

## Intergroup Dialogue in Higher Education: Definition, Origins, and Practices

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INTERGROUP DIALOGUE IS AN INNOVATIVE PRACTICE IN higher education that promotes student engagement across cultural and social divides, fostering learning about social diversity and inequalities and cultivating an ethos of social responsibility. This approach to diversity education on college and university campuses responds to a growing need for educational practices that prepares students to live, work, and lead in a complex, diverse, and stratified society (Banks, 2002; Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot, 2005; Guarasci and Cornwell, 1997; Gurin, 1999; hooks, 1994; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen, 1999; Sleeter and McLaren, 1995; Stephan and Stephan, 2001; Schoem, Frankel, Zúñiga, and Lewis, 1993; Tatum, 1997).

Intergroup dialogue (IGD), the focus of this monograph, is one of several dialogue and deliberation practices currently being used on college and university campuses in the United States. Many of these practices seek to foster conversation about contentious issues in collaborative ways (Schoem and others, 2001; Zúñiga and Nagda, 2001). One model, Study Circles (Flavin-McDonald and Barrett, 1999; McCoy and Sherman, 1994; McCoy and McCormick, 2001), emphasizes community building and social action. Study Circles bring community members together in small groups to build relationships, deliberate about community issues, and explore actions to effect change in their communities (also see <http://www.studycircles.org>). Another model, Sustained Dialogue (Parker, 2006; Saunders, 1999, 2003), draws from work in international conflict resolution and peace building. In Sustained Dialogue, students of diverse backgrounds come together to build mutual respect, identify

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issues of conflict, and generate action plans, including workable agreements to conflicts or disputes (also see <http://www.sustaineddialogue.org>). We focus on intergroup dialogue in this monograph for several reasons. First, intergroup dialogue is the only approach to campus dialogue that originated and was developed on college and university campuses. Other approaches to dialogue and deliberation have been adapted for campus use but were initially developed as community-based interventions. Because of its roots in higher education, intergroup dialogue is grounded in the theories, knowledge, research, and pedagogical principles drawn from the scholarship of teaching and learning. The intergroup dialogue approach has also been more systematically researched than any other campus-based dialogue practice. Finally, the authors of this monograph were among those who originally designed and developed intergroup dialogue at the University of Michigan and are among those now implementing intergroup dialogue programs at other institutions of higher learning. Thus, our presentation and discussion of intergroup dialogue in this monograph is informed by our own accumulated knowledge, experience, and scholarship in this area.

## Defining Intergroup Dialogue

Intergroup dialogue is a distinct approach to dialogue across differences in higher education. It can be broadly defined as a face-to-face facilitated learning experience that brings together students from different social identity groups over a sustained period of time to understand their commonalities and differences, examine the nature and impact of societal inequalities, and explore ways of working together toward greater equality and justice.

Intergroup dialogue was developed in the 1980s at the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor during a period of racial strife and conflict on many college campuses in the United States. It is now being implemented at a number of colleges and universities around the country. On some campuses, intergroup dialogues are stand-alone cocurricular activities, but at others, they are offered as part of a course in psychology, sociology, education, communication, or social work. IGD programs are currently operating at a number of institutions, including Arizona State University; Bucknell University; Mount

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Holyoke College; Occidental College; Portland Community College; Spelman College; Syracuse University; University of California, San Diego; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; University of Maryland, College Park; University of Massachusetts Amherst; University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; University of New Hampshire; University of Texas at Austin; University of Vermont; and University of Washington, Seattle (see Schoem and Hurtado, 2001, for descriptions of selected programs).

Intergroup dialogue brings together twelve to eighteen people from two or more social identity groups: men and women; white people, biracial/multiracial/ethnic people, and people of color; blacks, Latinos/as, and Native Americans; Arabs and Jews; lesbians, gay men, bisexual and heterosexual people; people from working-, middle-, and upper-socioeconomic class backgrounds; and Christians, Muslims, and Jews. These meetings are supported and guided by a skilled team of cofacilitators that use an educational curriculum integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of learning. The cofacilitators are chosen to reflect the composition of the dialogue; for example, a dialogue involving men and women would have one male and one female cofacilitator.

