

SESSION 2: Building a Movement?

Session: Introduces issues in communication with members of other Traditions. Focuses on the influence of attitudes and philosophical stances toward dialogue, the advancement of processes and resources for dialog at the local level, and observing the structure of a conversation.

OUTLINE OF SCHEDULE:

05 min: Gathering Prayer

10 min: Homework Processing

30 min: Presentation and Discussion: Humanizing and Dehumanizing

10 min: Presentation: Are We Part of a Movement?

30 min: The Reframing Game

05 min: Assignment and Closing Prayer

COPIES THAT NEED TO BE MADE:

1 copy per participant:

Gathering/Closing Prayer (1 pg)

Three Questions (½ pg)

Humanizing And Dehumanizing Responses Across Four Orientations
To Religious Otherness (2 pgs or duplex)

Are We Part of a Movement? (1 pg)

The Reframing Game (3 pgs. Pgs 1-2 can be duplexed)

Homework Assignment (1 pg)

SPECIAL NOTE

A participant without Internet access will need assistance to do the Homework. Of course, any website has content that can be printed. However, the material at the State Department website can be printed easily because of its PDF formatting. I would recommend it for assisting someone who is not online.

INSTRUCTOR'S CONTENT

05 min: Gathering Prayer

Distribute the handout. It includes a format for both opening and closing the session.

10 min: Homework Processing

Participants were instructed to pay special attention to #17-27 in the reading from the World Council of Churches. This is a synopsis of those paragraphs:

17. In dialogue and relationships with people of other faiths, we recognize Salvation belongs to God: Therefore: We dare not stand in judgment of others. We are sincere and open in our wish to walk together towards the fullness of truth. We claim this hope with confidence, always prepared to give reason for it, as we struggle and work together with others in a world torn apart by troubles.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

18. Dialogue must be a process of mutual empowerment in a common pursuit of justice, peace and constructive action for the good of all people.
19. In dialogue we grow in faith through self-criticism and to re-thinking the ways in which we have interpreted our faith traditions.
20. In dialogue we affirm hope in the midst of the many divisions and build bridges of respect and understanding.
21. In dialogue we nurture relations with patience and perseverance.
22. In dialogue we must be informed by the context. Once the context is taken seriously, the purpose is not to remove or run away from differences but to build confidence and trust across them.
23. In dialogue we strive towards mutual respect through an informed understanding of each other.
24. In dialogue it is important to respect the integrity of religious traditions in the variety of their structures and organizations and the way participants in dialogue define their relation with their community. Some speak for their community. Others speak from their own experience.
25. Dialogue is a co-operative and collaborative activity on all levels.
26. In dialogue we strive to be inclusive across strata of society.
27. Individuals and communities may, even with the best of intentions, encounter problems and difficulties in interreligious relations and dialogue: hesitation, suspicion, indifference or opposition.

*Offer this introduction from the WCC website (<http://www.oikoumene.org>): A major landmark in the area of inter-religious dialogue came in 1977 at a meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand where a group of Christians representing many different ecclesiastical traditions drew up *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*. These guidelines serve as the basis of interreligious dialogue sponsored by the WCC and many churches around the world. These guidelines were first published in 1979.*

The guidelines we read were published 25 years later as a study document. They reflect the expansion of the work from professionals out to all levels of communities and from ecumenical centers to interfaith gatherings.

Discuss the questions posed last week: Which of these guidelines struck you as most difficult and why? How well did this document match up with our initial consideration of Competencies for dialogue?

30 min: Presentation and Discussion: Humanizing and Dehumanizing

Basic content-

Charles Soukup and James Keaten are professors of communication at the University of Northern Colorado. Keaten got interested in communications in interfaith work when he encountered the Pluralism

Project while doing a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard. As we look at their work today it is important to remember that they are working primarily from this perspective and not from a theological perspective or from an organizer's perspective. Before I distribute the handout we are going to spend a few moments discussing the three questions they pose at the beginning of their article.

(6-7 min) Distribute the handout Three Questions. Have participants pair up with someone they did not talk with last week. Spend a minute or so answering the questions before you begin conversation. You have about five minutes for your conversation.

(7-8 min) When you come back together, distribute the handout Humanizing and Dehumanizing.

