

TRICKS AND TREATS:
Facilitating Dialogue for Social Change

Training for Change Manual for Dialogue Facilitators

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Welcome facilitators, potential facilitators, brother and sister social change activists! This is your guide to the jungle, the thicket, the thorn-filled process of exploring differences among activists. It may not be easy. In fact I can guarantee it won't be easy but the first thing you should know is that the Activist Dialogue Project, at least as experienced by its first three pilot facilitators here in Philadelphia, was not only frustrating, but creative, funny, inspiring, provocative, growth-producing, and had its moments of great happiness.

So why did we do this thing, anyway? Well, wow, for people committed to creating a more loving and liberated society, we sure do dis each other sometimes, don't we? Maybe this is just an East Coast thing, but us organizers often seem to be dis-organized as we get in each other's way, judge and dismiss each other, fail to share resources, issue scathing critiques of each other's politics, competence, hypocrisy, and generally disagreeable ways of doing things. And really, deep down, each of us has the REAL answer, the right recipe, the truly revolutionary or the most deeply nonviolent, the most pragmatic or the most fun, irreverent, radical approach to bringing about desperately needed change-right?

From September 2001 to May 2002, Training for Change carried out a Dialogue Project, using three part-time facilitators, with the intent of addressing a small and specific, but vital, piece of the many and massive divisions among activists. What follows is part chronology, part comedy of errors (we'll try to entertain you with our mistakes), and part a serious guide for those of you who would like to carry out similar projects in your neighborhood, city, state, country, or region.

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I. Why Dialogue?

Genesis of the Activist Dialogue Project

A. Diagnosis: identifying and focusing on intergenerational tensions

"Maybe there's something human about curiosity, human enough that it can overcome the comfort of being "right," and support the adventure of a teachable moment." --George Lakey

"Middle class liberals drive me crazy if they pretend they're more liberal than they are, then treat me with disrespect at the shop where I work" -- community-based youth activist

"I have a strong personality, I'm 44, I'm a white heterosexual male, I'm too visually like the oppressor" -- older, "seasoned" activist

To start with the beginning, during the Republican National Convention in the summer of 2000 (R2K), Philadelphia's activist scene was rife with internal conflict and misery (as well as creativity and wonderfully productive energy which gave rise to such projects as Philly's first Independent Media Center giving round the clock coverage to the issues and the action).

Of the many "divides," one dividing line that gave particular trouble was the generational divide. Clearly class, race, culture, gender, sexual preference, nationality, ability/availability, and political philosophy are huge and chronic divides, all of which emerged along the way as the Dialogue Project explored the inter-generational conflict.

All year long, in fact, some of the facilitators and participants in the Dialogue Project questioned whether it was appropriate to channel resources into creating an "inter-generational" dialogue when the issues of racism and classism in the movement seemed to us to be even more urgent. Nonetheless, the project as conceived by Training for Change director George Lakey was tightly focused on inter-generational dialogue, addressing a very real and multi-faceted problem which is rarely acknowledged explicitly, let alone addressed consciously, intentionally and creatively, within social change movements.

Below is George Lakey's essay describing the underpinnings and assumptions behind the original concept of the Dialogue Project.

Vision for Activist Dialogue Project: Assumptions

The Best Way To Change Society Is Through Social Movements.

Some people advocate top-down change, but I prefer bottom-up change because (a) powerholders have a vested interest against changes that promote democracy and cost them their privilege, so the degree of change will be very limited, (b) social movements enable the

people who will benefit to participate in making it happen, and that participation is itself essential to stable democracy.

Social Movements Vary In Values As Well As Size.

Some movements only focus on themselves, while others press for changes that benefit others as well. Some movements replicate within them unjust patterns without challenge, while other movements support transformation in relationships among the participants. Some movements have limited, superficial goals and others have deeper goals. Some movements want to make the change by themselves, and others want to spread democracy at the same time and build collaboration and coalition with others. Some movements care mainly about self-expression and other movements suppress self-expression and focus on gaining concrete changes. The values of a movement influence its capacity for growth as a movement, and also its ability to gain allies and make a bigger difference.

People Can Influence Social Movements By Work On Their Cultures.

Fatalism or determinism is useless. Culture is created by people and a movement's culture can be changed. Authoritarians can become more democratic. Whites can become less racist. Changing the culture of a social movement is a splendid challenge requiring many approaches, and such pro-activity serves democracy and makes more likely that the movement will change the world.

What Opens A Social Movement To Change Is Teachable Moments.

Cultures seek to maintain equilibrium, just as an individual's worldview usually resists change. Just as an individual will occasionally let down their defenses and consider a different point of view, cultures will do this. Those occasional moments of openness are called teachable moments. It's a waste of time to try to get people to change at other times; they just resist. Not only is it a waste of time, but it reinforces a bad attitude in the person trying to catalyze the change; the bad attitude is called self-righteousness. "There, now, I've tried and that man is clinging to homophobia as much as ever. It just shows how superior I am since I know the truth and he doesn't."

Teachable Moments Show Up Through Drama, Contradictions.

Russian peasants assemble in St. Petersburg to present a petition to the czar who they believe wants to take good care of them; instead the cossacks attack and the square is smeared with blood. A teachable moment, and the great insurrection of 1905 begins.

An adult believes she respects children, and in a moment of great irritation smacks one. A teachable moment.

The universe is generous with teachable moments. No one with a broad vision of liberation has to wait long to find a teachable moment, on some aspect or other of oppression. There's no need to force one's vision on others in the way of the urgent teacher with a scripted curriculum. Paying attention is sufficient.

R2K: A Teachable Moment Regarding The Generational Divide.

I personally saw racism in the movement, and sexism, and tons of classism (the most obvious to me personally was how much unaware classism drove activist decisions). However, the most glaring source of disunity in the movement culture as a whole was the divide between the generations.

At its most extreme, I heard this sort of thing:

-The older people are naive about what really goes down in this city, they want to be nice instead of being effective, they lack courage, they allowed this societal mess to get to this point so now we the young people have to clean it up, they are authoritarian, racist, sexist, etc., they have been corrupted by connecting with powerholders over the years, they have no radical vision and don't respect it in others, they are arrogant and believe they have the right to teach us even though they didn't accomplish anything themselves, they only care about bourgeois ethics instead of kicking ass in order to get something done, they've fallen for the fetishism of property that prevails under capitalism and imagine that they can be worthy allies to us when they didn't even stand up for themselves against the system.

-The young people are discovering what the system is like and kidding themselves into believing they are the first to know, they create an isolated subculture and then are surprised that their self-marginalization leaves them quite vulnerable to repression, they live out the stereotypes of rebellious youth through their arrogance and disrespect and then are surprised that they are perceived merely as rebellious youth rather than being taken seriously as carriers of an important message, they don't know anything about how movements in the U.S. have reduced the impact of repression, and so, spurning the lessons of history, allow their fear to drive them into isolation and contraction, they are spoiled and privileged youngsters who couldn't relate to genuinely oppressed people if they wanted to, which they don't.

This set of beliefs were accompanied by appropriate emotions of disappointment, rejection, feeling betrayed, anger, suspicion, and so on.

I felt personally lucky because I was able to move between the generations enough to see the stereotypes as a mixture of exaggerations and myths. I knew that terrific social changers were on both sides of the divide and that they would benefit from knowing each other. I also believed that a divided social movement, as delightful as it is to the powerholders, is a crucible of frustration to the participants and leads to a lot of burnout.

Hypothesis: Through Dialogue Both Sides Would Discover Strengths In The Other And Collaboration Would Become Possible, Thereby Changing The Culture Of The Movement To Be Supportive Of Unity And Power Rather Than Disunity And Irrelevance.

And that's the vision. Maybe people are too invested in separation to change, too in love with their narrower version of "we" that they can't get curious about a larger "we." And, on the other hand, maybe they so much want to win that they'll leave their comfort zone to build some unity. And maybe there's something human about curiosity, human enough that it can overcome the comfort of being "right," and support the adventure of a teachable moment.

George Lakey - 5/19/02

B. Concept: choosing dialogue, defining communities to work with

"I expected to be talked down to, but you're so down to earth! You didn't give me less respect. You have nothing to prove, know who you are, are easy to talk to! Meeting someone who's an adult who's still active is inspiring and it's inspiring that even though you're so busy doing so much, you came here to talk to me!" --High-school aged youth activist

"I had some fear I might be overwhelming, but you're so strong, that didn't happen. This dialogue addressed my loneliness, which happens when there are no young people in political work I'm part of." -- Older, "seasoned" activist

We chose dialogue among individuals, rather than debate or goal-oriented meetings between organizations or communities, as our tool, for several reasons:

1. Dialogue feels more informal and therefore accessible, "easy," and generally less burdensome than meetings.
2. Dialogue focuses the participants on their human relationship with each other, and with each other's communities, opening the space for dissolving stereotypes rather than hardening positions.
3. Dialogue, being more diffuse and less goal-centered than meetings or debates, tends to generate creativity and connection.
4. Dialogue, perhaps most important, assumes a relationship of equals throughout the process. In emphasizing mutual listening, it tends to empower those who think of themselves as more marginalized, and enable those in the "one-up" position to express vulnerability.

