

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BUILD PEACE IN THE COMMUNITY? - A DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE BASED ON YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

September 10, 2009

Introduction

A deliberative dialogue is described clearly in the book *The Power of Deliberative Dialogue* written by Scott London as “a form of discussion aimed at finding the best course of action.”(London, 2005) The author goes on to further express his insightful interpretation of this form of dialogue as having a main goal to deliver a process whereby the participants “establish a framework” for finding “the means to attain ends”.

The Western Justice Center (WJC) conducted a deliberative dialogue on September 10, 2009, at its campus located in Pasadena, California. The goal for this event was to convene a segment of the local population and utilize the dialogue session to experience common understanding that could lead to avenues for action or actions while answering the question “What does it take to build peace in a community?”

This dialogue was part of a series of six deliberative dialogues put on by the Western Justice Center Foundation with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Each of the dialogues in this series looks at the same question from the perspective of different subgroups of the population such as immigrants, women, faith based organizations, and youth.

The segment of the population selected to dialogue on September 10 around the question of “What does it take to build peace in a community?” was youth, represented by a panel of eight students who attend local middle and high schools – both public and private –in the City of Pasadena.

Pasadena is an incorporated City in the County of Los Angeles with an estimated population of 136,294¹, out of which there are approximately 31,241² youth under 19 years of age. The number of students enrolled in the Pasadena Unified School District, K-12, for the 2008-2009 school years was 19,654 (PasadenaUSD.org).

The dialogue engaged this panel of eight students alongside a participating audience of 36 community members ranging in demographic characteristics.

¹ 2005-2007 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates - Selected Social Characteristics in the United States: 2005-2007

² 2005-2007 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates - ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates: 2005-2007

Dialogue process

Moderators

Emily Linnemeier – Western Justice Center

Monya Kian – Western Justice Center

Panelists

Eight Students from middle and high school grades representing both private and public schools.

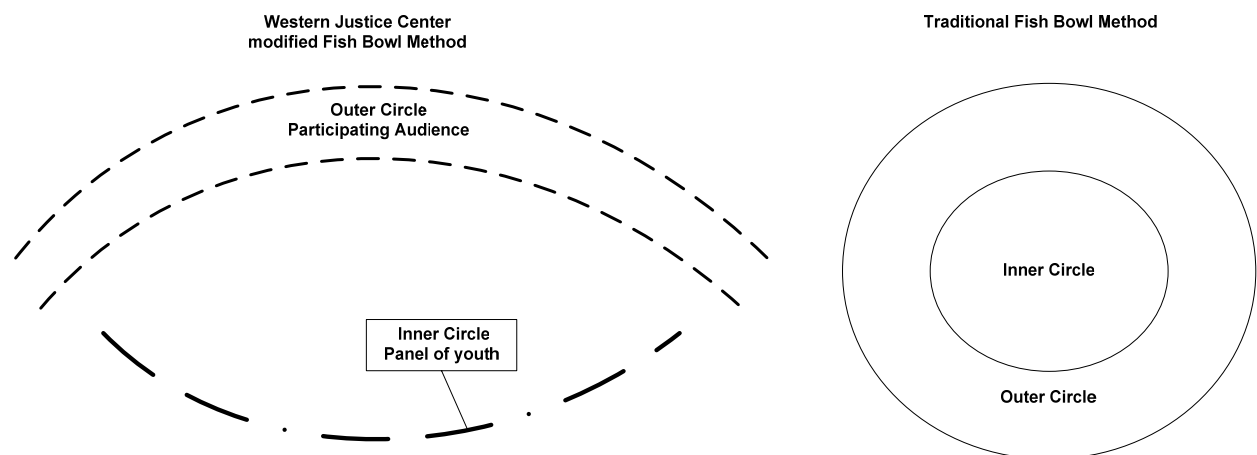
Process

The Western Justice Center Foundation implemented a modified fishbowl process as the model for this dialogue. This structure for dialogue was applied based on participant feedback from the previous two dialogues (June 4 and July 9 of 2009) that utilized a more formal fishbowl method approach.

The definition of the fishbowl method is:

“In a fishbowl, a few participants or session leaders begin seated in a small inward-facing circle, while the others sit in a larger circle observing their discussion. After everyone in the circle has a chance to talk, the people in the inner circle are usually replaced by participants that were seated in the outer circle who would like to talk about the issue at hand.”(National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation).

In the modified fishbowl method utilized by the WJC, two concentric half circles were placed facing each other with an inner smaller circle of panelists facing a bigger half circle of participating audience members. The following graphic illustrates the differences between the two methods.



