9 MODELS FOR DIALOGUE

Compiled by Dr. Sarah Ropp, 2021

1. REFLECTIVE STRUCTURED DIALOGUE

Defining Elements: Highly structured, carefully planned dialogues that employ timed speaking, go-arounds, top-down community agreements, and intentional pauses. Focus is on personal narrative, reflecting on values and convictions, and complexity over certainty.

Goals: Understanding of self and other. Social cohesion (sense of trust and belonging in community with one another). Personal transformation (competence, confidence, and willingness to engage across difference). Resilience (capacity to remain invested in relationships through moments of strain due to differences).

Facilitator's Role: Design a dialogue (purpose, questions, community agreements) with the needs and cultural norms of the group in mind. Ensure participants adhere to design.

Origin: Essential Partners, founded by family therapists in late 1980s. Principles from narrative therapy, family systems thinking, and communications theory.

Sample: Facilitator's Script for a dialogue titled "Insider/Outsider"

2. DIALOGUE TO CHANGE

Defining Elements: Over the course of 4-6 dialogue sessions on an identified topic or problem, participants move progressively towards implementing an action plan. 1) Share personal experience; 2) explore nature and root causes of an issue; 3) consider variety of interventions; 4) explore common ground for solutions; 5) set priorities for action/policy.

Goals: Collective action to implement meaningful, concrete change to address real problems, through a racial equity lens. Share knowledge, resources, power in community.

Facilitator's Role: Learn and model power-sharing. Logistical organization. Does not take sides or bear the responsibility of teaching the group about the issue.

Origin: Everyday Democracy, founded by philanthropist Paul Aicher in 1989. Connected to study circles, which originate in adult learning and community-building in late 1800s.

Sample: Discussion guide for 5-session dialogue on religious diversity

3. SUSTAINED DIALOGUE

Defining Elements: A five-stage "dialogue-as-action" process that unfolds over months or even years of ongoing dialogue among the same group. 1) Identify and recruit participants; 2) develop trust and common purpose by sharing personal experiences with the issue at hand; 3) collectively analyze root causes and systemic factors; 4) develop a plan for action; 5) collaborate to implement the plan. (Each stage might include multiple dialogue sessions.) Focus on relationships throughout: dynamics; (mis)perceptions; interests; identity; and power.

Goals: Concrete action towards a specified goal (with broader goal being peace and strengthened relationships across difference).

Facilitator's Role: Facilitators are always peers identified from within the communities affected by the issue(s) at hand. Students are trained for 16 hours as peer facilitators.

Origin: Sustained Dialogue Institute, founded in 2001 and emerging from collaboration by college students with diplomat Hal Saunders, who conceived SD as a "peace process."

Sample: "Mental Health on Campus" issue sheet for peer facilitators (note that SDI is phasing out these resources out of concern they promote a "one [conversation] and done" mindset)

4. INTERGROUP DIALOGUE

Defining Elements: Trained student facilitators lead dialogues in groups representing a carefully balanced mix of social identities. 4-stage model: 1) Build shared values and relationships; 2) explore personal experiences and structural systems of oppression; 3) collective inquiry into hot-button issues; 4) critical reflection and personal action plan.

Goals: Consciousness-raising, relationships across difference and conflicts, and building capacity in individuals and groups to promote social justice.

Facilitator's Role: LARA/I method: Listen, Affirm, Respond, Add information OR Inquire

Origin: Program on Intergroup Relations, founded 1988 at the University of Michigan. Roots in Dewey's democratic classrooms + Freire's critical dialogic model of education.

Sample: Description of 2-credit UM course "Intergroup Dialogues"

5. STORY CIRCLES

Defining Elements: Groups of ≤ 8 people sit in a circle and go in timed 3-minute turns to share a personal story related to a theme. No note-taking, recording, or interruptions to ask questions permitted during storytelling. Participants may pass and be returned to. After all have had the chance to share a story, open conversation and a synthesizing activity.

Goals: Listen deeply to connect to self and other, embrace dialogue, value nuances of experience over argumentation. Value and create space for all voices/experiences.

Facilitator's Role: Offer a theme or "seed story" to which participants will respond. Lead post-storytelling "crosstalk" and design closing synthesizing activity. Timekeeping and other facilitation tasks are shared equitably among participants.