Having chosen dialogue (this is something we did right!), we needed to define the communities we would be working with. Here is where we made MISTAKE #1:

MISTAKE #1: Using vague, or even euphemistic, terms where clear definitions are needed! This caused us a bit of trouble. In fact, the three communities which we realistically undertook to focus on in the intergenerational dialogue process were fairly well-defined:

1. Young, predominantly white, anarchist activists living mostly in the West Philadelphia area.
2. Older, "seasoned" activists, throughout the Philadelphia area.
3. University of Pennsylvania campus-based activists.

This would have been a bite-sized, doable project for one year, and, to the extent that we stuck to those definitions, we succeeded in impacting these three communities significantly.

However, because we chose to call the young activists "community-based youth activists," (when we really meant specifically the young anarchist and anti-globalist activists whose energy was so visible on the street during R2K), the euphemism created some confusion internal to the project.

One facilitator, taking the phrase "community-based" literally, felt disturbed that the project did not include young people of color community-based activists working on issues such as health (HIV/AIDS, sexual health education, and recovery), education (there was a huge fight about classism, racism and control of the Philly schools, throughout the duration of the Dialogue Project), and housing.

The response, of course, was that these activists tend not to have a problem with the older generation; they are working strongly side by side with seasoned activists already. Because the Dialogue Project was designed to address a problem through intergenerational dialogue, it didn't make sense to create intergenerational dialogue where no problem existed.

Logical although all this was, the continued use of the term "community-based youth activists" when the project was not, in fact, concerned with the majority of community-based youth activists in the city, left the project open to the charge of bias.

Even having identified this as Mistake #1, it's still not clear in hindsight what term would have been best. "Anarchist youth" is too narrow, for although many of the young activists did define themselves as anarchist, some were moving away from the label, some did not like the label because of all the myths attached to it, and no two anarchists define "anarchism" the same way anyway. "Anti-globalist youth" also didn't fit, for many of the young activists involved with the project identified other issues, including racism, sexism, animal rights; queer activism, indigenous peoples, the death penalty, and the death sentence against Mumia Abu-Jamal, as key issues for them and would not define themselves primarily as "anti-globalists".

Having chosen "community-based youth activists" as our term, perhaps the best thing we could have done would have been to acknowledge and discuss explicitly the built-in contradiction from the beginning, i.e., that although a high proportion of community-based youth activists in this city are young people of color, almost all the young activists this project includes, in this pilot phase, will be white, due to the particular character of the generation gap we have designed the project to address. Then, even if some participants might still feel uncomfortable and prefer to include more young people of color intentionally in the project, at least the discussion is out in the open and not hidden by an "as-if" euphemism.

"DO AS WE SAY, NOT AS WE DO" -- To avoid this mistake, carefully define not only the communities you intend to include in your dialogue project, but the terms you use to define those communities. Suppose you want to address anti-Semitism-keep in mind that Palestinians are also "Semites." Suppose you want to address transphobia within the queer community in a particular city and you think everybody these days knows what "trans" means or even what "queer" means- think again! Suppose you want to address xenophobia in Georgia, where waves of Mexican immigrants are being met with hostility in the very communities now benefiting from their labor- if you use the term "Latino" when the folks you are addressing are used to hearing "Hispanic," your intended audience may tune out before you've invited them to a single dialogue. Define your communities. Ask a zillion questions about your own definitions, and re-

define them, and check in with your definitions as you go along. Define the terms you use, ask a zillion questions about their appropriateness, and check in as you go along. That should help.

C. Getting started: fundraising, hiring, start-up communications

For this project, fundraising was fairly straightforward: after talking to key community leaders in all three of our focus communities and well beyond, George Lakey worked with one foundation to craft a single grant proposal resulting in a \$60,000 grant. Ingredients that helped make this proposal a success, aside from the positive reputation of George Lakey and Training for Change, included:

- a focus on empowerment and leadership development for participating young people, both community-based and students
- a timeline, which proved difficult to follow given the September 11th attacks and aftermath, but which gave structure to the year's dialogue project
- clarity about desired lasting results, including a Reference Committee which would continue to function, monitoring generational differences within the movement, after the Project was no longer staffed;
- a goal of creating new, multi-generational organizations as well as increasing the generational reach of existing campaigns or organizations.

Hiring proved an interesting challenge. Here are three learnings from our hiring process:

1. What we did right: hire three facilitators each of whom was part of, well known in, and currently active in the community she/he was expected to bring to the table. Thus although it would have been cheaper and easier to hire only two facilitators, we hired one quarter-time student facilitator and two half-time community-based activists, one somewhat younger, one somewhat older. It seemed to work well that we chose individuals who were representative, but not on the far edge of, their age bracket, i.e. a "young" activist whose 30th birthday fell during his staff year, and who maintains close friendships with older activists; and an "older" activist with enough visible gray hairs and stories to match, yet who wasn't too far over 40 and hangs out with a lot of younger people. Most importantly, however, we chose individuals who like people, are committed to movement-building and, however opinionated and passionate they might be, were sincerely open to dialogue and excited about its possibilities. Each facilitator already had developed a positive reputation in some activist circles; and already had developed some facilitation skills, which Training for Change took responsibility to hone. We also did well to hire self-motivated individuals; the importance of discipline and persistence in this work, as it got difficult, cannot be overstated.

2. Timing: here we did something well and something less well. As a practical matter, we hired the community youth-based facilitator first, and by putting him on payroll early, enabled him to become involved in and get to know many of the people who would later become enthusiastic dialogue participants. This worked extremely well, a "win" for him personally, for his communities, and for the Dialogue Project, because the level of skepticism among his community about participating in the project at all, might have otherwise sabotaged the whole project. However, the staggering of arrivals of the different facilitators on staff meant that there

was a bit of confusion in the beginning, with different levels of information about the genesis of the project shared by the facilitators. For example, one facilitator never saw the grant proposal containing many key assumptions about the project, until the ship was four months out to sea. Our "DO AS WE SAY, NOT AS WE DO" suggestion is, if you have staggered arrivals due to trust levels or other practical factors, take the extra time necessary to bring the later arrivals fully on board.

3. Predictable tensions: When different communities come together to dialogue because of tensions, and the facilitators each represent one of these communities, it stands to reason that tensions might, just possibly, erupt between the facilitators themselves. This happened in our case, and we suggest that you-

- a) be ready for this it's so predictable, even among skilled and dedicated folks!
- b) respond quickly and positively to tensions, if possible using them to explore differences through a practice dialogue, enabling the facilitators themselves to benefit from the very process they will be inviting others into
- c) encourage periodic face-to-face one-on-one meetings between the facilitators, outside the staff meeting structure, to enable them to get to know each other in the context of their common work, without the immediate pressure of decisions to be made. We found that the more connected the facilitators felt with each other, the better they were able to come up with creative solutions to the stream of practical and political problems encountered throughout the year's dialogues.

D. Necessary skills: training and self-training for facilitators

"The energy you brought to this project is so alive, fresh, excited, intuitive, ingenuous, and passionate, full of vision someone would have to be living under a rock not to notice." --young community-based activist

"In this dialogue I experienced a sense of timelessness. It's so important to hear these stories, to extend my narrow focus. Yet you really moved it along, too; the pace was always right." --older community-based activist

In our case, each staff facilitator already had some training and hands-on experience facilitating groups. However, facilitating workshops or activist meetings geared toward skills-building, decision-making, and political action requires a different mindset from facilitating dialogue. To make the shift toward dialogue facilitation, we built our skill set through four processes:

Intensive facilitation training, in our case through the Public Conversations Project. Although this three-day training did not meet our needs in that it seemed heavily geared toward white, upper middle class participants with considerable unexamined bias, it did hand us several valuable tools for dialogue facilitation.

For example, we learned the value of phone interviews with participants ahead of time to enable them to express some of their biases, fears, needs, and hopes without constraint (and to help facilitators identify surprise "hot spots" or burning conflicts).

We learned techniques for establishing participants' comfort and safety; how to ask "unloaded" questions; how to support appropriate levels of vulnerability; how to encourage participants to ask each other questions of curiosity; how to identify gray areas, areas where dialogue participants disagree strongly with each other but also have some internal discomfort about their own position.

Most of all, we gained intensive exposure to the whole concept of shifting relationships among participants, rather than shifting the participants' dearly held points of view. While we don't recommend Public Conversation Project trainings in particular, we do recommend facilitator training. Facilitator training sensitive to issues of privilege and diversity, from trainers intimately familiar with movements for progressive and radical social change, is available from the National Coalition Building Institute and Training for Change.

At least two of the Training for Change facilitators who worked all year on the Activist Dialogue Project are available to go on the road and not only train facilitators, but help you think through, customize, plan and shape your own Dialogue Project. If interested, please email us or call (215) 241-7035.