The sequence for process was:

- Two members of the Western Justice staff welcomed the audience and explained the concept and goals, as well as the ground rules, for the deliberative dialogue.
- Youth Panel participants introduced themselves.
- The dialogue process allowed the youth panel to deliberate on the question “What does it take to build peace in a community?” for 45 minutes. Two facilitators helped prompt the panel members as needed to continue the flow of the discussion while staying on task.
- The next 45 minutes were open to the audience who could then join the dialogue.
- Throughout the sequence of events a member of the Western Justice staff typed main highlights and comments on a screen visible to all individuals participating.

Dialogue themes and main interaction points

During the first 45 minutes of the dialogue session, several key themes, issues and questions were explored by the youth panel. The following outline breaks down the main key issues discussed with several underlying points.

What is your definition of Peace?

- Peace is respect for one another and a lack of violence
- When people have the ability to be tolerant, respectful, and mature
- Unity, and tolerance

How many participants believe that their community is peaceful?

- No panel participants raised their hands signaling that all members of the panel felt that their community was not peaceful

Why is your community not peaceful?

- ignorance and lack of understanding
- judgments about people’s appearance
- lack of respect among everybody
- intolerance for things that are different
- competition within groups regardless of background
- struggle for power and recognition in school, sports and peer groups

What are some examples of efforts that currently work for you in helping build peace?

Afterschool programs such as Day One, Culture Shock, and YWCA; however there are only very few afterschool programs

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- There is a need for more afterschool programs that spread knowledge about how to coexist
- There need to be more programs that promote community service and bring people together

What is currently not working or impeding the process of building peace?

- Separation (cliques, groups of people that don't get along)
- Separation within schools and throughout the community
- Discrimination (an example was given about different treatment and perceptions from law enforcement)
- Lack of education from parents about tolerance
- Not enough leaders, there are too many followers

What are some activities that can be done in order to start peace building?

- Create more events similar to Culture Shock, such as "Human Shock"
 - Events that involve everyone in the community
- Introduce yourself to peers, and generally develop more relationships
- Bring schools together for an event at the Rose Bowl
 - Mix public and private school at this event
- Diverse teen parties
 - Address the divide between youth

How can adults help?

- Support kids, help empower youth and acknowledge that they also have a lot of understanding and intelligence that adults do not have
- Adults should be proactive with peace building efforts such as moving into action
- Adults need to watch what opinions they express in order to be good role models
- Adults can keep on mentoring youth to do the right thing
- Parents can help kids express themselves and encourage self determination

What role should the city/local government have?

- Local government decision makers should attend and speak at more community events
This shows support and helps gain more community trust
- City should support community programs and youth activities not only through presence but also funding
- Work on reversing the current youth perception that city/local government does not value grassroots community efforts
- Listen for and observe positive work that is being done

- Look at kids as individuals

How can the local school administration and staff help?

- Create an environment that promotes support for youth programs
- School staff can put themselves on the same level as students

The second part of the dialogue was open to the audience for the remaining 45 minutes. The following main themes and discussion points are listed below.

- More teens can benefit from the process of dialogue
- Both youth and adults agreed that this dialogue process should be continued but also be inclusive of adults, parents, and youth of both private and public school systems
- Teens and adults agreed that youth need strong adult support in order to successfully move the youth's perspective into a platform heard by decision makers. This could be manifested in an adult presence alongside youth on activities such as a community event, more dialogues, addressing city council, or addressing the school board
- Adults agreed that youth have a unique perspective that should be considered when addressing conflict among youth
- Youth and adults agreed that issues of peacebuilding among youth include all demographics, not just impoverished or minority youth
- All participants agreed that communication between youth and adults is crucial in moving forward with any action steps

Participant post survey

Quantitative responses

37 participants (both audience and all panel members) completed a post survey test rating their agreement with the following statements:

- *The presentation format was effective*
- *The dialogue was informative*
- *The dialogue helped me identify actions I can take to build peace in my community*
- *I will use the information disseminated through this forum in my academic, professional, volunteer, and/or personal pursuits to promote peace in the community*

The response choices were: 1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Disagree 4 = Strongly Disagree.

Table 1 demonstrates that an overwhelming majority of participants thought that the dialogue was effective, informative, and helpful as a catalyst or resource for action.

Table 1
Deliberative Dialogue rating by participants (N = 37)

Use the following scale to rate the dialogue	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Answer
The presentation format was effective	38 %	59 %	0	0	.03 %
The dialogue was informative	38 %	62 %	0	0	
The dialogue helped me identify actions I can take to build peace in my community	54 %	38 %	.05 %	0	.03 %
I will use the information disseminated through this forum in my academic, professional, volunteer, and/or personal pursuits to promote peace in the community	51 %	46 %	.03 %	0	0

Qualitative Responses

The participants were asked four, open-ended questions as part of the post-event survey. The questions are listed below, followed by a brief description of the overall themes reflected by the responses.

