Intergroup Dialogues: An Educational Model for Cultivating Engagement Across Differences

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A number of initiatives over the past decade have addressed issues of diversity and inclusion on college campuses (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Smith et al., 1997). These initiatives have been implemented as a result of the demands by students of color and other marginalized groups (Thompson & Tyagi, 1993), the innovative efforts of faculty and staff, and the emerging national consensus that diversity in higher education is valuable for preparing students for a diverse society (Peelle, 1999). This article describes one such effort, intergroup dialogues. Intergroup dialogues cultivate student engagement with diversity by encouraging and facilitating student interaction and learning across differences.

Colleges and universities can positively affect student engagement with diversity at three levels: structural (composition of the student body, faculty, and staff); curricular (the incorporation of knowledge about diverse groups in the curriculum), and interactional (the opportunity to interact with students from diverse backgrounds inside and outside the classroom) (Gurin, 1999; Hurtado et al., 1999). Most initiatives in higher education have been concerned with the first two levels—increasing structural diversity by recruiting more students of color and first generation college students, and infusing multicultural content into the curriculum. While these initiatives are important, efforts to develop structural and curricular diversity do not, by themselves, encourage meaningful cross-group interaction among students. In fact, even on campuses where such efforts have been made, students find few opportunities to talk about their experiences and explore controversial issues with people different from themselves (Duster, 1993; Hurtado, 1992; Smith et al., 1997).

Intergroup dialogues can complement structural and curricular diversity initiatives in higher education institutions by providing students with opportunities for sustained and meaningful engagement across race and other social group boundaries. In this article, we describe a critical-dialogic model for intergroup dialogue practice. Drawing from our own experience with and empirical work on this model over the last decade, we propose a distinctive pedagogical foundation, a four-stage developmental design, and practice principles to inform the work of practitioners who wish to implement intergroup dialogues.

INTERGROUP DIALOGUE: A PRACTICE MODEL

Intergroup dialogues are facilitated, face-to-face encounters that cultivate meaningful engagement between members of two or more social identity groups with a history of conflict or potential conflict (Zúñiga & Nagda, 1993). These intergroup encounters provide a forum that fosters honest, thoughtful, and significant conversations about difficult or controversial issues across race and other social group boundaries. By “members of social identity groups,” we mean people who have a specific affinity with one another because they are members of a social group that shares a similar social status and a common history in society (Young, 1990). Examples of social identity groups include those based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, socio-economic class, and other socially constructed group distinctions. While students also have other identities (for example, being an athlete, a science major, or a musician), we focus on identities—singular or intersecting—and relationships that are embedded in systems of power and privilege.

Groups that have participated in intergroup dialogues include men and women; White people, biracial people, and people of color; Blacks and Jews; Asian women and Asian men; lesbians, gay men, bisexual and heterosexual people; and Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

As a whole, intergroup dialogues foster opportunities for engagement across lines of difference. By encouraging open and reflective communication about difficult topics, especially issues of power and privilege, intergroup dialogues help students build skills for developing and maintaining relationships across differences and enhance their ability to work together toward social justice.

More specifically, the learning goals are
• to develop self-awareness of one's membership in a social group in the context of systems of power and privilege;
• to explore similarities and differences across and within social group memberships;
• to examine the causes and effects of group differences and their impacts at the personal, interpersonal, community, cultural, institutional, and societal levels;
• to practice dialogue skills and constructive methods of addressing social justice issues and conflicts between groups;
• to foster alliances and other strategies of collaboration across differences; and
• to identify actions that actively contribute to developing more inclusive, equal, and socially just relations between social groups.

The intergroup dialogues described in this article usually meet for 2-hour sessions weekly for 7 to 12 weeks. Each group has 12 to 16 students, ideally drawn equally from the social identity groups participating in the dialogue. Group meetings include interactive activities, discussion of relevant concepts and questions, exploration of similarities and differences of experience, and dialogue about hot topics (such as sexual assault or affirmative action on campus). When students earn academic credit for participating in intergroup dialogues, they are expected to complete weekly readings, journal entries, and a final reflection paper.