Our second task as facilitators was to "self-train," which we each did in unique and creative ways. One of us, by immersing himself for months in a particular subculture and listening intently, identified many of the particular fears and sharp angers carried toward older activists by younger activists, and toward university students by community-based activists. He then created a set of questions designed exquisitely to bring out the stereotypes somewhat indirectly, such as, "How do you feel you would be received by the other participant's community? How does hearing that make you feel?" enabling activists to express feelings about how they feel they've been stereotyped by others, without (at first) directly asking them to reveal their own stereotypes of the other.

Another facilitator seemed to learn best by making close observations of his own impact, as facilitator, on each participant, and coming to staff meetings with a combination of shared observations and sharp questions about facilitators' dilemmas, such as, "what do you do when one participant is so seemingly disrespectful that she appears not even to be listening to the other participant?" or "what do I do as a male facilitator, when facilitating dialogue between two women, if I feel that to interrupt or re-direct the conversation feels sexist?"

A third facilitator, as a preliminary practice before facilitating her first "real dialogue," went to the local coffeeshop hangout spot and "practiced" not dialogues, but spontaneous one-person interviews to begin collecting life stories, political awakenings, and impressions of the 20-year-old been-to-Seattle-and-Chiapas crowd. This proved not only a confidence boost, but provided provocation necessary to get her to rethink her own generational assumptions based on over twenty years among predominantly pacifist direct actionists.

"Practice Dialogues"

Before we started facilitating dialogues between the communities in dispute, we each facilitated at least one "practice dialogue" between close members of the Training for Change community, i.e., staff, other facilitators, and board members. This proved extremely useful. We found this was a particularly exciting time to make mistakes. One facilitator made her most confounding mistake of the year in her practice session, when she experimented with stepping "temporarily" out of the facilitator role to put out a political perspective which she felt wasn't being represented in the dialogue. We must admit she felt emotionally provoked and involved at the time. It didn't work. She received extensive and pointed negative feedback about this experiment; it essentially ruined the safe and confidential atmosphere she had just skillfully created. (Interestingly, after months of carefully neutral facilitation, this facilitator did find it is possible to be open about one's own political involvements to a certain degree just enough to make participants feel grounded in knowing their facilitator has done some real work and help the "flow" of dialogue, without compromising the sense of safety and confidentiality for participants. But this came only after months of practice at containing her political responses; in general, we found the discipline of containing our own opinions to be essential to the success of the project).

We highly recommend "practice dialogues" for new dialogue facilitators to experiment with their method and to make mistakes in a situation in which the stakes are relatively low. We also recommend taking care, if facilitator mistakes are made, to acknowledge and check in about them thoroughly so that all parties are confident the same mistake won't be made repeatedly.

Evolving Facilitator Skills:

Facilitators were encouraged to keep a journal of their experiences as facilitators, as well as to share their experiences at staff meetings. We found the sharing of facilitation dilemmas often to be the most fruitful and fascinating portion of staff meetings, and even when we couldn't resolve a particular facilitation problem, it felt productive because we knew each staff member left chewing over a dilemma, and a solution might well occur right in the middle of the next dialogue.

In sum, the most useful of all training tools was our own reflection before, during and after each dialogue; our own observations of not only the words but body language, energy level, and freedom of expression of dialogue participants; our note-taking and journaling about the effectiveness of our opening and closing processes, questions and interventions; and sharing all this with each other with enough time left for brainstorming solutions.

Mistakes we made and how you can avoid them: I've mentioned some of our mistakes along the way, but the main "mistake" is to do with the trickster known as Time. We started the year with an excellent timeline, a map of where we needed to be by October, by December, by April. However, we started work the first week of September, 2001, and then there was September 11th.

We started the work with one political map in mind, and suddenly the political landscape was not only changing dynamically every day, but the very intergenerational conflicts we planned to tackle were re-creating themselves in front of our eyes and in our midst, AND we felt pulled at times to participate much more directly in the fragmented political scene so in need of bridge-building.

Because of this, because of the staggered arrivals of staff members, multiple demands on our lives, and events in personal lives (illnesses, deaths of loved ones) we absolutely did not keep to the timeline in front of us. We found ourselves far from immune from the multiple stresses placed on typical activists juggling organizational, family, community, and personal commitments. And you expect me to tell you how to avoid this mistake? HAH! Au contraire, please write back and tell US how to avoid this mistake.

What we do suggest are two remedies, one concrete, one attitudinal. The concrete remedy is to make a "political map" of the entire set of communities and activists you are interested in reaching, at the beginning of your project. Don't draw it to scale, just draw it, on a huge piece of paper up on a wall. Draw arrows between communities indicating who is connected, who gets along, and where lines of communication are eroded or nonexistent. Name names, so that you know who's who among influential activists you want to involve in the project. No matter what else happens with your timeline, do these two steps within the first six weeks.

Even if the political map changes, or you re-define your project and you have to re-make the map and re-name the names later, doing this activity together will help you enormously. You'll be grounded in the impossibility of "doing it all," which will help you focus on what, realistically, you can do in the time available; who you can reach, and what your priorities are.

The attitudinal remedy is compassion. As activists we tend to ask a lot of ourselves, be hard on ourselves, and sometimes don't leave enough room for family matters, personal responses to disturbing political events, or even our own health. If we are not compassionate with ourselves and with each other, how is it we're going to build the world we all want so much to live in?

II. What Happens in Dialogue?

What's Facilitation Got to Do With It?

A. Participants: Identifying, Matching, and Preparing Participants

"I think of you as always having known [about oppression and political struggle], so it's amazing to find out you only became politicized as an adult. It gives me hope when I think of kids I know, that they'll wake up, boom, it'll happen." --young community-based activist. Addressing older activist

"I had stereotypes of you because you're a boy and a Penn student; I think of them as not thinking deeply about how their personal life relates to activism." --young community-based activist

"At your age I'd a been scared outta my mind [to participate in something like this]; it's impressive. And I had no idea you were from Philly, that you're not upper middle class, that you connect with Temple and with being a writer, I had you [stereotyped] being a West Philly anarchist." --student, University of Pennsylvania, addressing teen activist and youth activist.

Identifying, matching, and preparing participants it sounds like we're matchmakers, doesn't it? Well actually, this was one of the most fun aspects of our particular dialogue project. We have no romantic matches to our credit, that we know of anyway, but we did unwittingly (or half-wittingly) contribute to one or two truces in longstanding personal conflicts among activists.

We definitely acted as a catalyst for friendships, for cross-fertilization between organizations, for matching up a set of happy housemates, and for the initiation of an intergenerational women's creativity circle.

Dialogues led to informal helping relationships including dog care, child care, housepainting and roofing; to exchanges of recipes and delicious late night feasts, as well as increased support for the International Solidarity Movement (engaged in nonviolent actions defending Palestinians against some of the indignities and cruelties of Israeli occupation), and increased attendance at events related to indigenous peoples in the U.S.

The long-term results of the many dialogues, in fact, continue to unfold currently, over three months after the project's pilot year ended. However, none of these results was the least predictable as we sat at staff meetings matching name to name for the early rounds of one-on-one dialogue.

What did we look for? In its simplest form, we simply tried to match the two most contentious sides of a triangular relationship: matching older activists to younger activists, and matching UPenn students to community-based youth activists. There was no particular conflict between older activists and Penn students, who tended to work together fairly comfortably, so with a few exceptions we didn't focus on that match. However, we took many other factors into consideration, including the preferences stated by activists themselves.

If an older activist stated flat out, "I don't want to waste my time with anarchists, they're not interested in coalition," then we would work hard to match that elder with a young, articulate anarchist activist whose experience included serious alliance building.

We matched an older activist, a former Communist Party member and lifelong labor activist, with a young anarchist who had just started a job organizing sanitation workers.

An older, gay Latino activist was matched with a young person who tended to be judgmental of older activists as "sellouts"; the seasoned activist could hardly be dismissed, having lived out his politics his whole life and always intellectually and creatively on fire as a poet, as well -- so this was one of the more exciting dialogues, with enthusiastic reports from both participants.

Occasionally older, seasoned activists who are people of color expressed a preference to mentor young people of color, rather than sitting across the table from a young white activist. In at least three cases we matched older/younger pairs of people of color, producing in one dialogue an enthusiastic connection, in another a long-term friendship between activists who never otherwise might have met; and in a third, increased familiarity among acquaintances who had been "fellow travelers" at political meetings for years, but had never had a chance to get to know each other personally.

A few other examples of matching according to preferences and common interests: a young activist who found white male labor activists intimidating, was matched with a white male labor activist- the facilitator anticipating correctly that they would find common ground on prison issues. The labor activist had spent several years in prison as a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War; the younger activist has spent seven years working on prison issues.

In another case, a young, straight white male student leader with a very strong ego was matched with an older, butch lesbian seasoned community activist with, perhaps, an even stronger ego—essentially we matched a much-admired young man with considerable privilege, with someone not easily impressed, who could challenge him and be comfortable allowing him to feel uncomfortable.

