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Recommended Citation

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In today's colleges and universities, administrators wrestle with how to create and maintain diverse campus climates. While many institutions recruit students with a wide variety of experiences and identities, often times these students will self-segregate into like-minded or like-experienced peer groups upon their arrival to campus. Interaction between these groups of students may be minimal at best if an institution does not intentionally provide a safe, supportive and confidential space in which students can establish meaningful relationships with members of a different social identity group. This article will present one method of social justice education known as intergroup dialogues as a means of engaging students in sustained cross-group interaction.

There seems to be little question regarding the value and need for colleges and universities to be microcosms of diversity. Evidence cited in the *Gratz, et al. v. Bollinger, et al.* (2003) and *Grutter, et al. v. Bollinger, et al.* (2003) affirmative action cases involving the University of Michigan undergraduate and law school admissions policies state the following:

A racially and ethnically diverse university student body has far-ranging and significant benefits for all students, non-minorities and minorities alike. Students learn better in a diverse educational environment, and they are better prepared to become active participants in our pluralistic, demo cratic society once they leave such a setting. (Gurin, 2004)

Though colleges and universities may contribute to student learning and engagement by establishing a diverse campus population, there remains a pressing need for these institutions to establish opportunities for students to actively engage across areas of difference. Multiple studies demonstrate that structural diversity – a campus's numerical composition of diverse students – is not enough to produce a student body that is engaged in sustained cross-group interaction resulting in educational benefits (Chang, 1999; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Reason, Millar & Scales, 2005; Trevino, 2001; Zúñiga & Nagda, 1993; Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002).

One way that colleges and universities are attempting to create opportunities for meaningful cross-group interaction is by implementing a model of social justice education known as *intergroup dialogue*. The practice of intergroup dialogue is most closely associated with The University of Michigan, where it was developed at the collegiate level in 1988 (Thompson, Brett, & Behling, 2000). Since its inception into the field of higher education, intergroup dialogues have been used at various institutions throughout the country including the University of Massachusetts, the University of Washington, Arizona State University, and the University of Maryland (Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005).

The Intergroup Dialogue Model

An intergroup dialogue unites a group of 10 to 18 students from two discrete social identity groups. Students engage in an ongoing dialogue about the conflict that exists, presently or historically, between identity groups. Intergroup dialogues may be used to facilitate conversations between students of different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, religious affiliations, gender identities, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as these groups typically have a history of intergroup tension or conflict.

Dialogue sessions involve sustained, face-to-face, facilitated discussions about identity group membership and generally occur in two-hour sessions over a period of several weeks or months. Each weekly dialogue session is co-led by two trained peer facilitators. Ideally, facilitation teams will consist of multicultural pairs who mirror the social identities represented by dialogue participants. Furthermore, each social identity group should be equally represented in the dialogue to establish an environment of equal status between groups. Throughout the dialogues, facilitators assist participants in exploring issues of power, privilege, conflict, and oppression in an effort to break down intergroup barriers and build alliances between dialogue participants (Schoem, Hurtado, Sevig, Chesler, & Sumida, 2001).

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Dialogue groups may be part of an academic or student affairs unit, depending upon the needs, interests, and support available within the institution. For example, at the University of Michigan, The Program on Intergroup Relations, Conflict, and Community is a unit within the Division of Student Affairs; however, the program has a strong partnership with the College of Literature, Science, and Art (Thompson, Brett, & Behling, 2000). The Intergroup Dialogue, Education, and Action program at the University of Washington is housed in the university's School of Social Work (Nagda et al., 2000).

An emerging intergroup dialogue program at The University of Vermont is uniquely situated within The Center for Student Ethics and Standards (CSES), a recently created department within the Division of Student & Campus Life. CSES is primarily responsible for responding to student misconduct and violations of the university's academic integrity policy. However, in situating the Intergroup Dialogue Program in CSES, the department is able to proactively engage with the undergraduate student body while demonstrating its deeply-rooted commitment to social justice. Through a partnership with faculty in the College of Education and Social Services, staff from CSES offer three units of academic credit to students who successfully complete a semester-long training course where students learn to become intergroup dialogue peer facilitators.

As these examples indicate, there are clear differences from campus to campus in regard to where a program may be housed and how it is administered, staffed, and funded. These are important considerations for any emerging program. Institutional support, especially in the areas of staffing and finances, are also important areas to consider before deciding to establish an intergroup dialogue program.

Learning Outcomes of Intergroup Dialogues

Intergroup dialogues are traditionally an outgrowth of cross-group tensions on a specific college or university campus (Hurtado, 2001; Thompson, Brett, & Behling, 2000; Trevino, 2001). In response to these tensions, institutions may turn to intergroup dialogues as a strategic means of facilitating productive conversations between conflicting groups. However, institutions also establish dialogue programs because of the intrinsic value of implementing such programs. As Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot (2005) note:

The ability to create more just organizations and institutions depends on the ability to talk and work together across racial, class, gender, and other boundaries. Social justice also requires widespread social and economic change, but effective dialogue is a necessary component of such large-scale change efforts as well as an outcome of such collaborative work. (p. 253)

"Chilly" campus climates need not be a prerequisite for introducing intergroup dialogues to a campus community, as there are a host of cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes associated with intergroup dialogue programs.

Some learning outcomes may include increased knowledge about in-group and out-group members; reduced presence of prejudice and stereotypes; increased knowledge about discrimination and bias; development of complex thinking, interpersonal, and cross-cultural communication skills; and increased awareness of one's role or relationship to systems of oppression or inequality. Participation in intergroup dialogues may also serve to reduce participants' anxiety when interacting with cross-group members and make participants more comfortable with diversity (Zúñiga, 2003).

Intergroup dialogues may also be used to address intergroup conflicts or to create alliances between dialogue group members. Dialogue groups may also be used to explore ways in which group members can develop "more inclusive, equal, and socially just relations between social groups" (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002, p. 8).

The Four-Stage Model of Intergroup Dialogues

Resolving conflict, creating a more equitable campus environment, or bolstering campus intergroup relations is a process that requires a significant amount of time and attention. Fortunately, scholars and practitioners of intergroup dialogue have developed a four-stage model to guide the intergroup dialogue experience. In this

model, each stage is discrete, sequential, and largely dependent upon the previous stage's successful completion. Zúñiga (2003) describes this four-stage process through which dialogues progress.

Stage 1. Creating an Environment for Dialogue
In the beginning stage of dialogue, which typically occurs during the first and second sessions, primary emphasis is placed on building relationships among dialogue participants. Ground rules for dialogue are established in these sessions, and participants begin building trust with each other. During this stage, both the goals and direction of the dialogue are established, and participants explore the characteristics of dialogue and debate. As the level of group trust increases, participants are led by facilitators into stage two.

Stage 2. Situating the Dialogue: Learning About Differences and Commonalities of Experience
The dialogue process involves developing a shared language to describe aspects of social identities. Topics discussed in this stage will include the impacts of prejudice and discrimination on social identity groups in addition to looking at how individuals and groups benefit from systems of privilege. An early part of this stage involves dialogue participants meeting in identity caucuses to explore these sensitive topics with in-group members. This grouping helps to create a safe space for exploration with peers who may share similar ideas or questions with members of their own identity group.

After these caucuses convene, the larger group comes together to discuss each member's experiences and observations with regard to privilege, prejudice, and discrimination. The goal of this stage is to have dialogue participants recognize and appreciate the individual perspectives and experiences of in-group and out-group members. Two or three dialogue sessions are allotted for this stage.

Stage 3. Exploring Conflicts and Multiple Perspectives: Dialoguing About "Hot" Topics
Once participants begin to better understand and relate to one other, the dialogue shifts to stage three. During stage three, media resources or structured activities often serve as an impetus to discuss taboo topics that tend to be heated and polarized. For example, an intergroup dialogue focused on race relations might include a discussion of racial privilege, interracial relationships, or affirmative action. Each topic is discussed in its own session, therefore the number of sessions involved in this stage depends on the number of topics explored by the group. The final session of stage three is frequently an open session for students to bring additional "hot topics" to the forefront of dialogue. Generally, four or five sessions are appropriate for stage three.

Stage 4. Moving from Dialogue to Action: Action Planning and Alliance Building
The final stage in this four-stage model involves a transition from dialogue to action. In this stage, participants use the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired in the previous three stages to establish an action plan for social change. Successes of the group and contributions of its members are also acknowledged in the closing sessions of dialogue. One or two sessions are sufficient to provide closure for the dialogue group.

Research on Intergroup Dialogue Programs

Research on intergroup dialogue programs reveals that they can have a far-reaching transformative impact on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral realm of program participants. Students involved in the Intergroup Dialogue Program at the University of Maryland, College Park changed their perception of themselves and society as a whole as a result of their participation in the Intergroup Dialogue Program. These students also developed greater comfort with challenging others about their notions of racial and ethnic diversity (Alimo, Kelly, & Clark, 2002).

After investigating the effectiveness of intergroup dialogue programs, Nagda and Zúñiga (2003) concluded that students who held the program in high regard showed "[an] increase in frequency of thinking about racial group membership, perspective-taking ability, comfort in communicating across differences, positive beliefs about conflict, and interest in bridging differences" (p. 111). Additionally, the researchers examined other studies, which concluded that intergroup dialogues enabled participants to "challenge misconceptions and stereotypes; [to] develop increased personal and social awareness of social group membership; [to] develop more complex ways of thinking, and [to] identify ways of taking actions for social justice" (Nagda & Zúñiga, p. 113).

Overall, research supports the claim that intergroup dialogue can have positive, lasting effects on program participants. Moreover, programs implementing this practice are achieving their intended learning outcomes. However, research on the practice of intergroup dialogue is in its infant stages, and further outcomes of dialogue groups have yet to be fully explored.

Recognizing the need for a greater depth of research, the University of Michigan is currently spearheading a longitudinal study involving nine additional university intergroup dialogue programs. This collaborative research effort hopes to discover the specific educational benefits that result from dialogue programs (The Program on Intergroup Relations, 2005). Perhaps upon the completion of this research, more reliable information will exist to support the effectiveness of intergroup dialogue programs, as well as the processes that yield beneficial educational outcomes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As institutions of higher education continue to diversify, it will be increasingly important for these institutions to create spaces on campus–physical and psychological–where students can explore their differences in a safe and effective way. Intergroup dialogues are one way institutions might fully reap the benefits of structural diversity by providing a safe, confidential, facilitated opportunity for meaningful cross-group peer interaction.

Colleges and universities seeking to diversify their student bodies need to recognize that the mere presence of diversity will not achieve the level of multicultural competency or awareness many institutions seek to foster among their graduates. If an institution wishes to produce graduates that value diversity and have developed skills for engaging across difference, intergroup dialogues may serve a critical role in achieving these purposes.

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