Intergroup dialogue is marked by its *critical-dialogic* approach to exploring commonalities and differences in and between social identity groups, its reliance on *sustained communication and involvement* to bridge differences and move participants to deeper and more meaningful levels of engagement, and its *intergroup focus*. By recognizing the centrality of social group affiliation based on race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and other socially constructed categories, intergroup dialogue fosters a critical examination of the impact of power relations and social inequality on intergroup relations (Nagda and others, 1999; Zúñiga and Nagda, 2001).

Intergroup dialogue is grounded in the assumptions that interpersonal and cross-group relations on campus are affected by the histories and current realities of intergroup conflict in the United States and that these conflicts must be explored through *dialogic* encounters. In contrast to “banking” approaches to diversity education in which the teacher-expert deposits knowledge into students as if they were empty vessels waiting to be filled (Freire, 1970), dialogic interaction promotes active, generative, and transformative connections

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and explorations among participants and between participants and facilitators. Intergroup dialogue recognizes the importance of listening and speaking honestly and openly to encourage shared meaning and improved interpersonal communication and relationships (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998; Weiler, 1994).

Communication flows in many directions as thoughts and feelings are shared and questions and issues are posed for everyone to consider. Dialogue involves “periods of lots of noise as people share and lots of silence as people muse” (Wink, 2005, p. 41). Different from “mere talk” or casual conversations, dialogue is an intentional, facilitated process that has a focus and a purpose (Brookfield and Preskill, 2005; Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot, 2005; Romney, 2003). Dialogue differs from debate, where one party tries to convince the other party (or an audience) of the correctness of his or her own position as well as the incorrectness of the other position. Dialogue, unlike debate, builds a relationship between participants that engages the heart as well as the intellect (Huang-Nissen, 1999; Romney, 2003).

Communication across social identity–based differences can be emotionally difficult, and tensions may develop between participants as they explore their differing experiences and the social and historical forces that divide them. Working through these tensions and achieving understanding require *sustained communication and involvement*, not just a one-time workshop or event. Intergroup dialogue requires a series of eight to twelve structured, facilitated meetings to promote meaningful dialogue and learning and to build relationships over time.

The emphasis on interpersonal communication and learning is expanded in intergroup dialogue to include an *intergroup focus* that recognizes that members of social identity groups have different locations in systems of advantage and disadvantage. Unequal social statuses, which have influenced participants’ past perceptions and experiences and their groups’ histories and present opportunities and access to resources, also affect interpersonal relationships. The relationships between the groups, not just the individuals, participating in the intergroup dialogue are addressed as participants work through conflict and critically examine the cultural, political, and economic bases of institutionalized discrimination and privilege. Participants in intergroup dialogue do not simply learn about the sociopolitical environment in which their social

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identity groups interact; they also develop a critical analytic perspective on why these environments exist and operate in the way they do and who benefits and suffers from these arrangements. This critical examination encourages participants to take action to change these societal structures as a necessary condition for the improvement of relationships among social groups and individuals.

In summary, the focus on sustained communication about intergroup issues from a critical-dialogic perspective differentiates intergroup dialogue from other diversity education efforts that emphasize, for example, content assimilation about contemporary race or gender relations in the United States. It is also distinct from curricular activities that promote intergroup communication without explicitly addressing power relations or problem-solving workshops that seek to identify strategies to address specific conflicts or interest group issues. Thus, intergroup dialogue integrates cognitive learning about identity, difference, and inequality with affective involvement of oneself and others through sharing intimate personal reflections and meaningful critical dialogues.