The first thing to notice on this handout is the matrix. The horizontal scale represents the range from people who do not engage at all to people who engage fully with the religious Other. The vertical scale represents the scale we just discussed ranging from a complete focus on difference to a complete focus on similarity. The resulting quadrants (starting at the top left) are:

- Exclusivist, people who are focused on difference and do not engage Others
- Pluralist, people who see difference and engage it very deliberately
- Relativist, people who are focused on similarity and engage through it
- Reductionist, people who see similarity and magnify it to the point of not needing to actually engage it.

Whenever we do courses like this we tend to think of some position as preferable and make its proponents into heroes. That would not do justice to the complexity of the work of interfaith relations. So first we need to remember that people who hold these positions are regular folks with preferences, values, and opinions that guide their actions. People who "live" in all four quadrants can be outstanding humanitarians who see others in the best light, that is, in a humanizing way. Or they can be total jerks that use their perspective to de-humanize others. It all turns on that third question we discussed: How much do you value the humanity of the other person—both as a religious actor and as an individual person?

This is one of the best features of Soukup's and Keaten's work: They demonstrate how each of these perspectives contributes to the overall work when lived ethically and graciously. For example, an Exclusivist may consider it radically wrong to engage another Tradition in dialogue, but will advance interfaith relations by working with Others on Habitat for Humanity. This can happen because they take their duty to service very seriously.

And by contrast, any of these perspectives may be detrimental to the work when lived in deliberate opposition to or supremacy over Others. For example, we would normally expect a Pluralist to be a champion of interfaith dialogue. But if he or she shows up with an attitude of superior enlightenment those that are struggling with the religious Other will be put off or shut down.

Having said all this, we cannot deny that a Pluralist acting in real Humility may be in the best position to advance interfaith dialogue because the position itself is dialogic, that is, it is about understanding each other's narratives not achieving theological agreement. So let's turn to the eight propositions about pluralism. For the moment we are going to focus on numbers 4 and 7.

Proposition #4 says: Pluralism neither presumes nor requires relativism. This is particularly important in a course on interfaith dialogue because you will encounter objections that you are blind to the reality that "those people" you're talking to really espouse something very different from you. This objection can have the tone of judgment or pity. In fact Pluralists do notice difference. It just turns out they are able to accept that other Traditions offer adherents a full and meaningful life. *And* they are unwilling to explain away differences that they don't yet understand. The other piece of this that keeps relativism out of the picture is that because the Pluralist does not need to forge agreement and does not need to surrender the values that he or she brings to the table.

Proposition #7 says: Focuses on faith rather than religion. This may sound like an oxymoron. Or it may sound as if the Pluralist doesn't appreciate the structure of a Tradition and merely wants to focus on your personal story within it. The intention of this comment is to focus our attention on the narrative in context rather than imagine that we know an individual's story because we know something about the Tradition. It is another way of saying that we resist the shorthand of stereotypes. One other note, in biblical terms "faith" is about trust more than intellectual assent to a list of creedal propositions. In other words, the Pluralist wants to know whom or what you trust, how you trust, and why you trust as you live within your Tradition.

(10-12 min) We're now going to take time to explore our experience of these orientations in our own lives. Work in groups of four. If necessary, put questions on a poster or board. The questions are very simple:

Which of these orientations has described you at some point in your life? Which is current and how did you recognize yourself in the descriptions?

Identify someone from another Tradition with whom you have worked well. Which orientation did he or she exercise? Describe any humanizing elements in that person's attitudes or practice that contributed to your successful partnership.

(3-5 min) Conclude the discussion by asking for a sample of the stories of successful partnerships.

10 min: Presentation: Are We Part of a Movement?

Basic content-

Part of today's good news is that such partnerships as you just described are becoming more common. The question is, are we building an Interfaith Movement or recognizing an interfaith reality?

In 1991, Diana Eck began the Pluralism Project at Harvard to study how the religious landscape of the United States had changed in the last half-century. Eck believes we live in the Age of Pluralism. It is more likely than ever that we'll encounter and work or live with someone of a different Tradition. But Eck leads us to grasp pluralism as a big step beyond seeing diversity. She draws this vision with these five markers:

- Active engagement with religious diversity
- Real knowledge of difference not just uninformed tolerance
- A process of creating a civil society through critical and self-critical encounter with the Other
- Commitment to sit at a common table for civil dialogue with people of many religions and no religion
- Constructive dialogue about "common understandings and real difference" through personal and community commitments to show up with one's beliefs

How did we get here? There are two primary ways:

- 1) We gained new neighbors through immigration and migration of people living different Traditions (this is now reinforced by the accessibility of information about Traditions.)
- 2) We engaged our new neighbors deliberately to learn about *and* from them.