In another case we matched a young activist particularly outspoken about the need for armed struggle, with one of the most ardent older pacifists in the country. We matched a Palestinian woman with enough political experience and courage for several lifetimes, with a younger white woman anti-racist activist whose partner, a Middle Eastern man, encounters plenty of everyday racism.

In short, we looked for a combination of sugar and spice: enough common ground to sweeten any combination of activists who might have otherwise assumed they didn't have much to say to each other, and enough cayenne pepper, or difference, to give the pair something interesting to explore. In reality, many a match was made on the basis of purely pragmatic considerations: who could show up where, when.

Scheduling turned out to be the single greatest practical challenge of the dialogue project, and often we would "match up" names of activists we thought would make great dialogue partners, only to give up on the basis of scheduling. One of our happy surprises, though, was that even last-minute dialogues in which a scheduled partner was a no-show, and another activist was substituted on a stand-by basis often turned out to be unpredictably smashing successes.

In one such dialogue, an older community-based activist was able to vent her frustration at being wrongly stereotyped as an "upper class suburban" activist just because she wore a suit to speak at a press conference and the dialogue partner to whom she vented worked for an organization led by the influential activist who had done the harmful stereotyping. In another, a ten-year old conflict was peacefully mentioned and admirably resolved after an hour and half of serious conversation. Such occurrences, although individually unpredictable, are exactly the kind of fruit we would expect to come out of a pattern of dialogue across differences.

Preparing participants: this varied a great deal, depending on such factors as the reluctance or eagerness of participants. Those activists who immediately said, "Intergenerational dialogue? GREAT IDEA! I'll be there, what time?" tended to need little preparation, but they were the exception. Most activists required several (three to ten!) conversations about the goals of the project, the process, the engaged, safe atmosphere created by facilitators, etc. before they committed to a time and place.

We found that older, seasoned activists tended to want to know a little more about who they were meeting with; tended to think more about their own curiosity and questions even before the dialogue began; and tended to be more reliable about time and place. Younger activists, both students and community activists, seemed willing to show up knowing little about the person they were about to meet, or knowing just a name and very general category. We found it useful to share just enough about the dialogue partner to whet the curiosity of the participant, without saying so much that our own biases, whether admiration or judgment, might get in the way.

If a participant had a strong reputation for being a talker or for being very shy, we might mention that in an understated way to their partner, i.e. "You may have to be assertive about saying your piece," or "you may want to be patient in drawing this person out," but even that level of "warning" or suggestion was unusual. More typically we focused on the overarching goals of the project facilitating connection, exploring difference uninhibitedly in a safe environment, and encouraging intergenerational collaboration and let the ensuing connection unfold naturally.

B. Atmosphere: timing, venue, food "it's the little things that count"

"The food really helped, I would have been spacey and distracted otherwise. The facilitation also helped, I would have dominated without it-It's interesting to have these conversations." --talkative older community-based activist

"I can't meet at the Comet [coffeehouse], forget it, I'd be interrupted every five minutes by someone I knowf actually I really enjoyed the atmosphere at [the facilitator's] home, it's quiet, warm, comfortable." -community-based youth activist

"Wow, and you're not even treating us for the coffee?" --community-based youth activist

"South of Baltimore Avenue? Is that safe? I've heard it's bad there." --University of Pennsylvania student activist

In dialogue, as in life, often it's the little things that count. Finding the right venue for a particular dialogue was part logic, part magic, part coincidence. What did matter was: --making sure the location was as convenient as possible to both dialogue partners --checking assumptions (are dialogue participants able-bodied, able to handle stairs? If not, will someone be there to assist? Is someone allergic to cigarette smoke? Etc.) --checking more assumptions (does the proposed location feel culturally alien or offensive to one participant? Is it too yuppie for the anti-gentrification activist, who sees it as "part of the problem"?) --when in doubt, giving preference to the more intensely scheduled partner and/or to the one having to travel the farthest, taking into consideration bus, trolley, bicycle, or other transportation. --safety really can be an issue; does the 17-year old young woman whose mom dropped her off have a safe way back to her neighborhood? --balancing familiarity as a "plus" (the local hangout) with familiarity as a "minus" (too many interruptions, or the possibility of being overheard by acquaintances) --balancing hominess as a "plus" (comfort, home food, happy animal presences) or a "minus" (a person's home reflects their class, race, politics, and is in no way a neutral space). --for group dialogues, having as neutral and accessible a space as possible --

FOOD! We found that offering dinner was absolutely essential to the success of the group dialogues, and hot, healthy, abundant food at that.

MORE FOOD! We held a series of "activist brunches" as well as the more structured dialogues; free food and coffee helped these become popular.

EVEN MORE FOOD! Building on these successes, we also offered dinner at the meetings for our fledgling "reference group," the committee volunteering to take on continued monitoring after the project ended. With the task somewhat nebulous and the group in formation, food helped to attract, support, and bond this group together.

COFFEE: Looking back, although we don't have consensus on this, at least two of the facilitators thought it would have been worth it to include the cost of coffee for the one-on-one dialogues in the budget. It would not have been a huge amount of money, and would have been an appropriate gesture of appreciation toward some of the dialogue participants who are underpaid, unemployed, have economic challenges and health challenges, and gave generously of their time to the project. That said, it seems that in general we were successful in creating a comfortable atmosphere for the one-on-one dialogues, the "activist brunches," the group dialogues, and the reference group meetings. We met in low-cost cafes or restaurants where we knew we would not be harassed for taking up space for two to three hours while drinking only coffee; we made sure food was available when we knew people would be hungry; we met in places where we knew people would feel comfortable regardless of how they looked or dressed; or we met in the homes of facilitators or participants after carefully checking ahead of time to see if each participant was happy and comfortable with the arrangement.

First Stupidest Mistake in relation to venue: on one occasion, an activist arrived on time to an event only to be completely unable to make it up the cement steps because there was no handrail. Everyone knew this person has a physical disability which makes it tough for her to walk and impossible to climb stairs without support, yet no one had taken responsibility to make sure to be there for her instead of leaving her standing on the sidewalk, waiting. Dumb! Insensitive! Do as we say, not as we do. Check assumptions.

Second Stupidest Mistake in relation to scheduling: oops. On one occasion, an older activist who had already been re-scheduled twice, left an exhausting and busy work day, made childcare arrangements, showed up on time, waited a full hour and a half, and no one showed up. Not the facilitator. Not the participant. He was burnt. He lived far away. He was mad. He did, fortunately, have a sense of humor and forgiveness - but we learned: always show up, as the facilitator, even if you think you've left the message canceling the thing - the message probably has not been received, and you also have to risk making a fool of yourself, going up to strangers and asking, "Hi, are you Paul?" rather than abandoning the thing. These things will happen - so, the other thing to do is, really, sincerely, apologize. Three hours of someone's time can matter an awful lot to them, and we can wind up busting up the very bridges we're attempting to build.

Third Stupidest Mistake in relation to scheduling: in theory, we were supposed to make confirmation calls, but it turns out that in reality, only the older, seasoned activists actually expected and depended on them. Oops. Once, a facilitator remembered to make childcare arrangements but forgot to make the confirmation call, so the older activist, a daddy, assumed that meant the dialogue was off. Not only did one facilitator wind up scrambling to find another dialogue partner last-minute, but the other facilitator, who expected to take care of a very cute child to enable this dialogue to happen, had to spend two hours talking with an adult instead of playing with a five year old. Oh, well. After that we learned: confirmation calls. Two days ahead of time. It works.

C. Structure, Themes, and Flow in One-on-One Dialogues

"He [the facilitator] made it really easy, comfortable, we'd just be rolling for long periods of time ..Because she [dialogue partner] opened up and was so frank, then I opened up. The two hours went really fast." -- older, seasoned activist

"I really liked [the facilitator's] style. It seemed like a safe haven, cathartic, therapeutic. I have all this experience, and now it's being valued." --older, seasoned activist

"The facilitation was fine, but [you] could have intervened earlier, to keep me from talking on and on in too much detail. It was good when you interrupted." --community-based youth activist

"Talking with you [younger dialogue partner] gives me hope. You are courageous, astute, intelligent. The world needs solutions now; we don't have the luxury of a lot of time. And you give me hope, hope. The laughing was fun. And the silence space, quiet helped me too." --older, seasoned activist

Each of the three facilitators developed their own style in structuring the one-on-one dialogues, and each developed a set of favorite questions, as well. We will go into more depth about each phase of these dialogues in the "tricks" section. What worked best, we can say over and over, was staying present; allowing spaciousness and flow in the dialogue; and checking our own assumptions.

Below is a sample structure that worked well for one facilitator. This structure worked for first-time or one-time only, two-hour one-on-one dialogues:

Opening: Introduce the project: history, rationale, and goals.