Question One. Would you be interested in attending future dialogue sessions? Why or why not?

There were a total of 35 participants who answered this survey question. The majority of the respondents (N = 32) indicated that yes they would be interested in attending future dialogues. There were three main themes representing the various reasons why the participants felt they would attend a dialogue in the future:

1. Information sharing and gathering.
2. Building peace.
3. Helping the community.

Question Two. Did this forum deepen your understanding of youths' roles and views on peace-building?

There were a total of 33 participants who answered this survey question. The overwhelming majority of participants (N = 31) stated that this dialogue did deepen their understanding of youth roles and views on the topic of peacebuilding. There were three main themes representing how this dialogue helped the participants deepen their understanding of the youths' roles and views on peacebuilding:

1. This dialogue helped reaffirm information about youth.
2. This dialogue helped shed new information about youth.
3. This dialogue helped recognize the need for action.

Question Three. Do you have any other feedback about this process?

There were a total of 32 participants who answered this survey question. 13 Participants answered that they did not have any feedback to the process. 19 participants gave feedback about what they thought of the process. The following themes represent the feedback obtained:

1. Dialogue process was positive and participants were glad the event was put in place.
2. The process needs more voices from both youth and adults.
3. The process needs to lead to action steps for the group in attendance.

What are some other topics the WJC should address in the future?

A total of 33 participants answered this question. The following themes were obtained as part of the feedback from the participants:

1. Gangs
2. Violence
3. Youth and parent relationships
4. Youth support

Recommendations

Recommendation One.

Youth need support in maintaining dialogues with other youth and with adults.

It is recommended that public dialogues among youth are maintained through a strategic approach. The goals for the dialogues are two-fold:

- 1 To utilize the dialogues as a means to minimize conflict and create action step solutions for issues between youth.
- 2 To begin movements of “reconciliation” between youth who currently express feelings of disconnect and disenfranchment from both adults and systems (run and controlled by adults).

Recommendation Two.

Youth need more afterschool programs which reflect best practices but also include a component for dialogue, human relations and conflict resolution.

The City of Pasadena Gap Analysis created in April of 2009 listed the presence of 26 programs under the category of youth and young adult development:

- 2 programs for participants ages 12 and under
- 17 programs for participants ages 13-16 of age
- 26 programs for participants 17-25 of age

There are several questions and observations that arise out of the findings listed in the Gap Analysis listing:

- What is the total capacity of the programs listed to adequately serve at least a meaningful portion of the total estimated youth population of 41,231 under the age of 25?
- How many programs currently include a component of dialogue facilitation, human relations or conflict resolution in their structure?
- How many programs currently allow for features that define quality out-of-school-time (OST) programming (Harvard Family Research Project, Spring 2004) such as:

1) Youth opportunities for...

- Positive relationships
- Safety and belonging
- Exploration and skill building
- Meaningful involvement
- Expression/reflection
- Service and work

2) Staff practices and support that promote...

- Youth as partners
- Safe, fair environments
- Supportive relationships

- Personalized participation • Learning opportunities/intentional skill building
- Continuity within program and across settings

3) Organizational policies and structures that promote...

- Consistent, safe, inviting environments
- Effective leadership and management
- Meaningful linkages with community
- High quality staffing
- Range of diverse, interesting, skill-building activities
- Youth involvement

This information was duplicated from The Evaluation Exchange Harvard Family Research Project, Spring 2004.

- How many programs have been assessed via performance measures both in terms of efforts and effect?

Recommendation Three.

Youth need support in achieving output activities (such as a teenage dialogue between all local public high schools and between public and private school students) in order to achieve outcomes (foster more positive intergroup relations).

This recommendation is in line with the latest Pasadena Gap Analysis. The Analysis report stated that “Sustainable solutions to youth and young adult violence will not occur without continued City Council leadership, and its support of government and community programs.”(Gap Analysis, 2009)

There has to be a clear understanding however that support has to be inclusive and participatory of the youth perspective. There also has to be a continued effort and movement to define and provide resources needed to sustain such youth output activities.

This recommendation thus maintains that there needs to be more efforts made than just to sustain what currently is offered to youth through City programming and community programs. This recommendation urges stakeholders to both come up with civic engagement plans and structurally realign services and resources to assist youth in creating new output activities in order to achieve timely and measurable outcomes.

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