the conversation and your reactions to it? What - in the way the conversation goes - is working, and what is not?

A meta-reflection can be used during a conversation, particularly if it gets tense or aggressive. It can also be used as a standing agenda item at the end of a recurring meeting. Getting the group to speak in pairs might be useful, and then relate what they spoke about. Ask the group to avoid pointing fingers at others and encourage them to reflect on their attitudes and actions or focus on the conversation, not on other participants.

A meta-reflection is a good way for a group that meets regularly to formulate principles or rules for their interaction with each other.

Youthworkers working with a team can use meta-reflection to build the group's dialogue skills. There are usually many longer and shorter conversations. Make it a habit to reflect on how they could improve the way members of the group interact with each other.

Conclusion

This guide gives some pointers for those working with youth leaders who want to create societal change through dialogue. It is not a complete handbook, but a guide.

Of all the chapters, the most important one is probably that on attitude. (9. Attitude Matters). Without the basic meta-skills or attitude, most of the other actions and activities risk becoming mechanical. And it is no easy task to shape the attitudes of a group. It would require a separate manual to consider how you build the culture of dialogue in a team or an organisation, but it is well worth investing the time to get to grips with

these important elements of dialogue.

We hope to continue this work with youthworkers and youth leaders in future projects or assignments. If ever there was a time when dialogue is needed, it is now. With the increasing polarisation in Europe, and indeed across the globe, we need Transformative Dialogue more than ever to build trust and create sustainable change.

Please get in touch with us if you wish to know more about any of the aspects of this approach and don't forget to look at the website: <https://rauhankasvatus.fi/connect/>

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