These groups require thoughtful facilitation by skilled individuals (Schoen, Hurrado, Sevug, Chesler & Sumida, 2001). The groups are co-led by trained facilitators representing each of the social identity groups in the dialogue. For example, a man and a woman would co-facilitate a men and women dialogue, or a White woman and a man of color would co-facilitate a White women/biracial, women of color dialogue. This approach to dialogue facilitation helps participants see someone “like themselves” represented in the leadership of the group (Nagda, Zúñiga & Sevug, 1995). The facilitators are expected to model and guide the dialogue process, provide information when necessary, and constructively intervene when there is a breakdown in the communication process. At the same time, they are not expected to be neutral or to stand outside the dialogue process. They are actively engaged, both personally and intellectually. They may present a perspective drawn from their own experience as a way to shed new light on the dialogue or make explicit something that has remained unsaid in the group. Such an active facilitation role is not meant to dominate or direct the participants’ expressions but to act as a catalyst that deepens the dialogic inquiry and engagement (Nagda et al., 1995).

THE PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATION OF INTERGROUP DIALOGUE

Intergroup dialogues are part of a long tradition of efforts to improve relations between racial and other groups over the last half-century. In the 1940s and 1950s, the intergroup relations movement centered on reducing prejudice by highlighting the similarities among social groups with the hope of bridging differences (McGhee-Banks, 1997). Since then, approaches such as cross-cultural education have emphasized learning about different cultures and culturally appropriate behaviors to facilitate cross-group communication and relationships (Gudykunst, 1998). Still other approaches, such as social justice education, have focused on understanding systems of oppression; their impact at the individual, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels; and ways to challenge social inequities (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). While the intergroup dialogue model draws from these previous approaches, it offers a distinctive critical-dialogic approach to intergroup education. The intergroup dialogues described here focus on the exploration of “group differences from a social justice perspective with a goal of both individual and systemic change” (Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001, p. 307). This approach is grounded in the assumption that meaningful dialogue across race and other group boundaries requires an educational practice model that incorporates sustained communication, consciousness-raising, and the bridging of differences. Together, they support the four-stage developmental design and core practice principles of intergroup dialogue.

Sustained Communication

Sustained communication refers to a process of interaction that emphasizes listening, sharing, questioning across differences, and the development of mutual understanding. This process takes place over an extended period of time—several weeks or months—so students can explore controversial issues more fully, develop empathic connections, and find strength and value in each others’ perspectives (Nagda et al., 1999; Schoen et al., 2001; Zúñiga, Vasques, Sevug & Nagda, 1996). Such sustained communication allows participants to examine their “pre-suppositions and compare them against quite different ones; to make [them] less dogmatic about the belief that the way the world appears to [them] is necessarily the way the world is” (Burbules & Rice, 1991, p. 414).

Moving from polite interactions to meaningful engagement demands hard work on the part of everyone. Facilitators and participants strive to build an environment conducive for dialogue by sharing personal experiences and practicing dialogic skills—communicating openly and honestly, listening without judgment, appreciating different perspectives, and asking questions. As trust in the dialogue process grows and is tested, students often feel more free to probe issues, challenge themselves and
others, express anger, offer support, and raise difficult or controversial questions (Schoem et al., 2001). Dialogue group facilitators assist this process by encouraging students to clarify their perspectives, examine the origin and effects of beliefs and biases, and identify areas of consensus and/or disagreement. To further strengthen the capacity for dialogue, facilitators often guide participants in a “dialogue about the dialogue” to reflect on the emerging communication process. This reflective process encourages participants to view dialogue as a place to seek mutual understanding rather than as an opportunity to advocate forcefully for their own perspectives (Huang-Nissen, 1999).

Consciousness Raising

Consciousness raising refers to a process that encourages participants to recognize, question, broaden, and challenge individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and behaviors that perpetuate estranged and oppressive relations between groups. This entails acknowledging and exploring group differences from a social justice perspective (Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001). Referred to as conscientização by Freire (1972), it is “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against oppressive elements of reality” (p. 19).

This process often begins with the affirmation of students’ present level of awareness and knowledge of the social conditions impinging upon the specific identity groups participating in the dialogue. Through introspection, encounter, and exchange, facilitators ask participants to explore the origin and consequences of group differences (e.g., history, cultural heritage, social status) and examine the roles they play in perpetuating estranged or oppressive relations between groups.

