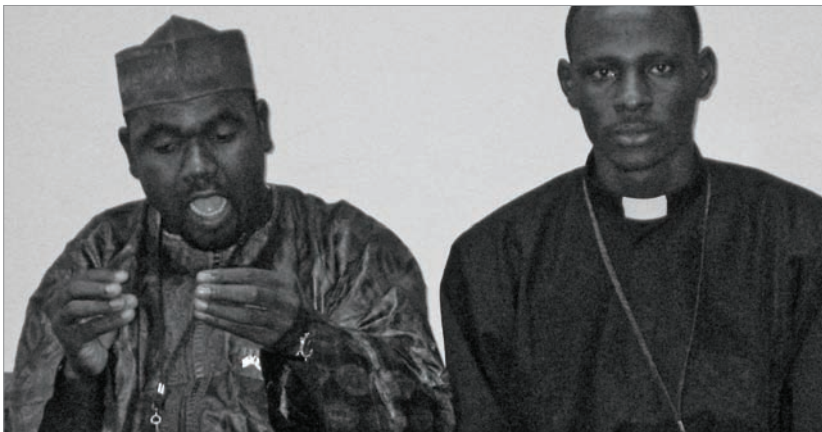




Nigerians look to mend religious, ethnic divides

Young leaders learn dialogue skills in Boston



Nigerian youth leaders participate in PCP's workshop at U.Mass Boston last June.

What can young Nigerian leaders do about the deep and sometimes violent divides between Muslims and Christians in their country?

The Public Conversations Project and University of Massachusetts Boston's Dispute Resolution Program answer was to train more than 250 young Nigerian leaders in dialogue skills. Now the young Nigerians are leading their communities in challenging conversations about religious and ethnic differences, conversations that will ultimately decrease violence and build democracy and peace.

"True dialogue creates opportunities for people from other religions to really understand what I feel and for me to understand what they feel with respect to religious intolerance and how we can work together to build peace in our country," says Chris Kwaja, a lecturer and researcher at the Conflict Management and Peace Studies Program at the University in Jos, Nigeria.

Kwaja is one of eighteen Nigerian youth leaders and members of civil society organizations who came to Boston last summer to receive intensive training in conflict prevention, management, and resolution techniques though an ▶

From the Board Chair



As PCP's button proclaims, "Shifts happen." The button refers to the interlocking shifts in speaking, listening, understanding, and attitude that occur among the participants in PCP dialogues.

I have always found it very hard to describe these cascading shifts—shifts that transform relationships among the participants, generate fresh ideas, and identify joint actions that were unthinkable before the dialogue began. Thus I have rejoiced since discovering a brief YouTube video that communicates what my prose never has.

The clip shows the judges and audience of Britain's version of "American Idol" responding to a contestant, Susan Boyle, in a way that provides the world with a vivid, high-speed image of the kind of transformations that occur in a PCP dialogue.

The footage makes clear that before her performance, Susan's age, old-fashioned dress, unpolished speaking, and awkward body language evoked ▶

► Nigerians look to mend religious, ethnic divides (continued)

educational and cultural exchange organized by the Graduate Program in Dispute Resolution at U. Mass Boston.

Home to more than 250 ethnic groups and one hundred different languages, Nigeria struggles with ethnic-based clashes that have claimed the lives of more than 10,000 since 1999. Nigerian youths—many of them driven to militant gangs by unemployment and widespread poverty—undertake the majority of violent acts during such clashes. In addition, a deep religious fault line between Muslims and Christians (who each represent about half the population) has resulted in extreme tension and numerous fatal riots.

With conflicts rising dramatically during the last decade, emerging Nigerian youth leaders need skills that enhance their ability to participate in and facilitate dialogues, mediations, debates, and public discussions.

Though their professions and affiliations ranged from parish priest to imam and from the Supreme Court of Nigeria to the National Youth Corps to the Interfaith Mediation Centre, all participants share concerns about their country's future and have the opportunity to use deeper conflict resolution skills in their daily work.

The Nigerians' three-week agenda in Boston comprised workshops, trainings, site visits, and case studies provided by conflict resolution professionals with extensive experience in interfaith and intergroup dialogue and consensus building. As one of five participating organizations, PCP provided a two-day workshop on dialogue process.

The trainings and workshops also serve as a vehicle for building democratic political culture, says seminar organizer U. Mass Boston Associate Professor Darren Kew, Ph.D. "The work of these youth leaders not only addresses interfaith conflict issues, but it also provides the basic negotiation and compromise skills essential for a healthy democracy."

