

# Indicators of dialogue

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This paper aims to outline a set of criteria for defining when dialogue is taking place during a Dana Centre event.

By dialogue we mean

*'A process of communication in which two or more participants engage in an open exploration of issues and relationships on an equitable basis'*

Dialogue is the exchange of ideas, opinions, beliefs, and feelings between participants – both speakers and audience. It is listening with respect to others and being able to express one's own views with confidence.

Dialogue is not;

silence

chaos

one person or faction monopolising the session

## **Evaluating dialogue based events**

Dialogue-based events such as Naked Science are regularly evaluated to assess their success. Typically an event will be evaluated using two or more of the following methods;

- i) detailed observation of the event – focussing particularly on the reactions and behaviour of the audience during and after the event
- ii) qualitative in-depth interviews with members of the audience after the event – either selected at the event or part of a pre-invited focus group
- iii) qualitative in-depth interviews with the speakers after the event
- iv) email survey of members of the audience after the event

Using these techniques the researchers will seek evidence for or against dialogue taking place as outlined in the following tables.

### **What is an effective dialogue-based event?**

A model of an effective dialogue based event was developed by Alex Burch (see Developing effective dialogue based museum events for adults Oct 2001). In this model a hierarchy of needs have to be met before dialogue can occur.

- **Physical**; anything pertaining to the physical comfort of the participants – speakers and audience
- **Emotional/social acceptance**; participants feel emotionally comfortable, they feel that they belong there, they do not feel as if they are being judged. This level could be described as how someone feels that the other participants view them
- **Intellectual**; all participants feel they have something to contribute, that their opinion is of value, and that they have learnt something

If an audience's physical, emotional and intellectual needs have been met to at least a minimum standard the possibility of genuine dialogue arises.

Table 1 describes the indicators used to assess i) whether the physical, emotional and intellectual needs were adequately met. Table 2 describes the indicators used to assess whether dialogue actually occurred during the event.

In the following tables

participant = speakers, chair and audience

contributors = speakers and those members of the audience who contribute to the discussion

**Table 1: indicators that visitors' basic needs are being met**

	<b>During the event</b>	<b>After the event</b>
Physical needs	<p>Discussion continues for at least the time provided by the organisers</p> <p>Majority of audience stay to the end of the event</p> <p>Demeanour of audience indicates that they are comfortable, can see and hear all contributors and any audio-visual used</p> <p>Nothing obviously distracts the audience from what the contributors are saying e.g. back-ground noise, late-comers</p>	<p>Participants do not complain about the venue or set-up of the event e.g. sound or light levels, temperature</p>
Emotional/social acceptance	<p>Relevant questions throughout the discussion i.e. little need for chair to intervene to keep the discussion going</p> <p>Majority of audience stay to the end of the event</p> <p>The chair takes a professional and even-handed approach treating all contributors fairly</p> <p>Demeanour of audience indicates that they feel welcome and willing to participate</p> <p>Contributions come from a representative range of the audience not just a small clique</p>	<p>Audience feel that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* the event matched or exceeded their expectations</li> <li>* the event was aimed at them and that content was relevant to them</li> <li>* they could identify with other people in the audience</li> <li>* the chair was impartial; all contributors were treated fairly</li> <li>* their contribution was/would have been listened to and treated with respect</li> </ul>

**Table 1 (continued): indicators that visitors' basic needs are being met**

	<b>During the event</b>	<b>After the event</b>
Intellectual needs	<p>Audience listens attentively to contributors</p> <p>Majority of audience stay to the end of the event</p> <p>Audience asks many factual questions to elicit new information e.g. What is a stem cell? What drugs are used in euthanasia?</p>	<p>Significant proportion of audience remains after the event to talk to the speakers</p> <p>Audience feel that the event was interesting, informative and thought provoking</p> <p>Audience feel that they had enough information to understand the topic</p> <p>Audience feel that the content was pitched at the correct level for them</p> <p>Audience can describe the gist of the arguments presented during the event</p>

**Table 2: Indicators that dialogue is occurring during the event**

	<b>During the event</b>	<b>After the event</b>
Indicators of dialogue	<p>Discussion requires little or no encouragement from the chair – audience are keen to ask questions or express points of view</p> <p>Discussion moves forward i.e.            * new issues are raised that related to previous questions or comments;            * the discussion does <u>not</u> get stuck on particular points;            * particular lines of discussion are followed e.g. a question is asked, an answer given, a follow-up question is asked, this question is addressed and so on ...</p> <p>Audience express opinions and statements of belief e.g. I could never ...; cloning is unnatural; animal testing has to be done ...</p> <p>Questions are <u>not</u> predominantly factual e.g. What is a stem cell? What drugs are used in euthanasia?</p>	<p>Audience appears animated and keen to continue the discussion</p> <p>Participants feel that they had sufficient time and means to engage in the discussion</p> <p>Audience feel that they had enough information and vocabulary to participate in the discussion</p> <p>Participants feel that they have taken part in something worthwhile</p> <p>Participants feel that their views have been challenged (and possibly changed) by what happened during the event</p> <p>Participants expressed increased awareness of / sympathy towards range of opinions on the topic</p> <p>Contributors feel that other participants listened to their point of view</p> <p>Audience feels that they have had an opportunity to meet and discuss issues with leading scientists, experts and policy-makers, on an equitable basis</p> <p>Participants leave feeling inspired to continue the discussion after the event</p>

	<b>During the event</b>	<b>After the event</b>
Indicators of dialogue	<p>Questions are mostly rhetorical i.e. a question that aims to make a point and express an opinion rather than to elicit information  exploratory e.g. if you really believe x then why do you ...  challenging e.g. how can you possibly justify ...</p> <p>New, relevant information is provided by members of the audience</p> <p>Contributors reflecting the language of previous speakers/questioners in what they say i.e. actively listening and referring to previous points or questions</p> <p>Distinct camps of opinion can be detected among the audience – audience express agreement or disagreement with different points of view</p> <p>Contributors express their opinions with emotion</p> <p>Audience readily participates in voting i.e. few, if any, abstentions</p>	<p>Audience actually do engage in prolonged debate after the event- e.g.  in the bar afterwards,  with their friends and families,  on the Internet</p> <p>Audience actively participate after the event  write to the press,  join pressure groups  write to/email their MP</p>