Dialogue group facilitators pose questions, present relevant concepts or information, validate and acknowledge difficulties and challenges, and question stereotypes, misinformation, and simplistic conclusions. Students take inventory of their experiences as members of social identity groups, examine the origin and effects of stereotypes, and delve into the dynamics of power and privilege. With the support of readings and critical analysis, students are encouraged to question personal biases and stereotypes and begin to position each other’s perspectives and experiences in a larger social context. Through the process of consciousness raising, students are often able to see some of the ways racism or other systems of oppression (e.g., sexism or heterosexism) shape people’s lives. Gradually, they may be able to understand that the tensions and misunderstandings surfacing between members of the social identity groups do not happen in a vacuum randomly but are a result of historical and institutional dynamics of privilege and oppression. Through this process participants frequently realize how the experiences and opinions of individual group members differ from common stereotypes (Lopez, Gurin, & Nagda, 1998). Meaningful exploration of group differences can also lead to the identification of shared goals and values, generate interest in learning more about the issues addressed, and motivate participants to take action against oppression outside the dialogue group (Schoem et al., 2001; Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001).

**Bridging of Differences**

Bridging differences refers to a process by which participants move from estrangement to ways of relating that build connections across differences and a commitment to social justice (Collins, 1996). This process involves developing empathy and understanding, building collaborative ties, and supporting action for change. Such a process is necessary to undo the impact of systems of oppression, such as racism or sexism, which are powerful sources of disconnection in our society. These systems alienate people from others’ experiences as well as their own (Tatum, 2000). Those who do not feel heard by others or are not affirmed by their social environment may experience feelings of isolation, self-doubt, self-hatred, fear, and powerlessness (Miller, 1988). Those who realize that they have contributed to others’ isolation and self-hatred may experience feelings of guilt, self-blame, fear, confusion, and powerlessness (Harro, 2000b). Intergroup dialogue offers an opportunity for students with these kinds of conflicting feelings and experiences to come together, perhaps for the first time, to engage in joint “thinking and feeling aloud” in a diverse setting.

By its very nature, the intergroup dialogue process highlights conflicting perspectives, feelings, and experiences. There may be heated disagreements or a strong display of emotions due to feelings of fear, alienation, and exclusion. Such conflicts can be opportunities for students to gain greater clarification of underlying sources of tension and to engage in new behaviors that communicate increased self-awareness, sensitivity to the experiences of others, and relational ways of being with each other. Dialogue group facilitators encourage students to embrace conflict as an opportunity to engage in possibly uncomfortable heart-to-heart conversations, reconsider potentially polarizing conflict episodes, and practice skills for meaningful engagement. Mutual understanding and support are enhanced when participants express their own thoughts and feelings, admit “not knowing” or feeling vulnerable, acknowledge group differences, and discover points of intersection and connection amid diverse dynamics of power and privilege (Fletcher, Jordan & Miller, 2000; Zúñiga et al., 1996).

The capacity to make a commitment and stand in solidarity with others also entails exploring issues of co-responsibility and alliance in working for change and social justice. In the ideal situation, students accept accountability for themselves, one another, and the greater community in regard to actions taken or not
taken against discrimination and oppression (Love, 2000). Facilitators help participants to “walk the talk” by encouraging them to take active roles for social justice. Moving from dialogue to action outside the dialogue can prove vital to strengthening the process of bridging across differences. While this process is challenging, “no matter which side of the privilege participants inhabit” (Collins, 1996, p. 222), it can empower dialogue participants to move from isolation and separation toward social justice by “breaking old patterns, weaving new ties” (Adair & Howell, 1997).

While the three aspects of the pedagogical foundation are presented as distinct from each other, they interact closely within the four-stage developmental design. This design encourages sustained communication throughout the duration of the intergroup dialogue. Consciousness raising and bridging of differences come more into the foreground as participants begin to explore and dialogue about group differences and hot topics, and envision alliance building.

A FOUR-STAGE DESIGN FOR INTERGROUP DIALOGUE

The intergroup dialogue model follows a four-stage developmental design (see Figure 1). We refer to the structure that is established to organize, sequence, and pace the intergroup dialogue process as stages of dialogues (Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001). This stage framework serves as a guide for facilitators (and participants) to keep the focus of the dialogue on established learning goals, and to facilitate the transition from one stage to the next. This framework is reflected in the curriculum guides developed by practitioners to support this educational practice (for examples, see Nagda, 2001; Treviso & Maxwell, 2000; Zúñiga, 1999). Typically, the curriculum guide includes learning objectives, experiential and didactic activities, questions to stimulate dialogue, short assignments to encourage individual reflection between sessions, and weekly readings.