In 2011, the Pluralism Project added a pilot initiative called "America's Interfaith Infrastructure." Its summary report at pluralism.org begins by quoting Bettina Gray, TV producer, music composer, and co-founder of North American Interfaith Network (1988). Gray outlines the deliberate efforts to learn about and from each other in the United States by naming these significant points in interfaith work:

- The work of the World Council of Churches from the mid 1970s on.
(We just talked about some of their vision.)
- The revival of the Parliament of the World's Religions beginning in 1993.
(You'll have the option to research this in this week's homework.)
- The experience of 9/11.

- The present when interfaith efforts are not all Christian-led, when theological seminaries value a pluralist world and begin training students to function in it, and when media coverage reflects the pluralistic religious landscape.

The touch point of urgency, 9/11, opened awareness into the general population more quickly than neighborhood changes ever had. It also boosted the profile of hundreds of small interfaith organizations and some major ones already at work. Gray says development has been “from obscurity, to urgency, into maturity.”

And this brings us back to the original question: Are we building an Interfaith Movement or recognizing an interfaith reality? Yes and no. And yes. In sociological terms a movement requires some deliberate organization of a group of people working together for a change in some social, political, or economic condition. The commitment of religious leaders to interfaith work has been deliberate, has involved growing numbers of people working together, and has changed our society. However, because of our American foundations of “freedom of expression of religion” and “no imposition of religion,” interfaith leaders have joined in working for civic causes, but they have not stood as one religious bloc in fundamental opposition to given specific and singular American problems. So the change in our society has not been a nationally targeted specific outcome like safe working conditions, or equal pay, or voting rights, or desegregation.

In fact, the changes that Gray described at “higher” or more visible levels of society (e.g. seminary programs, media portrayals) are responses to the expanded vision of professionals as well as interfaith work that is building healthier and more resilient local communities. For good or ill, regional or national images often inspire us to act; national and international issues and situations push us to be aware and responsive. Nonetheless, I think that the ‘maturity’ of this moment would best be described in terms of advancing leadership that is able to respond locally and reasonably to need right here as well as speak to emotional images from other places. The ‘maturity’ of this moment is not the completion of a campaign but growing out of narrow parochialism and into the wisdom of pluralism at all levels. Clearly your work as an Ambassador will be very local. It is possible that at times you will have to do some research into resources to suggest possibilities and options to your local leaders.

The Interfaith Infrastructure Pilot summary report goes on to detail the work they have done with an initial focus on 20 cities ranging in population from 150,000 to 1.5 million located all across the country. It also explains that part of the project’s mission is to provide resources to others doing interfaith work. Consequently, a massive amount of information is available for others to use through articles, reports, videos, and links to other organizations. It offers resources in abundance to leaders at every level and also recognizes the radically local nature of interfaith work.

30 min: The Reframing Game

When we began asking you to think theologically, you were learning to step back from your experience and describe how you made sense of it. You weren’t describing the experience itself, but the thinking, valuing, and ordering process. Now we’re going to begin doing that with dialogue. The goal of this exercise is not to come to a conclusion, but to “observe” how three possible conversations would unfold from specific starting points among these Characters. Have fun staying in Character and observing the process!

In groups of 4: Each member takes one of the Characters and participates in the discussion about “The Setback.”

05 min: Assignment and Closing Prayer

Point out that the Assignment has three parts: 1) Learning something about a non-local organization, 2) Sharing that knowledge with someone else, and 3) Reflecting on your conversation with that other person.

Remember that the Closing Prayer is on the same page as the Opening Prayer.

GATHERING/ CLOSING PRAYER

GATHERING

READING: To be read responsively.

ALL will read the indented, italicized lines.

Dhammapada, (Chapter 1: 1-2, 5-6, 11-12)

All that we are is the result of what we have thought:

it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts.

