The U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group: Make Agent Orange History
Track Two diplomacy and the case of the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group

Skills Exercise 2: Shifting Perspectives – 30 min.

◆ Skills practiced: Shifting perspectives

◆ Purpose: Students learn to think about an issue from opposing viewpoints.

◆ Instructions: Each student writes down a PRO/CON topic on a piece of paper. Keep it fairly light so the group can practice the skills and not get bogged down in content of the discussion. Topic examples include:
  - Coming to class in pajamas
  - Written evaluations instead of grades

Students split in two equal groups (Group A and Group B) and arrange themselves in a way where all group members are facing each other. Each group of students gets ten minutes to prepare arguments supporting their group’s point of view on the selected topic. One volunteer from each group presents the group’s collected arguments. Then the groups take turns (all members contributing) defending their argument.

The same groups then switch perspectives so they will now make an argument on behalf of the opposite perspective—the viewpoint against which they just argued.

The students are not told beforehand that they will change perspectives until the first set of arguments has been presented.

The class then discusses the process. Example questions are:

- In what ways was this exercise challenging? What was it like to change perspectives in short succession?
- How did your group go about this task?
- Can you give an example from your personal life where you have changed your opinion dramatically? Why did this happen?

Matsunaga Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution

Prepared for the Aspen Institute by the Matsunaga Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa, October 2011