

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CORRECTIONS DIALOGUE SKILLS TRAINING 2012-13 **by Peter Garrett and Jane Ball**

Context

Prison Dialogue first became aware of the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) early in 2000 when John Eggers, with whom Prison Dialogue had worked at Nebraska Department of Corrections¹, was transferred there on secondment. It was only in 2012, however, that Prison Dialogue began a purposeful relationship with NIC through meeting Chris Innes, NIC Chief of Research and Information Services, whilst both were working in the Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC)². This was at the outset of a one year contract (later extended) with the Virginia DOC, and Chris Innes joined Peter Garrett and Jane Ball for the first week of on-site sessions with the Director, his Executive Team and Extended Leadership Team. Chris was intrigued by the participatory and practical nature of the Dialogic approach, as well as the significant impact on staff that he saw, and he committed himself to learning more by accompanying Prison Dialogue on their subsequent 3 one-week trips that year to the Virginia DOC.

Aims and Objectives

NIC is a Government-funded agency that works to improve Corrections in the US. They could see the potential value of Dialogue, in the form that it was being delivered in the Virginia DOC, to other jurisdictions. Rather than being an externally designed reorganisation of some kind that would have to be rolled out, they could see that the Dialogue work engages directly with the immediate practical needs and opportunities, and calls on people to use their initiative to address those themselves. Dialogue provides the necessary skills for good engagement, communication and decision-making to do this. Prison Dialogue was developing the internal capacity of a set of Dialogue Practitioners to deliver these skills to staff in the Virginia DOC. NIC wanted to make the Dialogue work available to other jurisdictions, and offered a grant in support of that. The grant was used to enable Prison Dialogue to take the time to document the Dialogue Skills Training in a transportable format, to document protocols in support of the Dialogue Practitioner Development Programme and

to speak at the American Correctional Association Congress in Washington DC in August 2013.

Prison Dialogue is a not-for-profit charity founded in the UK with the aim of having a constructive impact on Corrections at an international level. This supporting interest and funding from NIC was seen as significant help to Prison Dialogue in this aim, and it came in the spirit of partnership which is conducive to generative outcomes.

Method: Activity, Participants and Duration

Prison Dialogue was working with the Virginia DOC to change its existing and (in some areas) remnant ‘command and control’ culture, with its associated fears of hierarchical power, into a more participatory culture. To achieve this, Dialogue skills for engagement and communication were made available to the Directors and Executive, and then cascaded down through the organisation via the Extended Leadership Team (of around 120, including the 39 Wardens and 43 District Chiefs plus head-quarters and other functions). It was decided to reach the larger body of staff (over 12,000) via Dialogue Skills Trainings³. These Dialogue Skills Trainings were delivered by Dialogue Practitioners who were trained by Prison Dialogue in the first year of the Dialogue Practitioner Development Programme⁴ (DPDP). The NIC grant ensured that the DST was documented in a way that can be taken to other US States. That included a Dialogue Skills Training Field Guide, a curriculum, learning model, choreographed one-day training (or three half-day training modules), Facilitator Guide and posters of the three specific Dialogic skills covered in the training⁵.

DIALOGIC MODES

Many people limit themselves by using only one or two of the Modes to engage people. How about you?

Each of the Modes of Talking and Thinking Together... engage people differently, from the basic mode of monologue to the more skillful levels of Dialogue. All are needed, but at different times, for different levels of engagement and for different purposes.

Dialogue is a mode of talking and thinking together that...
...helps people to find a common understanding and a common purpose. The decisions and actions that result from good dialogue make common sense to everyone involved. Good dialogue requires a set of simple and practical skills that can easily be learned and practiced with practice. In dialogue people express their own views, needs and aspirations, listen to others, agree and disagree with one another, support and challenge each other, become aware of their own assumptions and impact on others, come to appreciate diversity and to accommodate differences in ways that may not have been obvious at first. With the benefit of dialogue it is possible to undertake participatory change with people rather than imposing change by doing it to people. Change of this kind is sustainable over time because it feels right and is based on collective common sense.

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DIALOGIC ACTIONS

Have you ever wondered what to do when a conversation is simply not working?

Use the Dialogic Actions when conversations... take too long to get to the point, become arguments, are superficial, are cyclic and repetitive in nature, lack closure, have little direction, lack inquiry, are inductive, lack perspective or are simply not working.