*If one speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows,
as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.*

All that we are is the result of what we have thought:

it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts.

*If one speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows,
like a shadow that never leaves.*

For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time:

hatred ceases by love, this is an old rule.

The world does not know that we must all come to an end here;

but those who know it, their quarrels cease at once.

They who imagine truth in untruth, and see untruth in truth,
never arrive at truth, but follow vain desires.

*They who know truth in truth, and untruth in untruth,
arrive at truth, and follow true desires.*

REFLECTION:

Please name someone who has been to you a model or teacher of love, forgiveness, happiness, or truth.
No details are necessary, just the name.

WORDS: When the litany of names is concluded, offer this affirmation:

Blest are we and grateful for our gifts.

Blest are we and generous in kind.

Blest are we and grateful for our gifts:

Many we share!

CLOSING

READING: Repeat the reading above.

REFLECTION:

From today's session: Please name one insight. It may be something

...on which you will think or meditate further ...

...that surprised or delighted you...

...on which you will do some research...

...that you will talk about with a friend...

WORDS: When the litany of insights is concluded, offer this affirmation:

Let us continually enlarge our hearts with loving reflection.

Let us be faithful to our healthy loves and reform unhealthy habits.

Let us offer our mind, hearts, and hands in service.

Let us serve those in need with loving thoughts and actions.

THREE QUESTIONS FROM CHARLES SOUKUP AND JAMES KEATEN

For thinking about how and why we encounter religious Others:

1) When encountering the religious Other, to what extent do you focus on similarities or differences?

100% Difference

100% Similarity

Give an example from your experience:

2) Are you open to the religious experiences of the Other?

List three things that demonstrate your answer:

a.

b.

c.

3) What value do you place on the Other's unique humanity?

How does this relate to our discussion on stereotypes?

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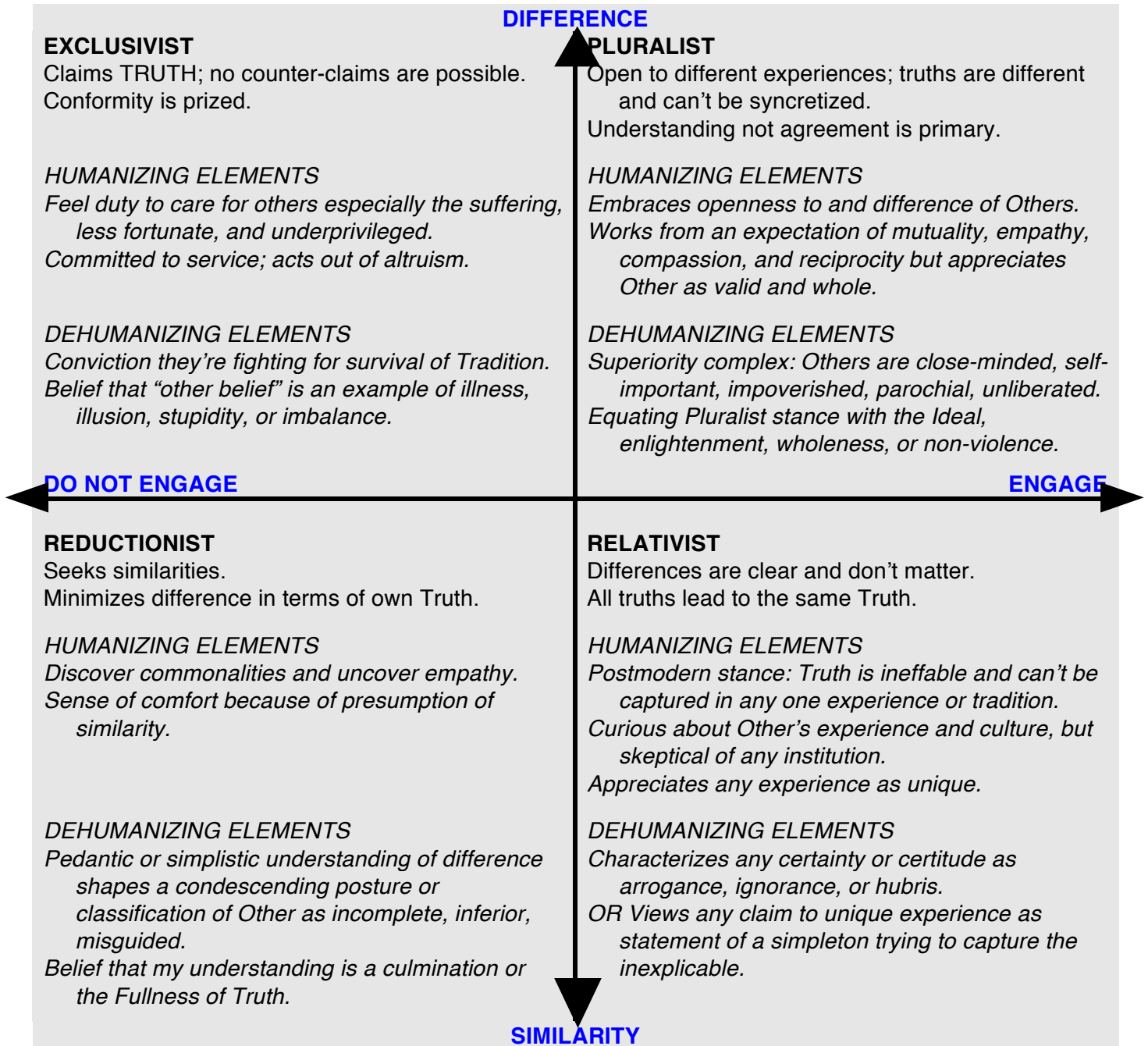
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CHARLES SOUKUP & JAMES KEATEN
HUMANIZING AND DEHUMANIZING RESPONSES ACROSS FOUR ORIENTATIONS
TO RELIGIOUS OTHERNESS