Stage I: Group Beginnings: Forming and Building Relationships

The primary objective in the first stage of an intergroup dialogue is to establish the foundations for an environment conducive to honest and meaningful dialogue. The main focus at this stage is on group formation and building, discussing hopes and fears about talking across differences, identifying participants’ needs and expectations, and developing guidelines for the dialogue and group process. Students explore the characteristics of dialogue and debate, identify behaviors that support constructive dialogue, and begin to practice active listening and dialogic skills. Facilitators validate the experiences, expectations, and concerns that participants bring to cross-group interactions. Participants begin to engage with each other in dyads, triads, and the large group. Some of these early interactions may bring forth negative first impressions or conflicting expectations. Facilitators model behaviors associated with dialogue rather than debate and actively encourage students to express their thoughts, questions, feelings, and concerns verbally. For instance, facilitators model active listening, encourage the voicing of different perspectives, and respond to the feelings or experiences shared by individuals in the group. They discourage students from stressing “right-wrong” positions or framing the discussion as a “win-lose” situation. Ideally, two 2-hour sessions are scheduled for this stage.

Figure 1
Stage of Intergroup Dialogue

| STAGE ONE: Group Beginnings: Forming and Building Relationships |
| Who am I? Who are you? How are we going to dialogue with each other? |
| (2 sessions) |
| STAGE TWO: Exploring Differences and Commonalities of Experience |
| What does it mean for me to be a member of my social identity group? What are the advantages and disadvantages people in my group face in society? What roles do I play in systems of power and privilege? How do these impact the relationship between the groups? |
| (3-4 sessions) |
| STAGE THREE: Exploring and Dialoguing about Hot Topics |
| White People/Biracial/People of Color | Men/Women |
| Interracial Relationships | Gender Roles |
| Separation/Self-Devaluation | Friendships and Intimate Relations |
| Race and Racism | Sexual Assault |
| on Campus | Gender and Sexism |
| Affirmative Action | on Campus |
| White Women/Biracial/ | Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual & Heterosexual |
| Women of Color | Families and Relationships |
| Body Image/Beauty | Coming Out |
| Interracial Relationships | Sexuality and Schooling |
| Sexual Assault | Heterosexism on Campus |
| Racism and Sexism on Campus | |
| (3-5 sessions) |

STAGE FOUR: Action Planning and Alliance Building

"Where do we go from here?"

(1-3 sessions)

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Stage II: Exploring Differences and Commonalities of Experience

The objectives of the second stage of an intergroup dialogue are twofold: to encourage participants to become increasingly self-aware as members of different social identity groups in the context of power and privilege dynamics (Adams et al., 1997; Tatum, 1997) and to explore the impact of stereotyping and prejudice on cross-group interactions (Stephan & Stephan, 1995). This stage combines group-building activities with increased opportunities for talking and listening to each other’s experiences and perspectives. Participants may explore early socialization memories of race, gender, and other social identities in homogeneous or affinity groups (such as an all-men affinity group and an all-women affinity group in a men/women dialogue) before engaging in meaningful exchanges across differences. Affinity groups provide participants with the opportunity to explore emotionally charged issues or difficult questions with people who share similar experiences in a more intimate environment (Adams et al., 1997). While exploring early socialization memories that were critical to the development of their social identities, participants also may examine the impact of individual prejudices, stereotypes, and social inequality in their lives. Concepts such as stereotype and prejudice (Farley, 1996); the cycle of socialization (Harro, 2000b); privilege (McIntosh, 1988); and individual, institutional, and structural discrimination (Pincus, 1996) are introduced to help frame the conversation. Students examine the advantages and disadvantages of social group membership and status as members of privileged and targeted social groups and start to grapple with the extent to which their experiences as individuals are shaped by systemic relations of inequality. This realization can be particularly challenging for students from privileged groups as they struggle to reconcile their own sense of self with issues of privilege and power as, for example, Whites, males, heterosexuals, or Christians. This process can also be challenging for students from targeted groups. For some, it may be the first time they explore a targeted social identity in an affinity group; for others, it may mean revisiting painful memories and experiences, or grappling more deeply with the impact of social inequality on their lives. Overall, this stage challenges students from privileged and targeted groups to appreciate their own and others’ unique experiences as individuals and as members of multiple social identity groups, and to explore similarities and differences in perspectives and experiences.

