



International Coalition of
SITES of CONSCIENCE

FROM BROWN V. BOARD TO FERGUSON: Fostering Dialogue on Education, Incarceration and Civil Rights

Intergenerational Dialogue Toolkit



A dialogue session, Missouri History Museum, Fall 2016.

YOUTH LEADING THE WAY: ASSISTING YOUTH IN FACILITATING DIALOGUES

Site of Conscience

Missouri History Museum (St. Louis, MO)

Founded in 1866, the Missouri Historical Society is the oldest chartered non-profit organization in Missouri. The Missouri History Museum is recognized in the St. Louis region as a space for open conversation and reflection on the ways in which our collective past influences our community today. The Museum's programming has consistently addressed historical inequity in housing, education, employment, and health; the displacement of African American communities; the intersection of race and governance/policing; and numerous other topics. In the wake of the unrest in Ferguson, the Museum hosted several town hall-style programs, becoming a space for difficult community conversations in a time of heightened tensions. The Museum's award-winning Teens Make History program also wrote and performed the short theatrical piece, #Ferguson. The Museum continues to address issues of race in St. Louis in the exhibition, *#1 in Civil Rights: The African American Freedom Struggle in St. Louis*, which examines the story of the struggle for African American equality in St. Louis from 1819 through Ferguson.

Community Partner

FOCUS St. Louis (St. Louis, MO)

FOCUS St. Louis® is the region's premier leadership organization. FOCUS prepares a diverse base of leaders to work cooperatively for a thriving St. Louis region through experience-based leadership training, civic issue education and public engagement initiatives. FOCUS St. Louis's eight signature leadership programs prepare individuals as part of an influential network of committed citizens who are working individually and as a group to change the region for the better. FOCUS also seeks to encourage vigorous dialogue and debate on a wide variety of public policy issues that are critical to the health and prosperity of the region. As a neutral convener and facilitator, FOCUS connects over 8,000 leadership program graduates and others throughout the region to deliberate on critical regional issues in a trusted, non-partisan space. In Fall 2015, FOCUS assisted the Ferguson Commission in its role of closing down as a formal Commission and planning next steps for the continuation of its work, now as Forward through Ferguson. In May 2016, began serving as the Executive Director of the Missouri Supreme Court's Commission on Racial and Ethnic Fairness.

Primary Audience

High school and college youth, adult museum-goers

Goals

- Introduce a group of youth to the process of facilitated dialogue.
- Give the group an opportunity to practice their facilitation skills across four dialogue sessions.
- Deliver four intergenerational dialogues on race and education.
- Engage the group in a subject that affects their community and provide them with information and skills that they did not previously have.

Dialogue Model and Mechanics

LOCATION: Classroom space at the Missouri History Museum

DATE AND DURATION:

- **Orientation:** August 21, 2016, 11am-4pm
- **Session 1:** September 21, 2016, 7-8:30pm
- **Session 2:** October 12, 2016, 7-8:30pm
- **Session 3:** October 20, 2016, 7-8:30pm
- **Session 4:** November 16, 2016, 7-8:30pm

MATERIALS:

Large sticky sheets (for posting the dialogue prompts on the walls and writing the group agreements), markers, evaluations, pens, cups/water and candy

EXTERNAL INFLUENCERS:

This session took place shortly after the presidential election, which heavily influenced the dialogue. Many people expressed experiencing raw emotions, and one participant noted that she wasn't even sure she was emotionally or physically up to coming that evening, but that she felt it was important. While there was clearly a level of fatigue, people also seemed keyed up and ready for action. Comments about the election results sometimes related directly back to the topic of education (e.g. questions about how the new administration would change the school landscape and the experience of students of color), but at times it also veered off into general venting. This presented the facilitators with two challenges. One challenge was ensuring that a safe space was maintained for expressing viewpoints for people on both sides of the political spectrum. The other challenge was honoring the participants' need to discuss the political climate while keeping the dialogue focused and synthesizing the various directions it went in.



Participants in the youth-led dialogue at Missouri History Museum.

ATTENDEES:

- Four youth facilitators (referred to as "facilitators" or "leaders"): One African American male, one African American female, one white male, one white female. All facilitators were high school juniors or seniors. The four youth worked in pairs alternately as facilitators and participants.
- Three adult facilitators, who recorded notes but did not lead the dialogue.
- Ten participants (friends and family of the facilitators, as well as members of the general public): Participants ranged in age from 15 through mid-70s. Two of the participants were African American.