Three questions for thinking about how and why we encounter religious Others:

- 1) When encountering the religious Other, to what extent do you focus on similarities or differences?
- 2) Are you open to the religious experiences of the Other?
- 3) What value do you place on the Other's unique humanity?



CHARLES SOUKUP & JAMES KEATEN CONT.

Foundational propositions regarding Pluralism

- 1) Pluralism requires engagement; it is a dialogic response.
- 2) Focuses on personal religious experience communicated through narrative.
- 3) Requires empathetic listening.
- 4) Neither presumes nor requires relativism.
- 5) Is a vehicle for interfaith understanding not conversion.
- 6) Conceives religious difference as an opportunity for insight and inspiration not as a threat.
- 7) Focuses on faith rather than religion.
- 8) Requires communicative climate.
 Religious difference and disagreement are learning opportunities not conflicts.

ARE WE PART OF A MOVEMENT?

1991: Dr. Diana Eck began the Pluralism Project at Harvard.

Pluralism is a big step beyond seeing diversity. It has these five markers:

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Gray says development has been “from obscurity, to urgency, into maturity.”

In sociological terms a movement requires

- Some deliberate organization of a group of people
- Working together for a change in some social, political, or economic condition.

Are we part of a movement?

Yes: The commitment to interfaith work has been deliberate, has involved working together, and has changed our society. But the American constitutional foundations have been respected so it’s slightly different from a “movement.”

No: Interfaith leaders have worked together, but they have not had a *nationally* targeted specific outcome like safe working conditions, or equal pay, or voting rights, or desegregation.

Building healthier and more resilient local communities whether or not we’re a movement.

Regional or national images often inspire us to act; national and international issues and situations push us to be aware and responsive. But ‘maturity’ is advancing leadership that is able to respond locally and reasonably to need right here as well as speak to emotional images from other places.

Your work as an Ambassador will be very local.

The Interfaith Infrastructure Pilot summary report

- Details the work they have done with an initial focus on 20 cities ranging in population from 150,000 to 1.5 million located all across the country.
- Provides links to a massive amount of information (articles, reports, videos, and links to other organizations) for you to use in your local efforts.