Because this second stage begins to address some of the causes and effects of group differences, individual and group needs must be attended to if the dialogue is to be sustained amid emerging tensions. Toward that goal, facilitators work toward developing an inclusive and constructive group process (Corey & Corey, 1997; Huang-Nissen, 1999). They support individual participants by listening and valuing their experiences and perspectives. They encourage quiet or reluctant group members to participate, but do not force verbal participation. When emotions are high or conflict between the social identity groups surfaces, some type of bridge building activity may be necessary to help students identify what they need from each other as members of different social identity groups in order to move to the next stage and continue the dialogue. Facilitators may ask students to do journal writing for ten minutes about questions such as: What do I need from my peers in order to take risks in this group? What kind of support do I need from people “like me” to participate actively in this dialogue? What kind of support do I need from people “different from me”? What can I do to show support to others in this group? A “Speak Out” activity (Adams et al., 1997) or a “Talking Circle” activity (Owen, 1997) can then be structured to facilitate conversation among participants. Through this type of discussion, dialogue participants are able to acknowledge some of the barriers to sustained communication across lines of difference, and to develop a commitment to dialogue gradually.

In Stage II, facilitators must be able to support students’ present level of awareness of their own and others’ social identities while also asking them to begin to recognize how differing social identity group experiences with power and privilege impact the self and the relationship between the groups. Encouraging thoughtful, empathic, informed dialogue is thus critical in this stage. Ideally, three or four 2-hour sessions are scheduled for this stage.

Stage III: Exploring and Dialoguing about Hot Topics

The main goals of the third stage of the intergroup dialogue are to encourage students to explore questions or issues from various perspectives and to begin to examine some of the personal, interpersonal, cultural, institutional, and historical factors that cause tensions or estrangement between social identity groups. Participants explore and dialogue about issues that typically stimulate controversy inside and outside the classroom. The choice of topics varies depending on the focus of the intergroup dialogue (see Figure 1). For example, in a White people/biracial/people of color dialogue, topics such as interracial dating, separation/self-segregation on campus, racism on campus, and affirmative action are addressed. Interracial dating and separation/self-segregation are scheduled before affirmative action because the latter requires a more complex analysis (historical, institutional, cultural, interpersonal, and personal) and can be a more volatile issue for many students.

Readings, videos, and structured activities (see Adams et al., 1997; Schoen, Frankel, Zúñiga, & Lewis,
Facilitators work with both the content and process aspects of the dialogue. They introduce content through readings, short presentations, video-clips, or census data. They involve students in activities to stimulate dialogue, guide conversation, pose and clarify issues, probe for deeper levels of thinking and feeling, and facilitate the exploration of differences in the group. They encourage participants to connect with what others share in the group by asking them to respond to and build on each other’s ideas and experiences. They also link different ideas by commenting on the emerging similarities and differences in the group. Facilitators ask students to examine their ideas and preconceived notions critically and to identify misinformation, omissions, or distortions that may be shaping the discussion of a specific issue or hot topic. Participants are also directed to pay attention to how they interact with each other as they express their ideas and verbalize disagreements or emotions. They are encouraged to ask clarifying questions, to allow room for others to voice their opinions, and to identify points of conflict and common concerns. Facilitators affirm students’ efforts to engage with each other and help them express strong emotions or disagreements in constructive ways.

In closing each of the hot topic sessions, students are asked to identify specific things they can do to learn more about a particular issue or perspective, to challenge their own and others’ biases and misinformation, and to get involved on campus. For example, in a closing round of a session focusing on sexual assault or segregation on campus, participants could be asked to name one thing they would do differently after that particular discussion if some of the issues raised came up in another class or with their peers. Stage III typically involves one session per topic discussed, including one open session in which students select their own topic for dialogue, or hold a question-and-answer session. Ideally, four or five 2-hour sessions are scheduled for this stage.

Stage IV: Action Planning and Alliance Building

Stage IV is devoted to bringing closure to the dialogue experience and to prepare for post-dialogue activities. This stage builds on the insights and skills gained to this point, and it shifts the focus from dialogue and conflict exploration to action planning and alliance building. Participants develop action plans and generate personal and collective visions for a more just and inclusive society. Planning for action may also involve exploring the kind of support students may need from people “like them” and “different from them” to affect change in their personal, student, and work lives (Harro, 2000a). In developing their action plans, participants identify, and in some instances, practice specific actions they would like to take to address injustices and bridge differences in their personal lives, residence halls, student organizations, circles of friends, workplaces, or communities.