Hadeezah Haruna, who trains Christian and Muslim youth in conflict resolution and peace-building activities as part of her work at the Interfaith Mediation Centre in Kaduna, Nigeria, was struck by the Public Conversations Project's focus on preparation.

"We [usually] just invite community people," says Haruna. "Talking with people before the session could help us shape the focus of the meetings. PCP's focus on

curiosity, collaboration, connecting, asking questions, and trying to forge a sense of communal belonging were all surprising and valuable parts of the training."

Six months later, in January, Prof. Kew and PCP Program Director Dave Joseph were two of ten Americans who went to Nigeria. In conjunction with five Nigerian partner organizations, they trained an additional 240 youth leaders and conflict resolution practitioners. They also provided support to the original exchange participants who are implementing conflict intervention projects developed during their time in Boston.

"The idea of providing participants with a wide range of conflict resolution tools and techniques is very much in line with the Public Conversations Project's thinking that every dialogue should be custom designed for the particular situation," says Joseph. "What's key is that we've been able to provide process expertise that the youth didn't have. But their cultural knowledge and position in the community allows them to design a dialogue that is more likely to be embraced and effective. UMass Boston's exchange mirrors PCP's commitment to involve participants in planning their own dialogues."

Initially proposed by Prof. Kew, the program was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

See video of the youth leaders at publicconversations.org.

From the Board Chair (cont)

reactions in the judges and the audience ranging from intense skepticism to scorn. As one judge later told her, "everyone was against you."

And then she sings. The camera captures the rapid shift in her audience—from scornful doubt through confusion and surprise to delight, affirmation, and wild applause. (If you do not have access to YouTube, find someone who does. This is not to be missed!)

Like Susan Boyle's audience, most participants in PCP dialogues enter their conversations holding negative attitudes towards those who have markedly different views about the matter at hand—attitudes usually frozen in stereotypes. The more chronic and polarized the disagreement, the stronger the stereotypes—and the

(cont pg 4) ►

Infinite translations

Adapting PCP's approach across cultures



Deputy Director of International & Science Programs Meenakshi Chakraverti, a key program staff member for eight years, shares how and why the organization's approach is successful in different cultural contexts and talks about its plans for future international work.

Tell me about PCP's current and emerging international work. We're currently working with the Social Science Research Council and the Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights to design and facilitate planning meetings for a new global center on gender and conflict prevention and recovery. We're also developing intergenerational dialogues on the legacy and effects of WWII in European and Asian countries.

We're exploring the usefulness of dialogic processes in work with government in Nigeria, community development in Nepal, post-conflict reconciliation in Liberia, and interfaith/interethnic groups in South Asia.

How does it build upon or differ from others' international work? In our preparation with participants for the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, we saw the value of our approach in international contexts where advocates often have outwardly similar purposes but find themselves stuck in battles over interventions, perspectives, and values.

Recently, we found that our Burundian colleagues deeply appreciated our approach to dialogue and how it elicits "speaking from the heart," which is very difficult in post-armed-conflict situations. These early recovery situations are particularly vulnerable to new outbreaks of violence when disputes inevitably arise.

While dialogue has unique value in post-armed-conflict situations, it also builds upon other kinds of

international work, like economic development, in which people must come together to address practical issues and basic needs. A lot of our international work is in situations where everyday life is very fragile and where there is a history of violence and a legacy of distrust. Often social and governmental functions don't work very well. Our work is not separate from nor does it replace economic development or other conflict resolution work. We add value by focusing on the relationships, conversations, and communications needed to sustain those other kinds of work.

How is our international work distinct from our domestic work? It's about cultural transferability. Much of our work in the U.S. is with middle-class, educated Americans who are predisposed to certain ways of communicating, listening, speaking, and sitting. When we talk about how we do our work in the U.S., people from other countries are often skeptical about whether what we do can be transferred effectively to their context.

The principles transfer easily; but all the practices do not. For example, one of our principles is personal speaking. Our usual practice is to invite personal speaking by inviting each person to speak only as an individual, not as a member of a group. But that practice wouldn't work for members of groups in which identity is based on extended kin or clan relationships. We have adapted our questions for such groups by referring to personhood based on multigenerational and extended kin relationships rather than individual personhood as it is commonly experienced in the U.S..

Other practices of ours actually DO work cross-culturally. For example, timed and democratized speaking, which people didn't think would work well in Burundi, actually worked beautifully.

What excites you about our international work? I don't think about the international work separately. I grew up all over India, attended nine different schools, have lived on the U.S. East Coast and West Coast, as well as in France, and am married to a German. In a very significant way, the world is a domestic environment to me. Both internationally and nationally, PCP's way of approaching dialogue really makes a difference. People experience a quality of interpersonal engagement, which, at a minimum, is personally transformative, and potentially leads to larger transformation.