THE REFRAMING GAME

Your Task: A Meta-Conversation Not a Solution

- 1) Take on one of the characters described below and play it throughout the exercise. Read *The Setback* out loud together. Take a minute of silence to imagine how your Character will approach The Setback.
- 2) Have each member of the group offer an opening statement of how you see the most pressing issue in the situation and any essential related concerns. Remember you are playing a Character that has come with specific intentions or a “frame” for the situation. Make notes of each Character’s remarks on the matching “cloud.”
- 3) After you have made all four opening statements, name any connections you see *in writing*. Consider: Things you *felt* as personal connections, things *hinted at* through philosophical or idea connections, or things *commonly stated*. If the connections are direct, write them inside the circle. If they are feelings or hints, write them around the edges of the circle and clouds.
- 4) Discuss the connections you’ve noted. Remember to use “I” statements. “*I heard you say...*” or “*When you said ___ I felt ___ because ___...*” or “*I feel...*” or “*I see this connection ___ because...*”
- 5) Begin to work with these connections by playing out at least three (more if you have time) different possible conversations from the beginnings you just named. At the 25-minute mark, stop and assess what each Character thinks happened in the three different conversations. What was promising, what was frustrating, and what should be done next? An outline is on the next page.

The Four Characters

- A) I believe I am a responsible agent helping heal the world. My primary goal is to hold a friendly and fruitful argument that allows us to consider our options for restoring or cutting services. My secondary goal is for us to make a solid ethical choice and act on it quickly.
- B) I realize that not even this devastating situation is permanent, but compassion demands that we work together to strengthen the community and address the pain it is in as well as plan for the gap in services.
- C) I believe the individual is the central concern of our work. My goal is to assure that everyone concerned maintains as much autonomy as possible while getting the basics that they need.
- D) I am here to serve God and neighbor. My goal for being here is to assure that we consider the poorest and weakest members (of our community) first in any of our decisions or planning.

The Setback

A community center has burned down in the middle of the night. Fortunately, no one was injured or killed. But the loss includes facilities for:

- Daycare for 15 infants and toddlers, open 6:30 am-6:30 pm, M-Sa
- An after-school program for 45 grade school children, open 2:30-8:30 pm, M-F
- A hospitality meal for financially challenged neighbors on Friday evenings
- A gym for Upward Bound Sports and open gym time for center members from 3-5 pm, M-Sa
- A teen lounge with WiFi and computers for homework open 2:30-8:30 pm, M-F
- A job skills screening office, open 10 am-2pm, M-F
- Hosting at least one youth club a day, M-Sa (e.g. JA, Leo Club, Adventure Scouts, etc.)
- A Saturday family exercise program meeting at 9 am, 11 am, and 1:30 pm

THE REFRAMING GAME CONT.

Because of the diversity of programs, many families have found a second home at the facility. Most families are working class and pay for services with a mixture of money and volunteering. At least 75% of children using the center qualify for free or reduced cost meals. The center is on a public bus line. The center is safe, affordable, and convenient to the neighborhood—and truly tended by the people it serves.

Unfortunately, nothing of comparable size (50,000 sq ft) is in the neighborhood or on this bus line. Although insurance was in force and is sufficient to rebuild the center, the process will take 12-18 months. The interfaith community has gathered at a church this morning to consider what should be done to help neighbors in that interim.

The Analysis

1) Did you bring your personal orientation toward dialogue to your Character or choose one based on the description of the Character? Was it Exclusivist, Reductionist, Relativist or Pluralist? How did that influence your perceptions and choices?

2) Quickly recount the process of your conversations:

Conversation 1

Which connection did you use to open the conversation? Why did you choose it?

How did you begin to reframe the situation together?

What was promising, what was frustrating, and what should be done next?

Conversation 2

Which connection did you use to open the conversation? Why did you choose it?

How did you begin to reframe the situation together?

What was promising, what was frustrating, and what should be done next?