In this last stage, facilitators invite students to envision a more just future, identify realistic next steps, and affirm everyone’s contribution to the dialogue process. The closing activity encourages participants to verbally express how other group members have been instrumental in their own progress and the group’s learning process. Ideally, two or three 2-hour sessions are scheduled for this last stage.

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR INTERGROUP DIALOGUE

The four-stage intergroup dialogue model designed to deepen the dialogic engagement over time. Such engagement is facilitated through a set of core practice principles: maintaining a social justice perspective, balancing both process and content, and actualizing praxis—reflection and action—in dialogue. Like the four-stage design just described, these practice principles reflect the pedagogical foundation discussed earlier. Each of the practice principles is geared toward enhancing the practice of intergroup dialogue by integrating dimensions that are sometimes addressed separately in other intergroup education efforts. For example, Practice Principle II emphasizes attending to both the process and content dimensions of intergroup dialogue rather than focusing on one or the other.

Practice Principle I: Maintaining a Social Justice Perspective

Maintaining a social justice perspective acknowledges the centrality of social group affiliation based on race and other socially constructed identities while exploring the effects of power relations and social inequality (Nagda et al., 1999; Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001). Participants interact with each other not simply as individuals but as individuals whose social group identities are salient to the dialogue (Stephan & Stephan, 1995). While individual experiences are important in this approach, they are grounded in social group memberships and status in society. This approach is distinct from efforts that emphasize prejudice reduction and relationship building across group boundaries without explicitly addressing power relations. A social justice perspective involves attending to two key considerations: (1) connecting individual experiences to historical and institutional dynamics of power and privilege; and (2) attending to different developmental processes for students from privileged and targeted groups.
Connecting the "Personal" with the "Institutional." Students bring to the dialogue many experiences that impact their understanding of group differences. These experiences include personal, interpersonal, institutional, cultural, and historical perspectives. In the intergroup dialogues, participants are challenged to position their individual and social identity-based experiences in a much larger and complex social context. Facilitators encourage participants to consider a multi-level method of analysis to explore differences and disagreements across and within social identity groups in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of each other's similar or conflicting perspectives and experiences. For instance, in examining the impact of current and past policies and practices regarding discrimination and separation in society—based on race/ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation (depending on the focus of the dialogue)—participants are encouraged to explore some of the institutional and interpersonal dynamics that may impact the relationship between particular social groups on the college campus. For example, in a White people/biracial/people of color dialogue on the topic of "segregation/self-segregation," White students often perceive people of color as self-segregating inside and outside the classroom. Yet, to the surprise of many White students, many of the students of color perceive White students doing most of the "self-segregation," be it in their friendship networks, living arrangements, fraternities and sororities, or other activities. In the dialogue, all students are challenged to consider what informs their perceptions of others' behaviors and encouraged to examine the roles they may play in this social dynamic. Further examination of this issue could focus on exploring some of the interpersonal and institutional factors that contribute to separation along racial/ethnic lines on the college campus. Readings can provide perspectives that may not surface in the conversation. An example of such an unspoken perspective might be the dynamics of exclusion and discrimination at the institutional level that create a hostile classroom environment for students of color. This return often contributes to their perceived need for "safe spaces" on campus. Similarly, readings can provide perspectives on the impact of group separation on cross-group interaction and the costs and benefits of same-group affiliation on college students.

Attending to Different Developmental Processes for Students from Privileged and Targeted Groups. A number of different social identity development theories posit that individual experiences of social identity and social inequality are influenced by one's understanding of social oppression. The development process is seen to move from unawareness to exploration to awareness of the impact of social group membership on the self, and toward internalizing and integrating this awareness (Helms, 1990; Tatum, 1992, 1997). Given that intergroup dialogues bring people together from different social identity groups, it is very likely that students will bring different levels of knowledge about their own and other social identity groups. They may also have different levels of readiness to engage actively with issues of social identity affiliation in the dialogue (Zúñiga et al., 1996).