Dialogue Format

WELCOME AND GROUP AGREEMENTS (10 minutes)

The facilitators welcome the group and thank them for coming, explain the *Brown v. Board to Ferguson* project, and ask for input on group agreements. Group agreements generally include respecting the personal experience of others, confidentiality, not judging, saying "ouch" and "oops" to indicate objections or retract a statement, and being respectful.

PHASE 1: COMMUNITY BUILDING (10 minutes)

The facilitators ask the participants where they went to high school. This is also known as the "St. Louis question," which can be simply a means of connecting with people, but is also understood to be a way of sizing up someone's position within the community in terms of class and economic status. In addition to the name of the school, facilitators ask participants to mention the racial makeup of the students and faculty.

PHASE 2: SHARING OUR OWN EXPERIENCES (20 minutes)

Facilitators ask the participants to explore their personal school experiences in more detail.

- Did your teachers look like you?
- How did that influence your experience in the classroom?
- Were you a part of the St. Louis desegregation program? If so, how did that affect your experience as a student?

PHASE 3: EXPLORING BEYOND OUR OWN EXPERIENCES (30 minutes)

Facilitators reveal five dialogue prompts that had been covered on the walls. They ask the participants who had not spoken much to read them out loud. The prompts include:

- Across age groups, black students are three times more likely than whites to be suspended.



Discussing race, youth and education equity at Missouri History Museum.

- While boys make up the large majority of students who are suspended (about 8 in 10), about 12% of black girls are suspended, and 7% of Native American girls are suspended. That's a higher rate than that of white boys (6%).
- Black students make up about 16 percent of enrolled students, but make up more than a quarter of all students who are referred to the police.
- 70% of students involved with "in-school arrests" or referred to law enforcement are black or Latino.
- Black and Latino students are twice as likely to not graduate high school as white students.

Invite participants to consider the statements and share which ones they find most surprising or disturbing. Discussion questions include:

- Does this information change or affirm your perspective on the school system?
- Do you draw any connections between this information and the prison system?

The facilitators approach this as an open dialogue, letting the participants take it in various directions and breaking in only to refocus if necessary, or occasionally to open up opportunities for participants to speak if someone else was monopolizing the discussion.

PHASE 4: SYNTHESIZING

(15 minutes)

Facilitators check in on how participants are feeling and what resonated with them as the dialogue wrapped up. They also ask for participants' thoughts on actionable ideas for their own schools and communities.

WRAP UP AND EVALUATION

(5 minutes)

Facilitators thank the participants for their time, energy and willingness to engage. They also hand out evaluations and ask participants to fill them out.

POST-DIALOGUE

(10 minutes)

Adult facilitators meet with youth facilitators to review how the youth feel it went and offer feedback.



A youth facilitator leading a discussion.

Photo credit: Missouri History Museum Missouri History Museum

LESSONS LEARNED

DEVOTE APPROPRIATE TIME TO SHARED CONTENT

It would have been greatly beneficial to have at least one session with the youth facilitators to focus on the shared content rather than the facilitation process, especially as the content relates to local issues. While the youth were provided with resources for reference, having more authority over the content would have taken their facilitation skills to the next level.

A CONSISTENT CORE GROUP IS IDEAL

Some sessions had better representation across age and race than others. It was difficult to get the same people to all four of the dialogue programs, but it would have been helpful to have a consistent core group that could offer comparative feedback on the youth facilitators, as not all of the youth facilitated each program.

COMMON YOUTH FACILITATOR SHORTCOMINGS

All of the facilitators demonstrated room for improvement in several key areas: not interjecting personal opinions; being more aware of how participants are feeling, both when they enter the room and as the dialogue progresses; synthesizing the various directions that the dialogue goes; making sure all voices are heard; and understanding how to cut participants off if they are taking up too much of the session time. These lessons were emphasized in the orientation process, but more practice is needed.

INVITE OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS

There was a missed opportunity to invite in opposing views. In the session featured here, the older participants became noticeably quieter when the discussion turned to the presidential election results, and the facilitator, who knew them personally, noted afterward that they are more politically conservative and may have felt uncomfortable.

PHYSICAL SPACE MATTERS

It is important to consider all aspects of the space that is being used. In this case, the room was ideal in terms of size, but the air conditioning was loud and compromised some participants' ability to hear well.



National Civil Rights Museum, the site of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr..

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