- Logistics: timing, food/drink, issues of comfort
- Process: role of facilitator; confidentiality; permission for notetaking
- Overview: facilitator gives a sense of what topics questions will cover
- Q & A: any questions participants have about the project, or about the facilitator.

Questions of Activity: (short, 5 10 minutes) These brief questions give activists a chance to understand each other's actions and involvements, at least superficially: if not the why, at least the what. Participants are more comfortable with deep sharing once they feel they have a bit of a "handle" on what the other person does.

Questions of Identity: (long, 20 minutes or more) Personal sharing about family, life stories, class, race, culture, gender, sexuality, and other formative aspects of identity. Usually this includes questions about how each participant "woke up" politically, and the influences on him/her.

Questions of Praxis: (long, the heart of the dialogue: one hour) --Core Values, Vision -- Application: Strategy, Tactics, Process --Sustainable Activism

Questions of Curiosity: (variable, short 10-15 minutes) Participants ask questions about each other based on what they've heard.

Questions of Closure: (variable, 10-15 minutes) Facilitator asks each participant questions about how their perceptions of each other and of each other's communities may have shifted. Participants share what surprised, challenged, provoked them to think, or inspired them. Evaluation of the dialogue experience is included in the closure section. Next steps -- second dialogue, upcoming events, networking are shared.

D. Structure, Themes, and Flow in Group Dialogues

"I learned that when it comes to disability in hearing, speech, and thought, the facilitator needs to intervene to enable everyone to participate fully." --facilitator

"Anything that shuts down or chills dialogue such as a dominating debator or power plays involving privilege can be countered when the facilitator intervenes to probe, provoke, to defend the space and to re-open it." --facilitator

We tried two different ways of handling group dialogues: themed, and un-themed. Both types of dialogues were successful as long as facilitators put thought into how to structure the conversation ahead of time; stayed present with what was being said to allow conflict, insight, and synergy to build; and brought the session to a close actively.

That said, we had the greatest success when we created a series of themed dialogues which we publicized ahead of time. The themes we chose were: "Image and Accountability"; (with a focus on activists' appearance and image in the public mind; to whom are we accountable in deciding how to present ourselves?); "Surviving the Movement," (with a focus on the relationship between activism and mental/emotional health) "Allies in Anti-Oppression Work"; and "Tactics." We also incorporated the theme of "Mutual Aid" into each of the group dialogues.

Because the group format disallowed the intimacy and depth of one-on-one dialogues, we found several elements to be important in creating as much intimacy and depth as possible:

- Welcome, including project overview, confidentiality, and logistics Introductions, often involving a creative, "right brain" light-hearted way of revealing oneself through a drawing, story, etc.
- First round: Throwing out a provocative question, making sure everyone speaks to it
- Second round: Addressing a related question in a more complicated or challenging way, eliciting stories and examples

- Third round: Encouraging active disagreement, allowing more back-and-forth, raising the energy; chaos ok.
- "Peak" phase of dialogue Moving towards closure: Making sure everyone has expressed their key points and didn't hold back out of fear; urging quiet ones to speak
- Closure: Acknowledging disagreements, elicit "learnings and noticings" by asking what was surprising, inspiring, provocative or new.
- Evaluation, Next Steps: feedback on facilitation and other aspects of the dialogue experience; announcements, info. sharing, networking.

Variations on this general format included:

- Pair exercises or small group exercises: especially in the first third of the time together as a group, these enabled more people to express themselves more fully, get to know each other better, and built confidence for expressing risky or "dangerous" perspectives in the larger group.
- Workshop format: including some more highly structured "workshopy" exercises along with time for dialogue. This worked well for the theme "Allies in Anti-Oppression Work," a topic that required definition of terms and sharing of experiences in order to successfully focus participants on doing their own work honestly. The workshop format also helped to deal with situations where a conflict among participants might otherwise have been "too hot to handle."

F. Mistakes we made and how you can avoid them:

Most of our mistakes as facilitators can probably fit into three categories: hyperaction, inaction, and failure to check assumptions.

By hyper-action, I mean packing the agenda with so many exercises, so many questions, or so many facilitator-initiated topics, that the relationship between or among the dialogue partners doesn't have time to flower and bloom, or ignite and explode, or set sail, or whatever it wants to do. Each of us made this type of "overactive" mistake at least once, and then reported later successes in containing our impulses.

In my case, responding emotionally to what seemed to me casual or numb statements about using violence as a tactic proved my early downfall. I found that as I contained my own emotional response, continuing to provide a safe container for dialoguers, the dialoguers themselves seemed to become more thoughtful and actively explored the contradictions in their own positions. In other words, "less is more."

Another facilitator struggled with a desire to insert his own knowledge and experience into dialogues where there was a severe deficit of knowledge of history. He succeeded in not intervening, but reported back to us the intensity of his frustration. We seem to have a hard time in just allowing people to not know things, not see things, not be aware. It's so deep in our nature as activists to educate, educate, educate, that the shift to facilitate, facilitate, can be tricky!

Overstructuring dialogue, both one-on-ones and group dialogues, is another form of being "overactive" as a facilitator. It's good to have interesting structures and abundant questions to fall back on if / when the energy is stuck or low or slow. But for a facilitator to insist on a structure or a particular question because of being attached to it, comfortable or familiar with it, can actually chill or kill the natural flow of insight, questioning, or even exploring differences which often happens without facilitator intervention, when the facilitator is wise enough to sit back and "do nothing." Sometimes doing nothing, allowing silence, spaciousness and the flow of curiosity and connection, suits the deeper purpose of dialogue.

Inaction: By this I mean failure to create, support, and actively protect the engaged and safe atmosphere essential to dialogue. A few examples:

Failure to thoroughly orient participants in the beginning can make a participant feel a little shaky or unsure throughout the dialogue. Simple inactions like failure to check in about what time we need to end can mean that a good dialogue is abruptly cut short, without closure, evaluation, or next steps, because a participant had another event to go to; or, it means that one participant is anxious throughout the entire dialogue because s/he is not sure the facilitator really "got it" that s/he REALLY needs to leave at 8 sharp or whatever.

Failure to intervene when intervention is really needed. The clearest example of this is being passive as a facilitator when one person is overtalking or dominating the discussion. Skillful intervention DOES require interruption at times, rather than politely waiting until the person is "done" with their soliloquy. Often the less talkative party is grateful, and the overtalkative person is also grateful for the intervention because they know, but can't easily control, their tendency to go on and on.

Subtle, but critical: by paying attention to body language and energy shifts (monotone speaking, lack of eye contact) the facilitator can learn when participants are underwhelmed with the dialogue. Facilitators can then do something creative to raise the energy, and re-engage the participants by insisting on stories rather than recitation of theory; ask an intentionally provocative question; take a break, or even re-arrange the seating to physically give participants a "new perspective." Often low energy means that something is being avoided; the facilitator can intuit what that something is, give permission to tackle it, actively leading participants back to the hot spot.

Failure to check assumptions: One facilitator, Martin Wiley, wrote, "The absolute worst thing is to come in with assumptions or expectations, either about the participants or how the discussion will go. I could never stress this enough. I went to a one-on-one discussion with a young anarchist from a fairly privileged background and an older college-activist from what I thought was an equally or more privileged background. Many of my questions were geared towards exploring the differences between the two communities. It turned out that the college activist had grown up on a farm, as a migrant worker, and had struggled to put herself through college. She felt little or no connection to the wealthy, relaxed students she saw all around her. She was

older and felt that the campus activist community was not hers, and didn't really feel that she had a community to claim. As my entire plan was based on a difference of communities, I was forced to rework things on the spot. I was able to, mostly thanks to the participants, but I should never have put myself into that position."

Another almost comedic example of making foolish assumptions (which always, of course, seem logical at the time): I assumed an older, seasoned activist who is also a woman of color, would carry negative stereotypes about young white anarchist activists similar to the stereotypes I usually run into. When the older activist and I arrived on time, and the young anarchist didn't appear for 20 minutes, I assumed the older activist was feeling frustrated or having negative feelings about what began to look like a no-show. I felt I would have to try very hard to connect the two. When the anarchist activist did show up, in fact the older, seasoned activist did a much better job than I did of being relaxed, gracious, appreciative, bonding directly, personally, and immediately with her younger counterpart. I needn't have worried! In fact, as a woman of color, the older activist was fascinated and impressed with this young white woman who was making anti-racism central to her political work and identity.

III. Tricks: Stuff We Did Right and How You Can Duplicate It

"Interruptions? Are you kidding? I'm from Brooklyn, I'm Jewish, I grew up with 1000 interruptions per dinner conversation, it's normal, I can hold my own."

"Actually, I'm kind of limited in the number of thoughts I can hold in my mind at one time, so if you interrupt me I might easily lose my train of thought."

"I like interruptions, it makes me feel at home, I'm Italian, what can I say, we get excited and talk simultaneously, it's great. I might interrupt you and have no idea I've interrupted you, I don't think of it as interrupting."