- ▶ more dramatic their melting in the conversation that follows.

The shifts that occur in a dialogue are more complex than those glimpsed on YouTube, taking place over hours and days and weeks rather than in a few seconds. What is similar, though, is the radical transformation in attitude that happens when fresh information liberates people from their negative mental boxes.

I watched the video of Susan through the eyes of a facilitator who has witnessed kindred shifts in the attitudes of many dialogue participants. Thank you, Susan Boyle for giving us a way to illuminate the invisible heart of PCP's work when our words fail.

From the President



When our oldest daughter was four, we took her to Disneyland. Her favorite ride was “It’s a Small World,” which carries passengers past displays of life-sized dolls wearing various ethnic costumes and singing “It’s a Small World After All.” After thirteen trips, the tune was bonded onto my brain!

Recently, I’ve been thinking about how technology has made my world small. As a recent resident of Facebook Nation, I have connected

(cont pg 5) ▶

When children are in peril...

Internationally renowned child protection specialist applies PCP approach

With nearly thirty years of combined experience and training, Wayne Bleier has a distinguished career and is internationally known for his work as a child protection specialist.

For the last fifteen years, he has been starting emergency child protection/ psychosocial programs for displaced and refugee children, child soldiers, and other vulnerable children and their communities in conflict and post conflict zones. The names of the places he has served have appeared often in news report headlines: the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Republic of Congo, East and West Timor, Aceh, Indonesia, Burundi, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Liberia, and Sri Lanka.

What he has seen and heard still shakes him: “These children are having horrific experiences, watching their relatives be killed, seeing other kids being eaten by wild animals, destruction of their homes, starvation, prostitution, forced military abduction... Nothing in my experience equals their experience or compares to their resilience.”

Currently Programs Director at War Child UK—an international charity that protects children living in the world’s most dangerous war zones—Bleier is a long-time fan of the Public Conversations Project.

He has used PCP’s approach on a number of projects, including his work in the former Yugoslavia where conflicts led to a three-year war in the 1990s.

The war resulted in the near complete resettlement of Serbs from Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Slovenia and the establishment of three new independent states.

Bleier worked with all populations in the region, running programs for Bosnian people, working with refugees and children in Croatia, and training people to work with children and families in the former Yugoslavia. The International Rescue Committee for which he worked at that time coordinated mental health services (an emergent idea) with practical services, such as housing and legal aid, creating a model for delivering services to war-torn populations that has been replicable in other countries.

Having visited both the Croatian and Serbian programs and developed rapport with each one, Bleier thought it would be a good time to get both groups together to see if they could begin discussing their different experiences. “I had relationships with both Bosnian and Serbian teams

(cont pg 8) ▶

▶ with a young woman in Thailand whose name, for Facebook purposes, is the same as mine, Cherry Muse. What are the odds that a middle-aged New Englander with an odd name would find a young namesake in Thailand?! When my children travel to places I will most likely never visit—Russia, The Corn Palace in Mitchell, South Dakota, Diablo Lake in the Northern Cascade Mountains,—their emails and blogs allow me to join their adventures from my kitchen table.

Of course, small also creates challenges. The speed with which Swine Flu became a pandemic reminds me that what starts in Mexico will be in Massachusetts a week later, thanks to the technology of air travel. Although potentially alarming, perhaps this is not a bad thing. Could a growing sense of interconnectedness help us to relate, motivate us to care more about one another, and to recognize the importance of relationships and the shifts that they sometimes require?

That's the heart of our work at the Public Conversations Project: Promoting shifts in relationship between people and groups who sit on opposite sides of big divides. Whether it's the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, conflicts around human sexuality, or conflict resolution in post civil war Africa, these big divides occur in a shrinking world.

The poet John Donne wrote, "No man is an island, entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." Even more than in 1600, this applies today. The same technology that links me with my daughters' adventures and my namesake in Thailand links me to almost every other human on this globe. Walt Disney and his singing dolls had it right—it IS a small world, after all!

Why I give

David A. Hoffman, Boston Law Collaborative, LLC



Why do you support the Public Conversations Project? I was first exposed to PCP when I was a staff attorney at the ACLU and PCP was looking for people to try out a new form of dialogue. The topic? Reproductive rights. I was one of three pro-choice advocates and we were paired with a group of three anti-abortion advocates. I was amazed at how successfully PCP's facilitators guided the conversation. I guess you could say that I was one of the "guinea pigs"

for this successful endeavor, and I was immediately struck by the skill and thoughtfulness of the PCP practitioners—they are brilliant at guiding conversations and eliciting real dialogue about the underlying values and perspectives that can fuel conflict if they are not understood.

