

Universal Love Alliance and Dialogue May 2017 (Updated June 2019)

Dialogue is a form of direct democracy. It entails facilitated discourse on difficult subject matter. It demands active listening and treating each person present with respect. Dialogue requires a diverse group of participants, each who partakes openly in expressing their views and relating their experiences. For this to happen the participants must feel they are in a safe space where they are comfortable and not intimidated by the others present. Thus, part of dialogue is establishing that the group can be open with one another and that doing so is non-threatening. This itself takes time. Then dialogue proceeds in a deliberate fashion to consider the issues at hand and to formulate a resolution of the issues that gives a sense of the group.

Dialogue is a twenty-first century approach to direct democracy. There are many antecedents to dialogue that should be noted. The Bible has selected passages that illustrate dialogue. Readings from Scripture can be used for dialogue training, especially when those in attendance have strong religious backgrounds. The Puritans in colonial America had Town Meetings to conduct local government, an early form of dialogue. Mary Parker Follett in her book [Creative Experience](#) offers an early twentieth century view. The chapter of Creative Experience on Power is particularly illuminating. Follett distinguishes between *power over*, which results in conflict between the parties, and *power with*, which is collaborative and enables a synthesis of views to be produced by the group. Dialogue is about power with. Another notable reference is given by the work [Chris Argyris and Donald Schon](#), particularly in their consideration of *double-loop learning* (sometimes referred to as Model II). In single-loop learning, underlying assumptions remain unquestioned and unchallenged. With double-loop learning, these assumptions are brought out into the open and examined in their relationship to the experience of the participants. Underlying assumptions may be discarded for a better alternative when they are found to be in discord with experience. Dialogue is about double-loop learning.

There is a rich tradition of dialogue in Africa. The name most associated with that tradition is Nelson Mandela.

Nelson Mandela based his entire life on the principle of dialogue and the art of listening and speaking to others; and the art of getting others to listen and speak to each other. [The Nelson Mandela Foundation \(ZA\)](#)

Dialogue was the process that Mandela relied on to help South Africa heal from the evils of apartheid. While that was an enormous challenge and the healing process remains ongoing to this day, there has been undeniable and real improvement. The success of the approach helped to spread dialogue elsewhere in Africa.

Turinawe Samson, the Executive Director of Universal Love Alliance, has had a variety of training and a rich background that makes him an effective facilitator of dialogue, particularly when the subject matter is gender, gender identity, and human rights. Samson is a pastor by profession. He did his studies at a life bible school in Uganda. He was trained on human rights by Amnesty

international. He was trained on women's issues and human rights by the South African Faith and Family Institute in Cape Town. He was trained on sex worker issues and human rights by the Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Task Force in Cape Town. He has also been trained on human sexuality and spirituality by the Center for Christian Spirituality in Cape Town. He was trained on dialogue, human sexuality, spirituality, contextual interpretation of scriptures, human rights and theology by Inclusive and Affirming Ministries in Cape Town. He was trained in drug abuse prevention among youth by the Ministry of Health – Uganda. Turinawe Samson has helped to develop a training module for educating religious leaders on inclusion and acceptance of LGBTI while in Kisumu Kenya. This module is being used now by [NYARWEK](#). For the past 7 years Turinawe Samson has given a variety of different seminars and workshops in schools, universities, and churches to key community leaders (religious, cultural, and political) as well as to the general public throughout Uganda.

Turinawe Samson has educated the other members of Universal Love Alliance in dialogue so they are capable of facilitating or co-facilitating a group. (With dialogue, it is preferable to have at least two facilitators.) Where possible, he has sent ULA staff elsewhere for formal dialogue training. In addition, all members of ULA continue to self-educate on dialogue from materials that can be obtained on the open Internet. A particularly useful document of this sort is [A Guide for Training Public Dialogue Facilitators](#) from everyday-democracy.org. Some of that document will be excerpted below.

Dialogue may be unfamiliar to many and is a learned form of discourse. Dialogue should be contrasted to debate. Candidates for elected office debate to let the electorate know their views and to win favor with them. Thus, debate does have a legitimate purpose in a democratic society. But debate is not a good way for members of society to speak about contentious issues among themselves. Many people don't understand this at first. A small group that sets out to have dialogue but without facilitation may then end up in debate and with much recrimination thereafter, ultimately defeating the purpose of the group get together. For this reason, it is useful to contrast dialogue and debate, so that novices can understand the difference.

The Difference between Dialogue and Debate

Dialogue focuses on:	Debate focuses on:
● Having all participants be winners, because everyone learns and grows through the process. ● Connecting and bringing people together, even if at the end of the process the participants choose “to agree to disagree.” ● Helping people to get to know each other and be willing and open to journey together. ● Dealing openly with diversity without fear. Examples include: different backgrounds of people, their different religious beliefs, their different opinions, their exposure to and understanding of different sexual orientations, etc. ● The challenge for people to hear and to understand each other. ● Dialogue is a time-consuming process. It takes much longer than debate. ● Planning the dialogue programme is more involved because it must allow for diversity and it requires adaptations as needed through the dialogue process.	● Arguing and explaining only your own personal point of view. ● Separating and dividing people rather than connecting and bringing them together. ● Determining who wins and who loses by means of the best argument, expecting people to change their attitudes and what they feel in their hearts based on the best argument. ● Involving and getting opposite sides to attend and “fight it out.” ● Debate is concluded in a couple of hours with the strongest argument as the “resolution.” ● Planning the debate programme is relatively easy and leaves no room for changes that might take place during the debate.

Comparison of Dialogue and Debate

Dialogue is collaborative; two or more sides work together toward a common understanding. Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution. In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal. Dialogue remains open-ended. One listens to the other side(s) to understand, find meaning and find agreement. Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view. Dialogue encourages introspection on one's own prior held view. Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions. Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change. In dialogue one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it. Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs. In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements. In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the positions of others. Dialogue involves a real concern for the other participants and seeks to not alienate or offend.	Debate is oppositional; two sides oppose each other and each attempts to prove the other wrong. In debate, winning is the goal. In debate, one listens to the other side to find flaws and counter their arguments. Debate affirms a participant's own point of view. Debate defends assumptions as truth. Debate implies a prior held position is correct. Debate causes critique of the other position, without changes in one's own position. Debate defends one's own position as the best solution and excludes other solutions. Debate creates a close-minded attitude, a determination to be right. In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenges to show that it is right. In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the position of others. Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationships, and often belittles or deprecates the other side.
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In conclusion, the following are points of emphasis in this document:

1. For people to become aware of dialogue and choose it as the method to manage and deal with diversity. Dialogue is a life-enhancing alternative to debate, argumentation, apathy and rejection. Dialogue reflects an attitude towards life that entails tolerance of others. It is a vital life skill.
2. For people to know the difference between dialogue and debate. This empowers us as individuals, allow us to understand what is happening in any given situation, and encourage us to move any given conversation in the direction of dialogue.
3. For people to come together and learn through the process.
4. For people to deal openly with diversity. It is something that should be welcomed, not feared.
5. For people to understand that in valuing diversity it will lead to an expansion of their own knowledge and a better understanding of humanity.