"I have this thing about being silenced. I've seen so many women interrupted by men, especially their husbands, and never get to finish their thought. I really hate it unless it's done with positive intent, for a good reason."

A. . Co-creating ground rules, providing background, creating safety

What works: Allow brief, completely informal/unstructured "chat time" while settling in, before a clear and fairly formal beginning. Facilitator shifts from friendly peer to facilitator with a welcoming remark, giving participants confidence that they are in good hands with a competent facilitator. Co-creating ground rules means that we used a combination of "standard" ground rules (confidentiality, one person speaking at a time, common understanding of starting/stopping times) and actively "customized" ground rules:

1. Note-taking: We asked permission of each participant about whether the facilitator could take notes, and explained "it helps me to track the conversation and honor what is being said."

2. Confidentiality/Anonymity: We also asked each participant to choose their precise level of confidentiality, meaning one of four levels: !you may not share anything I say; !you can share some of my stories only if you change details and make my identity unrecognizable !you can share my stories and quote me, but without my name; or !everything I say is public record and you may use my name. Finally, we re-visited the question of confidentiality at the end of each dialogue (sometimes we forgot this important step, but do as we say) because sometimes participants changed their minds about the level of confidentiality they need, i.e. *"You can share all my political observations but please don't mention what I said about my uncle"* All the care and attention we gave to confidentiality seemed crucial, and the one time we forgot to ask about note-taking in a group dialogue, trust us, someone brought it up in quite a skeptical tone of voice immediately!

3. Interrupting: We asked participants to state how they feel about being interrupted, inviting them to connect this to their cultural background if relevant. This question, often the first question participants responded to, played a dual role as an icebreaker and creating intimacy through revelationf while giving the facilitator and participants information about communication styles which was truly invaluable.

4. Creating safety also has a lot to do with the "presence" of the facilitator, emotionally speaking. People feel safe when they feel listened to. When someone has just talked about his father being murdered, or her childhood in a refugee camp, or her mother's desperate fear for her family in wartime, the facilitator's job includes feeling her/his own response as a human being. That emotional presence will then be communicated, perhaps just through eye contact, facial expression or quiet. It can also be communicated verbally, such as, "You've shared a lot, I can see it's affected us all. Let's have a pause before we move on." Creating a quiet space in this way allows other participants to feel, and begin to process, their own emotional response in a real way, instead of chucking it aside; this allows all participants to feel both heard and engaged.

B. Establishing Connection: Eliciting Personal / political histories, stories, and experiential learning

"My parents conveyed to me, 'you can do anything you want to do,' that race is not a barrier, that I could go beyond what the culture says girls can do. My mom believed violence doesn't solve anything: smart kids can do something other than beat up someone for calling me a nigger. It happened to me when I was very little, and I made a decision to confront it. Otherwise I knew I would feel shame, and I decided, 'I'm not going to live like that.' That decision held true for my whole life. The pivotal thing about being gay was political. My mother said, 'Just don't get arrested!' Both my parents accepted my partner." --older, seasoned activist

"I grew up poor; my parents' attitude was, "we don't have anything but that's not a problem." The house my father owns was built by his grandfather. My father had us read W.E.B. DuBois, autobiographies of slaves, and Asian philosophy. I experienced unfair treatment in school, and by the police. I have five brothers, who were abused by police officers; only two were not abused. When I traveled, I saw that whole nations are treated the way U.S. blacks are treated....I've seen a whole lot of inequality, all the time wondering, 'Why is nobody else understanding these things?' " --younger activist

Experiences like these, especially when elicited early in the dialogue, establish connection between the dialogue partners, open up the listeners' heart, and begin exploring themes that are often returned to again and again. They were most likely to be elicited by the "questions of identity", the first deep questions of the dialogue, asked after the brief "questions of activity have given participants a "handle" on who each other is.

Sample wording for the questions of identity:

"Who are you, in terms of race, class, gender, sexual preference, ability/disability, or other significant aspects of your identity? Feel free to talk about your family background, going back a few generations if you like. How did you wake up politically? Why aren't you still asleep? Were there particular events global, national, or very personal, right in front of you that woke you up?"

With such a long question, it's good to repeat it and pause, to give participants a chance to think. During and/or after answering this question, participants need a chance to ask each other questions of clarification.

The importance of sharing personal history, and its connection to history, can hardly be overstated. This was often the most mind-opening, deeply fascinating and moving sections of the whole dialogue, for all parties. Younger activists for whom Vietnam, let alone World War II, is far in the past, made direct connections with, for example, a German woman whose mother lost a baby during a bombing raid; who found unexploded ordnance in her backyard as a teen; and whose political foundation was built on the commitment to never let fascism rise again.

Older activists for whom the lies told during Gulf War were only to be expected, seemed startled to realize that the activist across the table from them identified realizing "my government is lying to me" for the first time during the Gulf War or, perhaps, that the young activist was 10 or 12 years old when Iraq invaded Kuwait.

As Martin Wiley put it, "When people get a chance to hear why someone has become an activist and made the choices they have made, it personalizes them, and makes them harder to just write off as 'one of them.' It helps you as a facilitator see where they have common threads, and to push them ('Wow, you both worked for Amnesty International when you were first getting involved. You seem to have had very different experiences there. Why do you think that is?')

Also, telling personal history, we may also tell a wider history, one that we know and forget that not everyone may know. An older, Civil Rights-era activist may not be aware how a younger activist may have a limited knowledge of that same time period, formed by a few paragraphs in a history book and a Martin Luther King video. And, conversely, a young activist may forget that older activists may have little understanding of animal rights/vegan issues, and might be more understanding of them if someone took the time to explain it. This happened more than once.

However, the sense of personal connection can be established in so many ways, not just by sharing life histories! For example, an activist coming in late from her job found that in the process of complaining about working in "dead, numbing corporate environments" she and her dialogue partner, seemingly so different in life experience, immediately had a lot in common.

As facilitator Martin Wiley, put it: "Choices come up, not just in the form of the discussion, but in the content. Making sure that you are present in the conversation but detached enough to read where people want to go is vital. More often than not, people's agreements/differences are not going to be anything like what you expect. "I did a one-on-one with an older, nonviolent male activist and a younger, anarchist woman activist. Somewhere in the discussion it came up that one of them liked showtunes. Shocked and pleased, the other admitted liking them as well. They then spent some time discussing what they would be doing if they didn't have to be activists, and got to know each other through that better than through any questions I had prepared. I was able to put aside what I had brought, both as questions and as assumptions, and listen to what they wanted, steering the conversation that way."

C. Empowering the Core: articulating values, principles, beliefs, while staying engaged.

"I don't have any belief in someone telling me what to do just because they have authority. I want things to be fair; I believe in justice, equality that's why I'm an anarchist, I'm trying to empower every single person." --community-based youth activist

"I want to encourage this explosion that happens with people when they realize they are good enough they think, 'I am good enough, in myself and in relation to others' " --older, seasoned activist

"My core value is respect for people. The Quakers call it 'that of God in every person'; I'm an atheist, but that gives you some idea. I don't want to tolerate a society that treats people with less than respect. Vietnam was not "just" a bad foreign policy mistake, it's related to so much more. What I want to do with my life is stop that." --older, seasoned activist

"I believe society creates the emotional flora and fauna and we make decisions based on that. Every person is doing the best they can, given what they know even oppressors are reacting from pain and lack. I'm an anarchist and revolutionary but I'm feeling a lack of hope unless we create spiritual change. As anarchists we need to talk about a society that's positive, built by mutual aid, not just motivated by anger. I want people to heal emotionally, the oppressed and the oppressor. " --community-based youth activist

When people talked explicitly about their core motivation for being an activist, their core beliefs and values, it was often with an electric energy that inspired all listeners. As a facilitator, I felt extremely lucky because I got to hear these hope-giving statements all year long. I found, even, that in odd moments when I felt down or demoralized by all the racism, drums of war, and violent inequality of everyday life, the voice of one of these participants would roll through my inner ear, with absolute clarity and conviction,

"I need to end poverty in the world; food, education, health and well-being for everybody, nothing less." (younger activist). Or "I am motivated by the vision of a world where everybody can live to their fullest potential. My commitment is to transmit this belief to future generations." (you guessed it: older activist).

These statements sometimes rolled out naturally with no prompting; sometimes were elicited with direct questions; and sometimes emerged indirectly while reflecting on a particular experience.

Here's an example of the direct question about core values, *after the "questions of identity" phase of dialogue: *Note: because they followed, and were grounded in, the very specific experiences of life history and political awakening, we found that people were very "real" and sincere in their expression of core values it never felt like someone was on a soapbox or off in la-la land. Having already touched nerves and hearts as well as minds, perhaps this is why the expression of core values usually seemed so electric, important, inspiring.