What value do you think PCP and its work brings to the world?

PCP's work focuses on a crucially important area in our society—the place where deeply held views prove resistant to mediated settlements or political solutions. Identity-based conflict, religious conflict, and other types of intense interpersonal conflict require deeper inquiry than politics or negotiation can provide. As a society, we are not well trained in the arts of inquiry and listening. PCP provides us with the training that we need in these arts, and exemplifies them in the way they deliver services.

How does PCP's work reflect your own values and goals?

PCP and Boston Law Collaborative share a common vision of enhancing understanding and managing conflict successfully. We both believe in empowering people by giving them tools they can use not only to resolve an immediate crisis but also to build for the long-term the skills that enable us to manage effectively our differences.

What should people know about PCP? What would you tell other potential donors?

The thing that is not yet well known about PCP is how broadly its techniques can be applied—in non-profit organizations, religious organizations, community groups, government—even businesses. We all need to improve our ability to listen, understand, and communicate about the issues that matter most to us. I don't think PCP will ever get Red Sox fans and Yankees fans to break bread together, but virtually every other kind of conflict I can think of would benefit from an application of PCP's skills and techniques.

A “laboratory” for dialogue

Meta-Culture brings PCP practices to India



Beth Fascitelli confers with Ashok Panikkar, Meta-Culture's Founder and Executive Director, during one of the organization's workshops in Bangalore.

With one of the world's fastest growing economies, coupled with high levels of poverty, illiteracy, and malnutrition, India faces a host of complex development issues. It is a society with multiple languages and ethnicities, as well as complex systems of class and caste. People from diverse sectors and backgrounds therefore have a vested interest in—and a need for challenging conversations about—the country's expansion and progress.

“[The need for these conversations] is why I'm in India—it's a laboratory for this,” explains Beth Fascitelli, a Consultant and Trainer with Meta-Culture, a four-year-old organization based out of the south Indian “IT capital” of Bangalore. Meta-Culture provides mediation, dialogue, and dispute resolution services to both the corporate and social sectors in India, a country “where dialogue is a completely new idea and practice.”

“India is growing so rapidly and it needs the creative genius of multiple groups working together. At the same time it's a very divided country so there's not a lot of collaboration on key issues and projects,” says Fascitelli, whose real passion is development issues.

“I get frustrated when development does not serve people's needs or is done in a way that is not practical, prudent, cost-effective, or just. Communities, civil society, corporations, and government all have a stake

in development and yet too often these groups fail to overcome stereotypes or animosity. They are not using their collective ingenuity to make development cost-effective, productive, and sustainable.”

Having worked as a community organizer in her twenties, Fascitelli rejected the activist model: “It alienates people.” A pivotal experience in 2003, during which she convened leaders from various sectors in Polk County, Florida, to brainstorm and do joint fact-finding for a county-wide health care delivery plan, revealed to her the potential of collaboration: “I'm a bridge builder, not an activist.”

That realization led Fascitelli to study conflict resolution as part of a masters program at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA). It was in her second year at SIPA that she discovered the Public Conversations Project when she organized an introductory PCP workshop for fellow graduate students. She attended PCP's Power of Dialogue workshop in 2007, and today uses PCP principles in her work at Meta-Culture.

“I see PCP as the grandfather of dialogue. Its principles are very much out there as standards,” says Fascitelli.

Fascitelli applies PCP practices like ground rules, thought-provoking questions, reflection, and creation of a “safe space” to Meta-Culture's monthly community dialogue program called Bengaluru Speaks. “I was surprised by the amount of time PCP spends formulating questions. Now that I'm in the field I understand why. The slightest phrase can really change the meaning of a question.”

Like the country's economy, both Meta-Culture's work and the desire to discuss difficult issues is growing in India. “We're a young company and getting people to make themselves vulnerable to dialogue is difficult, but we're getting more and more requests for dialogue within groups.”

To learn more, check out Meta-Culture's Web sites: www.meta-culture.in and www.meta-culture.org.

Associates' Corner:

Maggie Herzig



One of the Public Conversations Project's founding members and co-author (with Laura Chasin) of its signature guide, *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides*, Maggie Herzig has served as Associate Director and is a Senior Associate. She has facilitated dialogues

about a wide range of issues and has a special interest in arts-based dialogue, environmental issues, and Muslim–non-Muslim relations.