Origin: Free Southern Theater, founded 1963 by theater artist and civil rights organizer John O'Neal as a post-show conversation that centered the working-class Black audience as equal to educated Black performers and activists.

Sample: Recording of FST 50th Anniversary story circle

6. NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS

Defining Elements: Structured discussions using prescribed materials (e.g. guides, videos) and methods to prompt deliberation, listening, reconsideration, and second thoughts related to contested, topical political issues. Key concept is *choicework*: weighing options; advantages and tradeoffs; and ideas, experiences, desires, and available choices of self and others. Process: 1) Introduce issue and ground rules; 2) connect to issue; 3) deliberate; 4) review and reflect.

Goals: Bring people together from across the political spectrum to discuss solutions to public problems. Arm citizens with understanding, perspective, and confidence to act as more powerful players in the democratic process.

Facilitator's Role: Use provided materials to conduct forum. (No facilitator needed.)

Origin: National Issues Forums, founded 1981. Collaboration with Kettering Foundation (strengthen democracy) and Public Agenda (reduce divide between leaders and public).

Sample: Starter video and issue guide for "How Should We Rebuild Our Economy?" forum

7. EXPLORATORY DISCUSSION

Defining Elements: Sustained dialogue over a series of discussion events (once a month for a year) featuring expert and generalist panels. Core principles are a) sanctuary (dialogue space protected from rush to decision-making); b) sustained engagement; c) collaboration by difference; d) facilitation.

Goals: Participants generate a citizen discussion guide as end product, featuring array of policy possibilities emerging from dialogue process. Guides are made publicly available to be used, in turn, in future IF discussion processes.

Facilitator's Role: Remain active but neutral: manage discussion, challenge participants, and capture group's thinking in notes and summaries. Anyone can use guide to facilitate.

Origin: Interactivity Foundation, founded 1965 by "public philosopher/businessman" Jay Stern as a self-help organization focused initially on policies for economic development

Sample: "Human Impact on Climate" discussion guide

8. MORAL CONVERSATION

Defining Elements: Narrativistic, postmodernist, and pluralistic in theory, based on mutual sharing of the stories that give shape, purpose, and meaning to people's lives in practice. Grounded in love of interchange for its own sake and the desire to support the growth of all.

Goals: Evoking, understanding, and affirming defining narratives of meaning (with particular focus on religious, social class, and political identities and associated narratives). Mutual understanding and "symphonic harmony" rather than "melting pot" as the desired metaphor for diversity. Preserve individuals' dignity and integrity while expanding their worldview.

Facilitator's Role: Create a welcoming space. Establish common goals. Break down hierarchies. Check in, affirm participants, and conclude conversation. Participate & share.

Origin: Education professor Robert J. Nash, student affairs admin. DeMethra LaSha Bradley, and senior admin. Arthur W. Chickering develop concept in *How to Talk About Hot Topics on Campus* (2008). Influenced by Kwame Anthony Appiah's definition of cosmopolitanism.

Sample: "A Step-by-Step How-To Guide . . . When Doing Moral Conversation"

9. KIM'S CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS MODEL

Defining Elements: 8-step model: 1) define goals, 2) identify and address barriers, 3) define core personal values, 4) set the stage (time limits, spatial considerations, effective openers and ground rules), 5) initiate the conversation, focusing on relationship and benefit of the doubt, 6) practice deep listening and gratitude, 7) respond, 8) reflect, return to conversation, and rework.

Goals: Personal healing to address pain and suffering. Intimacy and relationship maintenance. Focus on internal factors (self-reflection, self-awareness, personal pain) over external (ground rules, language, crafting an "argument", etc).

Facilitator's Role: An interpersonal versus group dialogue model; no discussion of facilitator.

Origin: Developed by Anastasia Kim, therapist and professor of psychology. Explicated in *It's Time to Talk (and Listen)* (2019) by Anastasia Kim and Alicia del Prado. Influenced by cognitive behavioral therapy, Buddhist psychology, and multicultural/social justice education.

Sample: Two-page "Executive Summary" of Kim's Constructive Conversations Model