At times, dominant group participants report feeling confused about "the anger expressed at them" by members of the targeted group in the dialogue. Students from targeted social groups may be disturbed easily by the limited knowledge that privileged group members have about a particular oppression. Both groups for different reasons and at different times, may quickly dismiss the value of taking time to examine such issues. The implications of these dynamics between individuals, and indeed between the social identity groups in the dialogue, are that they can create a different, unequal and, perhaps, conflicting process for members of each of the social identity groups. This different process can then lead to increased polarization, heated arguments, and heightened misunderstanding, and in turn can evoke acute feelings of confusion, hurt, anger, and disappointment on the part of everyone involved in a dialogue. It is important to include activities and readings that take into account some of the disparate needs of dialogue participants from privileged and targeted groups to build a sustainable dialogue across differences. Facilitators are thus challenged to manage activities that may assist people to find ways to persist in the dialogue regardless of the contradictions inherent in this process.

Practice Principle II: Balancing Process and Content

Intergroup dialogue explicitly attends to both process (how we talk) and content (what we talk about). In this context, process refers to attending to how participants interact with each other (e.g., addressing questions such as: How are we doing as a group? What is contributing to, or getting in the way of, a deeper dialogue? What do we need from each other at this time?). Content refers to the topics or issues dialogue participants explore and discuss.

Attending to Process. A process orientation pays particular attention to the social climate in which learning and dialogue occur. Two issues are important in creating an environment that is supportive and conducive to meeting the goals of intergroup dialogue. First, developing a set of guidelines for group interactions (taken from a blend of human relations training and dialogue, as well as feminist, anti-racist, and social justice education guidelines) contributes to constructive intergroup encounters (Adams et al., 1997; Huang-Nissen, 1999; Porter & Mohr, 1982; Schoem, Frankel et al., 1993). Guidelines such as "listening to understand," "speaking from own experience," "it is okay to disagree," and "you may "pass" at any time" are helpful for encouraging dialogue and conflict exploration, and in decreasing
the initial anxiety of some participants. In some instances, if the discussion becomes polarized along social group memberships, it may also be helpful to add guidelines such as “no victim blaming” or “let’s not hold people accountable for what they have not been taught” (Cannon, 1990). These guidelines may need to be reiterated at various points throughout the duration of the group, especially when dialogue becomes difficult.

Second, a healthy process in an intergroup dialogue allows for both intra- (e.g., all women in a men/women dialogue) and inter- (men and women) group dialogue. There are some issues, such as internalized racism or sexism, that are best addressed within an affinity group before they are explored in the mixed group (Adams et al., 1997). Regardless of the specific means used to encourage dialogue, it is important for participants to feel they will not be attacked for their views, questions, or emotions. Actively listening and speaking, especially when struggling with challenges, is crucial to the process. Participants might resist ideas or experiences of the other group largely because of their own feelings of anger, confusion, or guilt. Facilitators are challenged to ask students to clarify their own experiences and emotions, and help members of each group to understand the struggles of the other (Romney, Tatum, & Jones, 1992; Tatum, 1992). Since some of these thoughts and feelings may have been buried by years of socialization, facilitators can model and invite participants to communicate pain, anger, or frustration in a constructive way. Facilitators may also encourage participants to self-reflect on their interactions within the group.

Attending to Content. In the early stages of an intergroup dialogue, content is primarily drawn from participants’ individual experiences. As dialogue moves to exploring issues of power and privilege and other controversial issues, popular and scholarly materials are used to expand the knowledge base of participants. Attending to content involves using and weaving together both academic and public knowledge (e.g., testimonial, historical, and “alliance and social action” types of readings and videos), and personal knowledge (e.g., personal reflections) to encourage informed dialogue.

In organizing the content of the sessions, it is helpful to consider “personal-institutional” and “concrete-abstract” sequencing of the hot topics addressed (Bell & Griffin, 1997). For instance, it is best to explore issues that are more familiar to the majority of the students before those that require addressing conflicting or complex information from various perspectives. For example, in a 12-week women/men dialogue, the topic of gender roles, which is generally experienced by students as more personal, is addressed earlier in the semester than the topic of sexism on campus, which is seen as more institutional. Similarly, it is helpful to use a concrete-abstract sequence to manage conversations that may require deconstructing abstract concepts such as systems of advantages based on gender, race, class, or sexual orientation (McIntosh, 1988). In the session focusing on gender roles, participants may take inventory of their gender socialization experiences growing up in school, and in neighborhood and family contexts (personal and concrete). To encourage further dialogue, during that session and the upcoming session, participants could be asked to look at cultural, institutional, and historical factors that shape their perceptions of gender roles for men and women. Such a sequence may enable participants to begin to establish links between the themes that emerged in the discussion of gender roles with issues associated with masculinity and femininity, family, religion, and systems of advantages based, for example, on gender and sexual orientation (institutional and abstract).