“I’ve used a lot of metaphors to describe our work, but only recently have I seen similarities between what we do and heart health,” says Maggie Herzig. “Before cardiology became sophisticated, death from heart attack was almost seen as inevitable for a large segment of the population. Now we know a lot about what threatens the heart, about how to prevent plaque and how to clear it, restoring the body’s ability to move forward.”

Two projects illustrate Herzig’s metaphor. Both feature a partnership between Herzig and Grady McGonagill of McGonagill & Associates.

The Maine Forest Biodiversity Project (MFBP) was preventive and proactive. In the early 90s, when the spotted owl controversy in the Pacific Northwest was at fever pitch, industrial landowners and environmentalists in Maine took notice. “There but for the grace of God go we,” they thought.

Could stakeholders in Maine steer clear of full-blown acrimony by working together to maintain forest biodiversity? A diverse committee approached Herzig and McGonagill with this question. Four and a half years and eleven retreats later, much was accomplished. These stakeholders, many who previously belittled each other’s values, interests, and data, had designed and

implemented field research, published an inventory of species, issued a detailed report on ecological reserves, and produced a handbook on managing working forests for biodiversity. These products served as the basis for constructive public conversations about Maine’s forest policy, shaped legislation, and served as a model for other stakeholder work in Maine.

Over a decade later, Herzig and McGonagill worked with a group that Herzig describes as struggling with something more like a blocked artery. A deadline was looming for representatives of the global cocoa industry and leaders of NGOs concerned with child labor to agree on a trustworthy approach to verifying surveys of child labor practices as part of a certification process in Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana. The NGOs’ solution had been unacceptable to industry leaders and the solution put forward by industry proved unacceptable to the NGOs. Mil Niepold, an expert on labor practices and corporate responsibility from the non-profit organization Verité was brought in to work on a “roadmap” for moving forward.

That roadmap involved planning a one-day meeting in Boston, drawing about fifty stakeholders from North America, Europe, and Africa. By the end of that meeting, the parties had achieved consensus on a way forward. Pre-meeting phone calls with twenty participants contributed to the meeting’s success: “By the time the participants were together,” says Herzig, “we understood the most fundamental concerns and hopes of the key participants and they had been heard by us.” Without those pre-meeting conversations, she says, “we might have taken the full day just to build a platform with them for their conversations. Instead, we began the meeting with a summary of what we learned from the interviews, presented it without attribution, and that provided focus and direction for the participants’ limited time together.”

Both projects allowed participants to build trust, make sustainable decisions, and take action. What made it possible? “Three elements stand out, in addition to our investment in pre-meeting work,” says Herzig. “In both cases, there was recognition of the costs of doing nothing. Second, while the parties didn’t begin with trust in each other, they trusted the conveners who brought us in. Third, we were trusted by the conveners and participants to partner with them and to bring a flexible, customized approach, not a cookie-cutter model.”

▶ When children are in peril (continued)

and workers and had their trust. We used the PCP model, hand-picking people from four different regions who would be most receptive.”

“When we had the meeting, I was shocked. At first no one would talk to each other. The Croatians and Serbians sat at different tables. Initially, the purpose of the meeting was to get together to discuss our work and learn from each other.” But the dynamic prompted Bleier to introduce a new idea.

“I said ‘we can do this the easy way and talk about our work, or we can take a risk and talk about what our experience has been as a result of the war.’ The result was fascinating. We spent two days with people sharing and reflecting on what they heard and by the end of the two days, it was like they had known each other forever. And there was a ripple effect; when they got home and told the other staff members, everyone wanted to do it.”

Though he’s typically an outsider to the culture and



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- ▶ often doesn’t know the native languages, Bleier has found facilitation practices that work across these boundaries. “For me, it’s finding a stance that helps me avoid polarization. Sit back, don’t judge, have a Zen mind. This helps me to facilitate in an active and structured way. It’s also being responsive to your group and being flexible enough to ask why something isn’t working.”

Dr. Tony Hoffman, Psychology Department, University of California, Santa Cruz—a long-time colleague and friend of Bleier—says, “It is hard for most of us to imagine how to safely and productively bring warring parties together for public conversations. In Bosnia,

Rwanda, Congo, Afghanistan, and Liberia, Wayne has brought parents, youth, children, child soldiers, victims, and perpetrators together for public conversation. His tactics are part of the growing consensus about the importance of contact and communication for peace and reconciliation.”

Says Bleier: “If you approach this type of work with a stance like PCP’s, you’ll be much more able to be a witness to these things. Often in international work, bearing witness is the only thing we can do. Just by being there, we can be a voice for someone who doesn’t have a voice.”