Dialogue is a mode of talking and thinking together that...
...helps people to find a common understanding and a common purpose. The decisions and actions that result from good dialogue make common sense to everyone involved. Good dialogue requires a set of simple and practical skills that can easily be learned and practiced with practice. In dialogue people express their own views, needs and aspirations, listen to others, agree and disagree with one another, support and challenge each other, become aware of their own assumptions and impact on others, come to appreciate diversity and to accommodate differences in ways that may not have been obvious at first. With the benefit of dialogue it is possible to undertake participatory change with people rather than imposing change by doing it to people. Change of this kind is sustainable over time because it feels right and is based on collective common sense.

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DIALOGIC PRACTICES

Did you know that it is impossible to have a high quality conversation without these practices?

However good you are, if you practice you will get better... The atmosphere within which people talk and think together is dependant on the Dialogic Practices. Deepening the practices makes the atmosphere richer and more conducive to thinking well together by making a stronger container.

Dialogue is a mode of talking and thinking together that...
...helps people to find a common understanding and a common purpose. The decisions and actions that result from good dialogue make common sense to everyone involved. Good dialogue requires a set of simple and practical skills that can easily be learned and practiced with practice. In dialogue people express their own views, needs and aspirations, listen to others, agree and disagree with one another, support and challenge each other, become aware of their own assumptions and impact on others, come to appreciate diversity and to accommodate differences in ways that may not have been obvious at first. With the benefit of dialogue it is possible to undertake participatory change with people rather than imposing change by doing it to people. Change of this kind is sustainable over time because it feels right and is based on collective common sense.

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NIC was also interested in the DPDP, which is essential to developing the internal capacity to deliver the Dialogue Skills across a large organisation. This first stage of the DPDP was achieved with just seven days of face-to-face training by Prison Dialogue (spread over the year), along with telephone coaching by Prison Dialogue from the UK using a Reciprocal Coaching Trios methodology, and regional Practitioner Circles. NIC helpfully supported the documentation of the protocols for the Coaching Trios and Practitioner Circles.

The third area of support was the hosting of a Workshop at the American Correctional Association Congress in Washington DC in August 2013. This gave Prison Dialogue the opportunity to meet various Directors and Commissioners of other state Departments of Corrections and for several of them to have a taste of the Dialogic approach through the Workshop held during the Congress. The Director of NIC was also able to attend the workshop.

Significantly, NIC has also been supporting the input of the Urban Institute to research the changing culture and improved outputs at Virginia DOC as part of the Norval Morris Project⁶.

Outcomes

The Dialogue Skills Training and the Dialogue Practitioner Development Programme were recorded in transportable form for replication in other US States. Other States showed an interest in the Dialogue Work currently underway in the Virginia Department of Corrections. One state contracted for Prison Dialogue's services in support of their strategic aim to create a Healing Environment as a result.

A further development was the regular input from NIC to the Prison Dialogue website in the form of *A Letter From America* by Chris Innes. This has since been extended with *A Letter From the UK*⁷ and hopefully in due course by Letters from other countries.

Learning

Prison Dialogue learned something about the value of partnership with an agency like NIC in a common endeavour. Prison Dialogue's international reach was extended as a result, requiring attention the language used by Prison Dialogue to ensure what it is conveying is comprehensible to people from the UK, US and other Correctional systems. It has also learned to be much more

explicit about the skills it has been using tacitly for many years, so that they can be taken on by others.

The fourth area of learning relates to research. Prison Dialogue has come to realise that its own participatory ethos is itself a research methodology, more similar to Action Research than objective approaches to research that discount the observer's impact on what is being observed. In Dialogue it becomes more apparent that it is the change in the observer that causes a change in what is being observed, because it is all one system, and this is fundamental to the Dialogic approach. So Prison Dialogue committed itself to being more rigorous in defining and documenting Dialogic Research as a methodology.

¹ See Case Studies on US Executive and Leadership on the Prison Dialogue website www.prisondialogue.org

² Case studies are available on some of the work undertaken in Virginia Department of Corrections since 2012

³ See Dialogue Skills / Dialogue Skills Training on the Prison Dialogue website www.prisondialogue.org

⁴ Dialogue Practitioners who graduate at the end of year one can go on to develop as Dialogic Coaches in year two and Dialogic Interventionists in year three

⁵ These resources are available to Prison Dialogue Associates as part of their Associate development. Read more about these Dialogue Skills in the Prison Dialogue website www.prisondialogue.org

⁶ The Norval Morris Project develops processes for discovering and disseminating innovations, knowledge and ideas that allow the fields of corrections and human services to enhance the services they provide to clients and communities. The inspiration for this project comes from the innovative mover and shaker of the late 20th century criminal justice field, Dr Norval Morris, who was dedicated to making corrections more 'just, efficient and humane.' From the website nmp.j-sat.com

⁷ Letters from the UK are written by Phil Wheatley. See Research / Letters From.... on www.prisondialogue.org