1. Core values/vision: "Both of you have already mentioned values important to you, while talking about who you are; for example (respect, justice, anger at oppression). Talk a little more about this: what are your core values? What motivates you?" Variation: "It's often easier for us to talk about what we don't want than what we want. What do you want, what does the society you'd like to live and and are trying to build, look like?" Variation: "What is your vision; what is it in this vision that gives you hope, inspiration or energy to keep going as an activist?" *At the same time, once the core values have emerged, it's important to move back to the practical, experiential plane, to give these values room to live and breathe in connection with the actual struggle for social change, and thus also keeping the participants engaged in vital connection with each other:

2. Application: What works? Based on your values/vision, what kinds of strategies, tactics and processes should we be adopting? Please tell about a time that you felt part of a campaign, organization, or movement strategy that really worked if you've ever experienced this! what happened? Feel free to also give examples of disasters: what didn't work? *Note the repetition of the word "what" in all these questions of praxis, of application. Using "what" encourages participants to speak specifically, elicits stories and examples rather than theories and generalizations. Variation: "You've both mentioned different processes used inside radical movements the authoritarian structure of the Communist Party, or the hidden structure of a "clique" that makes decisions inside democratic / anarchist movements. Let's talk more about this. What kind of process works? Give examples of decision-making processes and organizational structure that you've experienced what happened? Variation: similar approach to questions specifically about: Nonviolence, armed struggle, property destruction, confronting oppressions within the movement; relating to the media, the mainstream, and powerholders.

D. Making room for complexity, confusion, passion: stirring things up

"In 5th grade, I had been friends with a poor white kid. His family didn't flush the toilet because they couldn't afford the water; they all shared one toothbrush. Later, we had a visibly racist teacher. This kid's house burned down; his dad maybe hit him. We had a fight, and I became "nigger" to him. Then I was eating dirt every few days." --younger activist

"An ally must be able to say, 'I don't know,' and be self-accepting, and be able to admit when they're wrong and make amends. It's offensive when people who are not African American think they know all about African American culture. .It's not my job to help white people work on their racism, they need to

work first before trying to be an ally. I can feel sucked dry and angry about that. Yet I'm willing to hang in there with Black folks who are not where I am. " --older, seasoned activist

"We don't have the hearts and minds of everyday people any more. When I came up, my perspective was similar to those around me; now, reactionary nonsense is more common." --older, seasoned activist

"I don't like the anarchists' tendency to marginalize themselves. To deliberately marginalize yourself to effect change is a false construct. You are forming relationships in and with community." --younger activist

"The barrier I feel sometimes with younger people is not from me, it's younger people who think they don't have anything to teach. I need the back and forth." --older, seasoned activist

"In my family, older people talk nonstop and don't even care if there's input, I can't get a question in. There's a lot of thinking, 'I know it all.' " --younger activist

Most of the above comments are examples of the flow, in a dialogue, from relatively more "safe" forms of expression to that which is less safe. Less safe because it is complicated and may not be well understood; less safe because it acknowledges anger; less safe because it's an unedited opinion which could hurt somebody's feelings; less safe because it directly addresses the very differences which are sitting right here in the room with us: differences of generation, of political perspective, of race, class, gender, and every conceivable aspect of identity and life experience.

It often felt like this venturing outside the comfort zone was where the greatest learning took place. Sitting and talking with an older lesbian woman, a young man who grew up Muslim acknowledged, "Growing up, I thought negatively about homosexuality. Muslims sometimes speak very badly about homosexuality. Recently when I went to a mosque, and two out of three times I went, bad things were said about homosexuality, I decided not to go back. For me that's part of becoming an ally." Yet, for him to reveal this about his own growing up, his faith community, and his decisionmaking process required a great deal of vulnerability and the courage to reveal it. It may be significant that in this case, such sharing happened only in the second dialogue, after sharing of general life stories and views about tactics and strategy had been covered in the first.

A few things we learned about encouraging people to go to messy, contradictory, complicated or controversial places:

1. It takes time -people usually need to feel safe and connected first
2. The direction will suggest itself. Sometimes all the facilitator needs to do is ask a question a different way: after "what do you look for in an ally," ask, "what does it feel like to BE an ally?"
3. Stick with using "what" to elicit specific experiences
4. If you know of an unspoken disagreement, ask the silent party directly, "what do you think of that," or "does that represent your view?"
5. Sometimes people begin a story, then hesitate as if thinking it will be somehow "inappropriate" especially if it includes their conflicts and criticisms of others. Simple encouragement, "go ahead," or "this is useful" or "keep going, we need to learn from this," often works.

6. Ask directly about the conflict, to give permission, i.e. "What is it, in your experience, that keeps older and younger activists from learning from each other?"
7. Challenge negative or ahistorical generalizations to provoke clear thinking: "You say demonstrations are useless; can you think of one that's ever been useful, anywhere? What's the difference?" Yes, it's possible to retain neutrality while asking provocative questions.
8. Switch physical seats! Sometimes when the energy that wants to flow through a conversation is "stuck," changing location can "unstick" it. This can be done randomly, or intentionally, as we did once when we put all the "younger" activists on one side of the room and "older" activists on the other. This worked well!
9. Switch viewpoints, or rather, ask the participants to. Martin Wiley says, "One thing I've found successful is to ask, "What do you think the other person/group's assumptions about you would be?" This forces people to acknowledge that their "side" or opinion may be viewed differently than they would like it to be, and to remember that their opinion or view of the other might be equally flawed. It's also a chance for people to poke a little fun at themselves, rather than having the other person poke fun at them.
10. Another question is, "How do you think the other person / group would be received by your friends / peers / group?" This forces people to see their community through another's eyes. Some people may hesitate to be fully truthful, afraid of hurting another's feelings or unwilling to make their own community look bad. But you can continue this exploration by getting the dialogue partner involved, asking them whether that has been their expectation or experience in relation to the other's community.

One way or another, this line of questioning often creates a breakthrough beyond politeness into honest exploration of differences and honest crumbling of harmful, distancing stereotypes.

E. Digging for Differences

Like miners going underground for ore, facilitators ultimately have to take risks and make difficult judgment calls in order to dig for differences. The differences are there, but participants in a dialogue may prefer to stay polite, or simply to experience the pleasure of connection without the discomfort, awkwardness, or self-confrontation of expressing differences directly. We were, in fact, awestruck at the persistence of politeness and the difficulty in getting to difference. We brainstormed all year long about techniques we might use as facilitators to encourage participants to express their differences with clarity and passion.

Our collective self-critique, at year's end, was that we did not make enough progress in this area. My own hunch, having thought about it for a few more months, is that we as facilitators were self-contradictory. We felt protective of each group because each group is maligned: young anarchists are smeared as being wet behind the ears, unreal in their objectives, and disconnected from the very communities they live in and claim to care about. Older activists are dismissed as sellouts, as hypocrites more concerned with their mortgage than with social change, and as irrelevant because unable to keep up with technological, tactical, cultural, organizational, and other developments. Students are seen as self-involved, as unaware of their own privilege, coming from the "head" rather than gut, heart, and life experience; and as unlikely to be involved in long-term radical social change work.

Consciously and more importantly, unconsciously, we facilitators wanted to protect the precious individuals in front of us in each dialogue from the weight of these negative stereotypes-so we failed to insist that these assumptions be explored directly, bravely, openly.

On the plus side, trust is a shining thread, and in general our project erred on the side of building trust and weaving a web of connection among many individuals, organizations and communities.

We also engaged in quite a bit of healing and repair work on webs that had been damaged by painful blunders in the past. Perhaps, in Phase 1, or the pilot year of such a project, this was the best that could be done.

Still, it could be that we made the mistake, however unconsciously, of being overprotective, and that this overprotectiveness was due to our own erroneous assumption about the fragility of "our" triangular (younger, older, student) communities of activists. Thus we considered it to be very risky to burden our dialogues with facilitator-initiated questions like, "Some activists feel that the imposition of nonviolence guidelines at actions is repressive, arrogant, and counterproductive to the success of the movement. What do you both think of that?" or, "We haven't mentioned the term, "sellout," but you have been talking about the compromises you've made such as paying taxes to a government whose policies you abhor. What's the difference between "compromise" and "selling out"? or, "Some activists think that a security culture has arisen which is so paranoid that it's harming our ability to carry out strategies for social change. What do you think of that concern?"

In hindsight, it's understandable that we focussed on safety, pleasurable exploration, education, connection, and insight more than on conflict: this project had never been done before, and it felt like the stakes were high: if we significantly alienated people and made them feel attacked, if we compromised the neutrality of the facilitator, we would lose trust and sabotage the project.