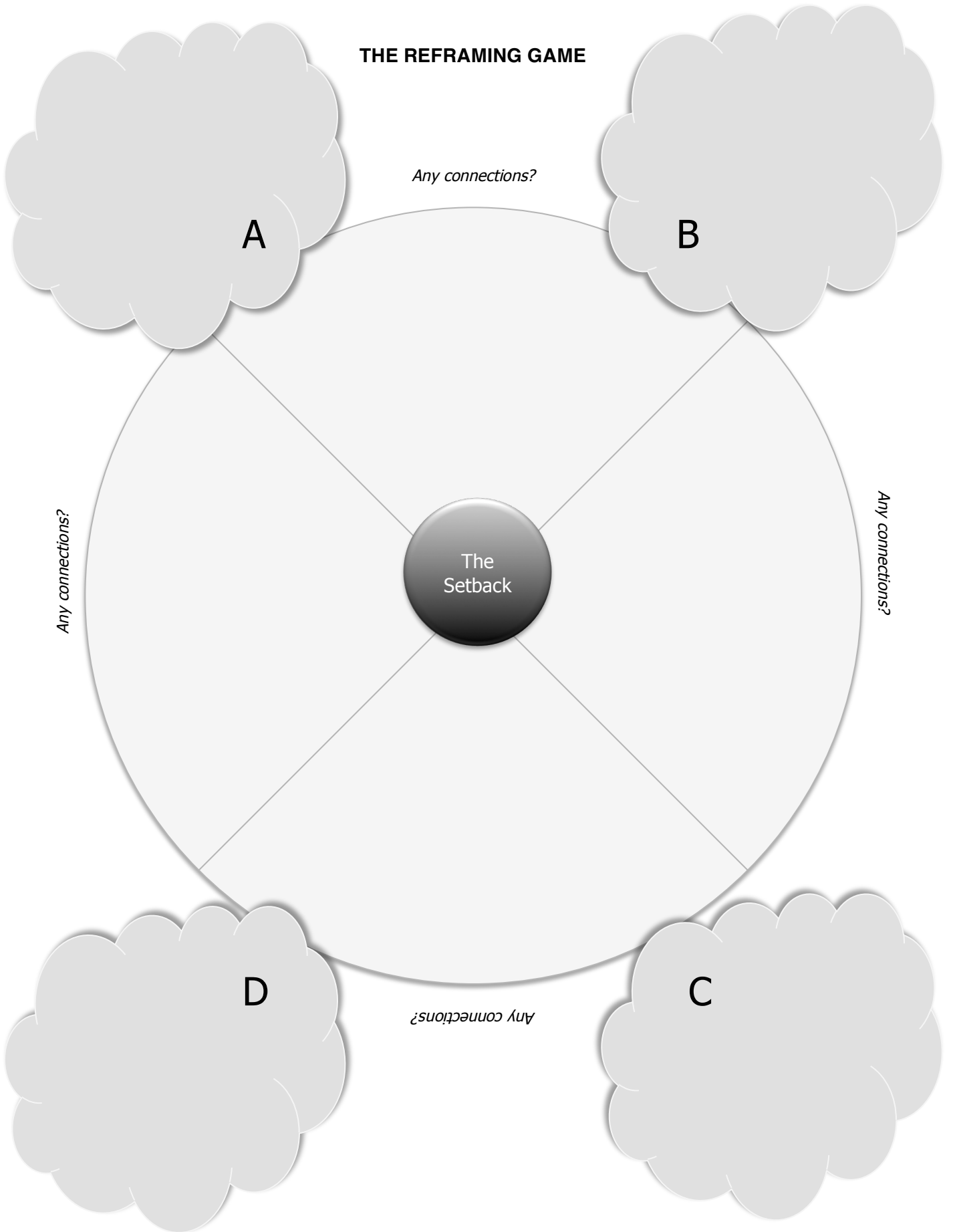
Conversation 3

Which connection did you use to open the conversation? Why did you choose it?

How did you begin to reframe the situation together?

What was promising, what was frustrating, and what should be done next?

THE REFRAMING GAME



HOMWORK SESSION 2

CHOOSE ONE OF THESE SITES TO VISIT:

History of International Association for Religious Freedom

<https://iarf.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Summary-IARF-history-written-1999.pdf>

Rev. Bud Heckman on Interfaith Movement (Huffington Post)

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-donald-heckman/why-the-interfaith-movement-must-rebrand_b_2849432.html

History of the World Parliament of Religions

<http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm?n=1&sn=4>

Look under *Get Involved* to see how the Ambassador Program assists the movement

State Department on Religion in the USA

<http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/publication/2008/08/20080819131356cmretrop0.9265711.html#axzz3SFTtRHad>

This segment is part of a 30+ page document the whole of which can be viewed as a PDF

Take an interfaith literacy quiz at Interfaith Youth Core

<http://www.ifyc.org/quiz>

1) Make notes on these questions:

- What was the most significant thing you learned?
- What surprised you?
- Where did you find your Tradition in the work of the organizations or causes?

2) Share one thing you learned (in your research) with someone else.

Make notes about your conversation: