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(RE)TRAINING OURSELVES

Professionals Who Facilitate Intergroup Dialogue

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Intergroup dialogue as an educational practice is based on a strong assumption that knowledge is constructed through the process of intergroup interactions among participants and facilitators. Intergroup dialogue purposefully resources personal and social group experiences of the participants and the facilitators. Since their inception, intergroup dialogues have had a very particular praxis, where theory and research intersect practice. The curriculum and pedagogy of structured intergroup interaction is developmentally driven based on research and theory from social psychology on intergroup identity and tokenism, social identity development, and social justice education theories (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007). It is the role of the facilitators to drive, guide, and encourage meaningful interaction among participants within groups and across groups. On university campuses intergroup dialogue facilitators come from a variety of backgrounds including students, graduate students, academic staff, and faculty, all of whom receive varying degrees of formal training and supervision specific to the intergroup dialogue topic.

Whereas other chapters in this book speak to intergroup facilitation in general, or describe programs utilizing peer or near-peer student facilitators, this chapter focuses on the unique challenges and strengths that higher education professionals bring to their role as intergroup dialogue facilitators. Some challenges to professionals-as-facilitators are obvious: generational and socialization differences and experiences related to our social identity group memberships that may be quite different from those of student participants. These natural differences are expected, important, and therefore must be addressed.

Beyond differences based on age, other, less obvious perspectives are also at play among and between facilitators and our student participants. Feminist standpoint theory (Haraway, 1988; Harstock, 1983) assumes that knowledge is multiple and situated because it is rooted in the life experiences of individuals specific to social location based within historical contexts. In particular, Black feminist standpoint theory (Collins, 1991) expands this notion by highlighting the experience of multiple marginalities and contradictory positions of oppression and privilege within marginalized groups. At the same time that we are multiply positioned in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and economic class origin, we are positioned as degreed professionals who hold power within university settings. This chapter provides personal insights and conceptual frameworks about the social and institutional positionality of professionals who come to the practice of intergroup dialogue facilitation.

We approach this as three experienced intergroup dialogue facilitators whose personal and social identities and professional backgrounds are traced to various communities, geographic regions, institutions, disciplines, university occupations and educational training. Joycelyn Landrum-Brown is an African American woman who was formally trained as a clinical psychologist and has worked in counseling center settings as well as taught in academic departments on university campuses around the country. Thomas Walker is a White man schooled in intercultural communication and has spent the bulk of his career as a staff member in university intergroup relations offices, working with various campus and community dialogue programs. Kathleen Wong(Lau) is an Asian American woman and an assistant professor and researcher in intercultural communication and has spent part of her career working as a staff member on intergroup relations with faculty and local communities at a public university.

While our diversity is our strength, our professional status provides unique challenges into the informed practice of facilitating intergroup dialogues.[1] In this chapter we speak to the importance of being learners and teachers in the dialogue process. This involves being open to participants as teachers regarding their own experiences and stories.

Teacher–Learner Dichotomy (Unlearning Assumptions About Knowledge Generation: Faculty as Dialogue Facilitators)

Kathleen Wong(Lau): Facilitating a *women of color and White women* intergroup dialogue for the first time was an incredible challenge for me. Being grounded in women's studies, ethnic studies, intercultural communication and gender, and communication literature as an instructor of undergraduate students had not actually prepared me to facilitate rather than teach the course content. Yet, when it came to intergroup dialogues, a dialogic learning practice that places students as sources of knowledge for each other, I was surprised at my reluctance to let go of the role of teacher when I felt the group disagree or misinterpret readings. Instead of focusing on process by highlighting other students who also indicated disagreement with the interpretation and coaching them to ask each other questions, I was focusing on what the author intended in the text. I often found myself suppressing the urge to intervene by providing facts and previously published "expert" interpretations in order to "teach" perspectives. I had to silently redirect myself to focus on facilitating the group through dialogue and mutual discovery of student perspectives. I was ambushed by the energy and vigilance it took to continually unlearn my ingrained teaching practices throughout the eight-week dialogue.

An additional challenge all facilitators face is that students themselves have been rigorously trained in traditional academic ontology. It is easy for both facilitators and students to fall into the comfortable traditional relationships of standard classroom experiences. Typical intergroup dialogues on university campuses take place in classrooms during traditional class meeting times. On most campuses intergroup dialogue participants also receive college credit and a coursework grade. All of these factors can trigger institutionally ingrained communication roles and scripts of what communication scholars have termed *persistence* patterns that interactants jointly construct to resist change (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). A facilitator with faculty background needs to be particularly mindful and vigilant to recognize persistent communication and intervene toward dialogue even as students themselves enact the script of calling on the facilitator to be the expert.

As professors we are also trained to look at learning outcomes as the primary measure of curriculum. Even if we focus on pedagogy, it is usually with a general overall goal of being more engaged and interactional—we do not consciously plan or view classroom engagement as a developmental intergroup process shaped by sociocultural history, social identities, and social psychological dynamics such as tokenism and majority/minority relations. The praxis of intergroup dialogues, however, originates in the best research and informed pedagogy on these very processes.

The role of the dialogue facilitator is to be deeply conscious, mindful, and active in driving and allowing developmental dialogue processes to evolve among students who are understood to be rooted in all of these conditions (Beale, Thompson, & Chesler, 2001). It requires trusting that the depth of the learning process will ultimately drive the depth of learning outcomes (Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, & Zúñiga, 2009). Content is of course important, but knowledge is not exclusive to traditional sources of academic material such as readings, lectures, and exercises. Knowledge is dialogically generated, and the skills and desire for dialogic engagement itself constitute one of the most important "knowledge" outcomes of intergroup dialogues for students (Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003). In intergroup dialogues, knowledge is not found in texts but is produced through the process of sharing and constant self-reflection upon different life experiences and perspectives triggered by texts. The knowledge itself is not merely cognitive and affective, but experienced at an individual and group level. In short, students themselves generate knowledge only if facilitators privilege students as generators of individual and group knowledge, a completely different approach from that of traditional faculty instruction training (Beale & Schoem, 2001).

Most important, being a facilitator requires a genuine trust that students themselves are resources of knowledge and that intergroup-generated knowledge during the dialogue is the most effective transformative knowledge. As a faculty member, this ontological shift is radical. It is a shift that may seem to come easiest intellectually but can be incredibly challenging pedagogically. It is one thing to theorize about student-centered learning and knowledge generation; it is another thing to put it into practice, particularly when one is facilitating on intergroup issues such as discrimination, oppression, and injustice, and developing a sense of common fate and commitment on these issues that are central to our intellectual, personal, and community lives.

Many scholars and practitioners of intergroup dialogue and engaged pedagogy are familiar with Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1998), in which Freire critiques the traditional teacher–student, teacher–learner dichotomy by using the metaphor of teachers adhering to the "banking method" of learning where all-knowing teachers pour knowledge and content into students' heads so they can accumulate their knowledge. Freire contrasts learning as a knowledge-banking process with dialogic learning whereby teachers and students engage in a two-way dialogue that uses the students' own indigenous experiences of the world as a source of knowledge and means of anchoring learning to the self. Freire's work was innovative at the time and should still serve as a cautionary tale to faculty who want to engage in facilitation of and research on intergroup dialogues. We live and work in institutions built on cultural academic traditions that favor banking of knowledge. And traditionally trained faculty (instructors) who become facilitators must consciously and consistently recognize and engage this different approach with intention and commitment.

Professional–Personal Dichotomy

Thomas E. Walker: Beyond blurring the traditional lines between teacher and learner, intergroup dialogue's mutually shared relationship also involves some dissolution of the traditional professional–personal firewalls between us and colleagues, and especially between us and students. Typically in our professional roles, we are focused on the job content and its connection to the students' development; and we present only those parts of ourselves necessary to those purposes. Our authority and expertise come from credentials such as degrees earned, years worked, and works published. We know that our race, ethnicity, gender expression, and some other identities may be obvious, but especially for those with dominant identities, they may never be discussed. We may occasionally reward "good" colleagues and students with revelations about our earlier years, a dinner at our home, or an introduction to family members—insights into our larger, extraprofessional life. But many of us, most of the time and for several legitimate reasons, maintain a healthy distinction between professional and personal realms.

Intergroup dialogue, meanwhile, asks us not only to share control with a co-facilitator and with participants but also to share ourselves. Our sharing of self adds substance to the dialogue. As professionals we are often older than our participants or, at least, have given considerably more thought to the identities and issues about which we are dialoguing. Therefore, sharing our experience provides insights that otherwise might not be present. The greater quantity of our life and study can add historical perspectives to contemporary experience and can help bust myths or correct misinformation. Our sharing also supports the dialogue process. When the authority figures in the dialogue are willing to share about themselves, participants are more likely to do the same; facilitators' appropriate self-disclosure can model what participants should do. (Dialogues are neither therapy sessions nor awards shows, but we can relate to one another through comparing struggles and successes in our social justice development, experiences, and actions.) We both practice and model the skill of dialoguing.

Yet, for all its benefits, exposing evidence of other aspects of our lives and the emotions around them happens rarely, can seem risky, and therefore can be very uncomfortable for us as professionals. While we are trained to tout our (professional) accomplishments, most of us are not practiced at volunteering publically what we do not know, where we fall short, or where we have struggled or hurt. Such confessions of our fallibility, our insecurity, and ultimately our humanity are not encouraged and may even be punished in our professional contexts. So we must challenge ourselves to practice that constructive discomfort, perhaps discussing it with our co-facilitator, and to push through it if we are truly to be collaborative teacher–learners in dialogue—to open ourselves to the learning we can give and get through sharing our expertise in our experience.

At the same time, we cannot forget that we still carry the institutional authority of our professional roles, in addition to our other social identities and their societal values. As university employees (staff or faculty) in the role of group facilitators, our sharing and other actions carry a power that the participants' do not. Our title and/or apparent age may protect us from some of the authority challenges a peer facilitator can face, but they can also create credibility gaps between us and participants who do not think we can relate. We may be grading participants for the course credit they are receiving for the experience, and that "power over" is not erased by our welcoming invitations and statements of equality within the dialogue.

In race and gender dialogues, for example, my being White and a man carries a social power that my co-facilitators of color or of a different gender typically do not have. As with every facilitator's dominant social identities beyond his or her facilitator/instructor role, I must be mindful of whether, when, and how I wield my stories so as not to privilege them, and must be cognizant of how my experience will differ from the experiences of those in the target/subordinated identity groups. (Though not less valid than others', the privilege inherent in my identities makes my experiences qualitatively different.) I must "sit with" the social justice critiques of my agent identities (and me), and not follow the temptation to "run to" my target identities. Even in dialogues where my target identities are the focus (e.g., sexual orientation or religion), I do not lose the power associated with my professional role or other agent identities.

For example, I will sometimes share an early realization of how my agent identity and experience masked my racialized assumptions about all groups, in this case to my own detriment: how during college I was mugged by a group of other young White men because their skin color did not mark them as threatening to me, despite every other contextual clue shouting "danger." How I, in fact, reacted more hesitantly to the Black passerby who intervened on my behalf because her skin color registered to my socialization as "threatening," despite her clear actions to the contrary.

Each time I consider sharing this story, I first find myself reflecting on whether the particular dialogue participants (and even co-facilitator) will judge me as a weak man (unable to defend himself), whether I think they can see me as more than the racist assumptions obviously operating in me subconsciously, whether they will accept diversity facilitation from someone with that admitted bias, and whether we all can move beyond "poor Thomas, victim of bad individuals" to look at the racial dynamics inherent in the situation. In sharing my vulnerability, I expose myself as an imperfect person, and I make myself available to the group for discussion just as I ask them to do.

At the same time, I must not allow the sharing to recenter my dominant identities, or the discussion to focus on me exclusively. As a facilitator, I must be intentional with my choice, my sharing, and my own focus in facilitating discussion around my own and others' stories, to be sure that this risk and modeling is educational for us all. As a professional, rather than a peer, the offering of self-as-subject can be not only especially uncomfortable, but also powerful, for its rarity.

Thus, as with the teacher position specifically, it is again important for the professional facilitator more generally to be thoughtful and intentional with *how* (not whether!) he or she brings himself or herself into the mutual sharing that, in part, defines intergroup dialogue as a unique learning space and process.

Leveraging and Managing Emotional Engagement

Joycelyn Landrum-Brown: Given the traditional roles and boundaries described above, a particular challenge for many professionals is constructively engaging emotions in intergroup dialogues. In most other professional and educational settings (with therapeutic counseling being the most obvious exception), we are trained and expected to keep emotions "out" of the learning; affect is viewed as irrelevant (to rational learning), uncomfortable (for witnesses), or risky (for fear of committing/allowing emotional trauma). Therefore, academics, in particular, may work hard to keep the dialogue at an intellectual or "in their head" level, whereas trained therapists may be tempted to explore the expressed affect in the service of helping a particular group member resolve identity-based traumas. As an educator trained as a therapist, I believe that an appropriate exploration of affect can be useful, but only in the service of deepening or expanding the dialogue process.

Dialogue without space for participants' emotions becomes just another impersonal, "academic" treatment of a theoretical subject. It has been our experience that the expression of strong feelings accurately reflects the emotional charges that are often part of intergroup history and relations, humanizes the issues, and can act as a catalyst for the group's relationship building and learning. Emotional sharing can deepen the dialogue when the feelings are normalized and considered in light of what a particular perspective means to the speaker and the listeners. When appropriately worked through, affect can move the dialogue participants to a deeper level of sharing, particularly since one fear often expressed is that "people will get offended or hurt" by things shared. When the participants learn that strong emotions can be expressed without things "getting out of control," then the expression of affect is normalized, and its benefits become available to all participants and facilitators.

I recall working with a *race and ethnicity* dialogue where a person of color strongly expressed her anger at a White student who dismissed the impact of racism. As a result, the White students got really quiet and the students of color became more animated. I took that moment to make a process comment and asked the students what they were feeling about the last interaction. When the White students were able to express their fears about making the students of color angry, it opened up the group to talk more honestly about their feelings about not wanting to offend..

This is an example of how a strong expression of affect can be a catalyst for students to then talk about their feelings and how their cultural backgrounds inform their reactions to strong expressions of feelings that, in effect, deepened the dialogue and created an opportunity for students to explore the roles of culture, socialization, and lived experiences in making meaning of affective responses. In addition, it allowed for a teachable moment for the White students, who learned that strong expressions of anger from students of color do not automatically result in violence and physical harm as their stereotypes might have suggested. It provided an opportunity to work through an immediate and pressing conflict and to practice managing their feelings and challenging their assumptions. In a traditional classroom, when strong emotions are expressed and the instructor feels uncomfortable, he or she may silence the speaker by ignoring their comments or by allowing other students to rescue the receiver of the strong emotional expression.

Despite being a facilitator also trained in group therapy techniques, I am clear that the dialogue should not turn into a group therapy session. I feel comfortable allowing the strong expression of emotions in dialogues; at the same time it is important to not lose focus on the goal of the dialogue, which is to provide a safe space for creating understanding and collective meaning making. It is also important to allow participants to have their feelings, to work with others who are feeling uncomfortable, and to manage others' discomfort without attempting to "rescue" them by discounting or diminishing the messages associated with the expression of strong feelings.

While engaging the heart as well as the head in intergroup dialogue is certainly a challenge for every facilitator, helping participants access and engage the often powerful feelings accompanying our life experiences is an important component of IGD facilitation. Professionals-as-facilitators may struggle to balance this approach but may be better able to manage emotions and conflict than younger, less life-experienced peer facilitators.

Walking the Talk

As professionals in educational settings, we regularly challenge students to take the information or skills learned in a particular class or program, and to apply them to other aspects of their studies, work, and larger lives. We are well served to heed our own advice, to incorporate the dialogue process into our repertoire of communication skills, and practice dialogic communications in all of our relationships. In other words, we believe we are more effective as facilitators when dialogic communication becomes our way of relating to others.

We work hard to implement the dialogue methods in everyday relationships with others. This involves an ongoing process of trying to be self-reflective, seek understanding, suspend judgments, listen for the meaning of messages, and actively engage in perspective taking. For example, in staff meetings and research planning meetings I work hard to keep channels of communication clear; to listen to others and encourage their participation; and to be clear about my own baggage, triggers, and perspectives by accounting for them and making them explicit.

The congruence of this communication style in and out of formal dialogue settings makes these practices easier, more natural, and more effective when actually facilitating a group. In the same way, if someone actually incorporate a social justice framework into their life, they will be able to facilitate participants' understanding of the concept more easily.

One example is Deborah Flick's (1998) work in her book *From Debate to Dialogue*. Flick mentions that individuals can affect the (dialogue) "understanding" process, as she calls it, even if the listener has not committed to doing so, reporting that "when one person engages this process, a conversation will shift from debate to dialogue" (p. 43). She goes on to provide examples of how applying the principles of the dialogue process shifts the conversation because it shifts the intention to one of caring about and understanding another.

Doing Our Own Work

A theme implicit in our discussion thus far has been the key willingness of professionals to be vulnerable, to set aside (i.e., to bracket to the extent possible) the perspective and privilege of our professional position in order to engage with participants as a whole person. At the very least, we need to be self-reflective and understand how our professional training has influenced how we experience and relate in dialogues held in academic settings. One who holds a unique process responsibility in the dialogue and has distinct content knowledge to offer remains another human learner nonetheless.

Before and as we ask participants to honestly and holistically reflect on their experience as members of groups in our social structure, we need to do our own work not only know to about the influences and impact of our social identities but also to explore the hurts, wounds, and traumas that we facilitators have experienced in our lives. When individuals have worked through their own wounds and offenses around justice issues, it makes it easier to be aware of triggering statements or arguments and not get distracted by discussions of those trigger-related issues instead of the primary focus of the topic. As discussed earlier, we can also appropriately self-disclose our own stories as models of how to use our own struggles to encourage and challenge participants that this work is an ongoing process and they can do it, too.

It is not appropriate, however, for us to "do" our work with students. As we have discussed, our life experience and responsibilities are quite different from theirs, and centering the dialogue on our developmental needs or desires is unethical. Instead, some people use a variety of resources like in-service training, additional education, personal and professional support groups, or even therapy to work through their personal issues; others utilize dialogue with trusted friends and colleagues. The key is to find the right resource so that student learning and the dialogue process remain central. As with all the suggestions and balances above, doing healing work allows us to be fully present as the participants are working through and exploring their issues.

Resources of Our Professional Fields

One final, unique resource professionals bring to intergroup dialogue participants is that of our colleagues and associations. Unlike most peer and near-peer facilitators whose work experience is largely limited to being a student, we professionals have the formal training, experience, and resources of our career communities. An increasing number of academic disciplines and professional fields are incorporating social justice perspectives and initiatives. It is exciting that disciplines such as education (Brown, 2004; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Chizhik & Chizhik, 2002; Marshall, 2004; McDonald, 2005; Opfer, 2006; Shields, 2004; Terzi, 2005; Theoharis, 2007), community psychology (Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002; Prilleltensky, 2001, 2003; White, 2003), social work (Himmelman, 1996; Parker, 2003; Swenson, 1998), and other fields of study (Davis & Wagner, 2005; Sears, 2004; Swan, 2002; Vera & Speight, 2002) have expanded their curricular foci and practices to engage social justice as an important factor for these fields. Being mindful not to utilize these resources as "the expert," more and more of us have field/position-specific professional resources and opportunities to draw upon in our ongoing professional development and action.

As we have described, it can be tempting to engage in intergroup dialogue facilitation as part of our jobs, as "work" we do for *others*, to help *them* learn and grow. Yet, there is a powerful learning dynamic in the dialogue setting when professionals allow the dialogue process to create the environment for learning. Further, sharing important stories and engaging the affect of the dialogue students is a unique challenge that differs from traditional classroom teaching. It is crucial to invest ourselves as whole persons in that effort, both for the strengths that it brings to our relationships with participants, and the benefits the process brings to us as professionals and people.

As our author backgrounds convey, we each bring a long and varied professional experience to our intergroup dialogue facilitation; we have known and worked with one another specifically (and with many other contributors to this book) for the better part of a decade. Over these years, we have shared many stories about our experiences; worked collaboratively on curriculum design; had conversations about educational philosophy and pedagogy; and in fact, become friends through this time and sharing. And yet, through all the work and relationships, until now, we had never (in person or via e-mail) held sustained conversation about what it was like for each of us to be IGD facilitators.

As for other educators, it has been a rare challenge and gift to take the time to focus on the facilitation process for us as professionals and as people. Writing this chapter has allowed us to intentionally dwell on the what, why, and how we bring ourselves to the work of facilitating intergroup dialogue, and to consider both what we offer easily and what we struggle with.

We hope that by sharing our stories, strengths, struggles, and some of ourselves through this chapter, we can invite and encourage other nonstudent facilitators to consider these issues. We suggest that would-be facilitators make the time to articulate their goals, intentions, and experiences relating to dialogue, and to have a focused dialogue with (an)other facilitator(s). In dialogue, we regularly ask our participants to self-reflect on habits, motivations, interactions, and relationships within and across differences. We must remember to heed our own call, to model personally what we ask of others, and to benefit from the wonderful challenges created through introspection and metadialogue.

Note

1. In this chapter, we use the language of U.S. higher education to describe the dialogue context and players. As intergroup dialogues are run in a variety of settings, we invite readers to draw parallels to the facilitators and participants in their own context. (For example, the professionals and students might actually be governmental or nonprofit staff and community members/constituents, respectively.)

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