Integrating Process and Content. Engaged learning results when the process of the activities used to encourage introspection, encounter, and exchange is well structured and aligned with the content of a particular session. The information generated by students through these activities can then be examined at the personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels, and broadened with support of such content items as readings, fact sheets, and video clips (see Practice Principle I).

Multiple learning modes, as in the experiential learning cycle, include concrete experiences, observations, reflections, and abstract conceptualizations (Kolb, 1984; Svinicki & Dixon, 1987). Concrete experiences include recalling personal incidents and story telling, participating in simulation games and role-plays, and interviewing each other (Kolb, 1984; Svinicki & Dixon, 1987). Openly acknowledging personal and group dynamics among participants also integrates process and content. The emergent processes in the dialogue may be reflective of, or different from, the intergroup relationship in a larger societal context. By identifying and questioning patterns that emerge in the group, students gain content information. For example, members of privileged groups may be more prone to ask for statistical data, while members of social groups targeted by a particular form of discrimination may be more likely to accept their peers’ experiences as valuable data. This naming of interaction patterns in the process can provide participants with more content for further dialogue. Formulation of abstract concepts and generalizing learning is facilitated through regular or final written reflection papers and in planning to take certain initial actions.


A praxis-oriented approach involves continuous cycles of reflection and action that bring about new understandings and more constructive actions (Kieffer, 1984). In intergroup dialogues, students have ample opportunities to speak and listen to various perspectives, while also trying
social groups. It involves developing an understanding that we are all affected by systems of inequality and are responsible for challenging them. Intergroup dialogues can thus provide a site for thoughtful conversation, inquiry, and action planning that may not be readily available or sustained elsewhere.

While intergroup dialogue provides a unique and powerful opportunity for learning about diversity and social justice, this approach cannot be regarded as a stand-alone effort. Coordinated with other campus efforts toward inclusion and social justice, and infused in the processes and practices of higher education institutions, intergroup dialogue can have an even greater impact. Opportunities to build on the intergroup dialogue experience can foster further intellectual, social, and affective development. Universities and colleges must continue to look for ways of supporting such growth if we are to meet the challenges of educating citizens for a diverse society.

NOTES

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1. The authors began developing the intergroup dialogue model described here at the University of Michigan in the early 1990s. It has since been adapted at a number of colleges and universities, including the Universities of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), Maryland (College Park), Massachusetts (Amherst), and Washington (Seattle), and at Mount Holyoke College and Arizona State University. The model has been identified as a promising practice by the President’s Initiative on Race (1998), and in national reports focusing on student development in the diverse campus (Hurtado et al., 1999; American Association of Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1998).

2. Dialogue participants are recruited in different ways on the various campuses. In most instances, students complete a placement form indicating their preferred choices from a list of possible dialogue group offerings and indicate some voluntary background information. This information helps organizers with placement in the groups and with scheduling the dialogue meetings (see http://www.umich.edu/~igrc/placementform.html and http://www.asu.edu/provost/intergroup/progsvris/vodapplets.html for examples of placement forms).

3. The strategies used to recruit, train, and supervise dialogue facilitators also vary across different programs. In some cases, facilitators are undergraduate students who make a two-semester commitment to the dialogue program. In the first semester, they receive intensive training; in the second semester, they facilitate at least one dialogue group (Beale, Thompson, & Chesler, 2001; Nagda et al., 2001). In other instances, facilitators are student affairs professionals or graduate students who have received specialized training.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have presented the pedagogical foundation, a four-stage design framework, and a core set of practice principles of intergroup dialogue. Intergroup dialogue aims to cultivate engagement across differences. This critical-dialogic model of intergroup dialogue embraces the notion that dialogue is more than talking or discovering similarities and differences among
as part of their programs of studies (e.g., counseling, education, or social work) (Nagda et al., 1999; Treviño, 2001; Zúñiga, 1999).

4. We all have multiple social identities that, depending on the social category being explored in an intergroup dialogue, may place us either in a privileged (dominant, more powerful) or targeted group (subordinate, less powerful); that is, on different sides of the power and privilege continuum (Goodman, 2001).

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