What follows is a combination of things we did right in digging for conflict, and things we "shoulda coulda woulda" and which you can:

1. Spend explicit time in the project's earliest phase identifying the stereotypes, assumptions, and projections each community makes about the other(s). This won't be fully accurate of course, but it will give the facilitators a much clearer picture of the mine they need to get down into than if each facilitator is actually harboring their own stereotypes of others' stereotypes!
2. Do take risks and stimulate the discussion with questions in the form of "Some activists thinkf" whenever you feel a conflict is being avoided or skirted around. The only time not to do this is when you are really concealing, not very convincingly, your own political viewpoint under the disguise of "some activists think" and hammering somebody with it.
3. Facilitators, question your own sense of protectiveness, and challenge yourself to envision each participant as strong, competent, and able to withstand sharp political criticism even when it touches their personal life. One of the most "fragile"-seeming activists, an older woman with frequent depression, became quite feisty when the "sellout" issue was brought up in a non-dialogue setting. "Let them try living my life first, and then see if they think they can pass judgment!"
4. Try doing less in order to do more. That is, rather than covering a number of topics in any given dialogue, take a topic and try to go down into the conflict areas that touch it.

5. Be sneaky, funny, and creative. When two participants seem to agree on almost everything or they just share experiences without coming to terms with each other's perspectives ask outright, "Well, if you two disagreed about something, what would it be?"
6. Ask not only about interruption, but about conflict styles. "Are you a conflict avoider, a conflict resolver, or a conflict addict?" This can give the facilitator good information about how to dig for difference with this particular pair or group.
7. Pay attention to your own pulse, breathing, etc. as facilitator. Your own biorhythms will tell you when a "hot button" has been pushed, even if people are still dancing politely around it. The facilitator can then play a powerful role by naming the hot button, acknowledging the heat, and inviting people to "sit in the fire" rather than to avoid it, or pretend it's been prematurely resolved.
8. Get out of the way! Participants may hold back because of what they think you think, or what they think you feel. One example of this is when I, as facilitator, responded to a questioning look from a participant in a dialogue by saying, "That's OK, you can say anything you want and need to about white people here, I am fine with it." Without an explicit, encouraging, permission-giving statement, this participants might have held back things they needed to say about their exhaustion, complex feelings, and frustrations with white people.
9. Pay attention to your own levels of hope and despair, as facilitator. When we despair of resolving conflict, we too tend to avoid it. When we feel hopeful and resilient, we are much better able to skillfully lead discussion into and out of difficult places. If our own attitude is that conflict is zestful, fruitful, and fascinating, then the dialogues we facilitate will be much more likely to bear that out.
10. Don't worry too much, for that matter, about "resolving" conflict. As many participants said at many different times, for example, age differences are "really real!" People think differently at 20 than at 40! Creating a space for each participant to fully express her/himself is enough; the changes in perspective generally happen internally, invisibly within each participant -- and in the ripple effects through their communities -- after the whole dialogue is over.

IV. TREATS...Results, Verified and Unverified

"I greedily collect elders, I benefit from connecting with a river of elders" Training for Change staffperson

"It was refreshing talking to you, you're not an anarchist kid wet behind the ears." Older, seasoned activist, addressing student

"I didn't know how extreme you would be." Student, addressing older anarchist activist

"Knowing only that you are a Mumia activist, I assumed first of all you'd be male, African American, have dreadlocks, and be hostile to me." --Older activist, addressing white female community-based youth activist

"You dress so ordinary. If I saw any of you on the subway, I'd have no idea of the radical thoughts you are thinking!" --community-based youth activist, addressing roomful of older, seasoned activists

"It's so encouraging to me that you can actually have kids and stay radical, and stay active. I thought I had to choose one or the other." --community-based youth activist

"At first I thought the whole idea of intergenerational connection kind of boring. Then during one of the dialogues, I got a flash: intergenerational connection among radicals is inherently subversive, powerful, and exciting." --facilitator

"My favorite person is an 82-year-old anarchist I love older lefties, people who haven't compromised their beliefs." --community-based youth activist

Clearly, melting stereotypes was one of the most consistent outcomes of the Activist Dialogue Project. Sometimes it was more dramatic than other times, and was expressed in emotional terms by both younger and older activists who said they felt less lonely knowing that their intergenerational counterparts are really there, so strong, so solid, and so human!

The word "hope" was used over and over in this context. Younger activists felt encouraged that they could "keep going" over a lifetime the way some elders had done. Solid collaboration did develop crossing over generational and ideological lines which might not have been crossed were it not for the Activist Dialogue Project. In particular, AWARE, an anti-racist group formed by community-based youth activists, many of whom participated in dialogues, began collaborating actively and directly with Training for Change, sending its members to trainings, and co-leading intensive workshops for white people on unlearning racism.

In addition, the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) in Philadelphia, seeking constructive third-party nonviolent intervention in escalating cycle of violence between Israelis and Palestinians, initiated a series of discussions and included activists from age 19-73. This intergenerational collaboration was quite unlike the fragmentation which occurred immediately after September 11 2001, before the Dialogue Project was underway.

Considerable personal growth and maturing was experienced by Dialogue Project participants. One example was people feeling more secure in their identity, whatever that may be. Rather than "hiding" under the veil of an organizational or "movement" identity, people claimed who they really are, including their class and cultural heritage. Some participants found deeper meaning in their family backgrounds as a result of dialogues; for example, one woman had never before considered the influence of her father's early anti-Fascist resistance in Italy on her identity as an activist; nor had she taken into account fully the fact of her mother's deafness on her sensitivity to differences of all kinds.

The student facilitator, Brian Kelly, commented that he'd successfully challenged his own assumption that "older people don't get it." As he put it, "I realized I'm totally off base on this one, and I'm going to keep talking to older people!" Within the anarchist community, the Dialogue Project increased the skills base to do even more challenging questioning around race, gender, and power issues. Older activists expressed delight at hearing so many life stories of younger activists, felt that some of their curiosity was satisfied, and expressed commitment to keeping on finding ways to connect, organizationally and informally, with younger folks. One older activist commented that the project "made me feel like I had a purpose" and also made her glad to have a chance to counter-act the behavior she had witnessed of too many older activists who were "rude, interrupting, discounting younger people's points of view."

Other positive outcomes of the Activist Dialogue Project include a series of phenomena related to dialogue, which we cannot take credit for but feel that our work was part of a wave which is still increasing: Increased buzzing and bubbling about "dialogue" in movements for peace and justice. Locally, in Philadelphia, a suburban-urban dialogue about the peace and justice movement; an inter-Jewish dialogue; a series of "deep listening" seminars, and a Jewish-Muslim collaboration for peace and security in Palestine and Israel, arose during the closing months of the Dialogue Project.

Internationally, Thich Nhat Hanh and other world leaders are teaching about the value of listening, with insistence and effectiveness. Finally, a Reference Committee was formed which includes participants from each leg of the triangle. This group continues to meet, to monitor the intergenerational and other conflicts within the movement; it's something new under the sun, and merely the fact that its members continue this commitment is phenomenal.

V. How to Do What We Did, Even Better

This question has been addressed all along, but here's a condensed summary you may find useful:

- Define and refine your concept, identifying the communities you will work with by drawing a "map" of those communities, the influential individuals within them, and how they relate to one another
- Clarify the terms you will use to identify these communities
- Create a timeline and, half-way through your project year, revise the timeline to take into account reality
- From the beginning, pay explicit attention to the dynamics of race, class, gender, ability/disability, sexual preference, as they relate to your project.
- Try to find sensitive facilitators already experienced in group process and not easily intimidated; they will still need outside training to facilitate dialogue
- Encourage facilitators to keep a written log of their learnings, observations, and process as the project goes along
- Encourage one-on-one, informal sharing between facilitators, outside of staff meetings
- Encourage facilitators, above all, to stay present, to check assumptions, and to enjoy the ride
- Scheduling, for us, was the single most challenging issue, requiring tremendous patience and persistence. Be ready for the frustrations of reschedulings, cancellations, and no-shows. Sense of humor is essential, as are carefully kept logs and confirmation calls.
- Documentation: it's difficult to discipline oneself to document the work as it tumbles along, but it's even more difficult to recreate it afterward. Extensive note-taking is essential, and writing up summaries of dialogues, learnings, and suggestions soon after dialogues have taken place is extremely useful.
- Interns: Yes! An intern presented herself to us midway through the year, and for the short time she was with us, work proceeded at a much more disciplined and orderly pace. Since she was the only one not responsible for coordinating dialogues, she could effectively coordinate information-sharing. She also enjoyed dialogues as a participant and honed her own facilitation skills by observation.

- Informal gatherings for dialoguers: Yes! We found a certain number of people who simply could never schedule a one-on-one dialogue or group dialogue, but who managed to show up to our informal Activist Dialogue Project Brunches. This was also a place where staff, board, facilitators, project participants and other activists could gather, blow off steam about unbearably repetitive mistakes in the movement, enjoy each other's company, and boost morale.
- Celebrate! In our case this was a matter of a "Last Brunch" in which a diverse set of activists from age 20 (actually the youngest was 3 years old) to 70-something shared their political awakenings. It was quite fascinating and lively, but small. For other or future Dialogue Projects, we could imagine a larger celebration in which all the participants in a particular Dialogue Project could be invited to meet each other after a year-long series of one-on-one, group, and informal gatherings.
- Appendix: Look in this space for more tools and inspiration for your own dialogue projects: a) sample timeline b) lists of questions c) transcripts of actual dialogues