## **Historical Roots of and Contemporary Influences on Intergroup Dialogue**

Intergroup dialogue has its roots in philosophical and cultural traditions that have valued dialogue as a method of communication and inquiry (Zúñiga and Nagda, 2001). These traditions gave rise to the democratic, experiential education, and intergroup education movements of the last century (McGee Banks, 2005; Stephan and Stephan, 2001; Zúñiga, Nagda, and Sevig, 2002). Dialogue as a communication practice has been used in many cultural and discourse traditions to support inquiry and explore shared concerns.

The practice of dialogue in education can be traced to the progressive democratic education movement inspired by the work of John Dewey and other influential educators working at Teachers College during the 1930s and 1940s. These educational pioneers conceptualized dialogue as the practice of deliberative democracy and sought to foster in learners the capacity and disposition to participate in such deliberations (Burbules, 2000). Dewey believed

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that “the theory and practice of democracy should be nourished by the power of pedagogy” (Wink, 2005, p. 106). Democratic educators, by offering students the opportunity to work on real situations and problems, stimulated reflection on the real world (Brockbank and McGill, 2000). Citizenship education and learner-centered pedagogies and experiential learning methods are legacies of this movement (Adams, 1997; Banks, 2004). For instance, Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, and others applied many of Dewey’s ideas in the popular education movement in an effort to empower marginalized peoples to challenge social inequities in the United States and other societies (Horton and Freire, 1990). More recently, critical theorists have questioned Dewey’s idea that dialogue as a form of communication can by itself foster democratic practices in a liberal democracy. From this perspective, Habermas (1981) argues that because democracy is an “unfinished project” marked by cultural and status differences, the preservation of the democratic process requires the development of speech situations that allow people to communicate across differences to reshape prevailing power relations (Morrow and Torres, 2002). Freire’s writings (1970) about dialogue as a liberatory educational practice have influenced the work of critical, feminist, and antiracist theorists in education (hooks, 1994; Sleeter and McLaren, 1995; Weiler, 1993).

The intergroup education movement of the 1940s and 1950s also influenced efforts aimed at bridging differences across social identity groups. Intergroup education drew from Allport’s conditions for positive intergroup contact—equal status, acquaintance potential, and interdependency (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). This movement grew out of the social unrest following the U.S. “great migration,” when large numbers of African Americans from the South moved to industrial cities in the North. Parallel efforts took place in the Southwest in response to the large migration of Mexican Americans after World War II (Castañeda, 2004). Intergroup education is also considered a precursor to contemporary practices oriented toward antibias, antiracist, multicultural, or social justice education (Adams, 1997; McGee Banks, 2005).

Two approaches to multicultural education rooted in intergroup education—a human relations approach and education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist—have also influenced intergroup dialogue theory and

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practice (Sleeter and Grant, 1999). Although intergroup dialogue is not strictly aligned with either approach, it draws elements from both. The human relations approach, focused on intergroup understanding and harmony, aims to improve relationships between groups through personalization, building acquaintances and friendships, and engaging in cooperative projects. These educational activities and processes may reduce individual prejudice but are not directed toward greater social justice and addressing inequalities. In contrast, education that is critical, multicultural, and social reconstructionist, such as social justice education, holds central the analysis of social inequalities and the role members of both privileged and disadvantaged groups can take in creating change (Adams, Bell, and Griffin, 1997; Sleeter and Grant, 1999).

In reconciling the tension between approaches that emphasize fostering positive intergroup relations and those that emphasize critical understanding of social inequalities, intergroup dialogue draws from two other sources in articulating its specific pedagogical practices. First, work in conflict transformation and peace building (Norman, 1991, 1994; Lederach, 1995; Saunders, 1999, 2003) provides important lessons that are incorporated into intergroup dialogue (for example, building collaborative ties among conflicting parties in small-group contexts). Although conflicts in communication, perceptions, and understanding across differences are located in larger systems of social inequality, conflict transformation practitioners foster collaborative ties to promote more equal and just relationships among participating groups. Thus, participants explore individual or group actions aimed at transforming their intergroup hostilities with the goal of changing unjust situations. Second, feminist pedagogy (hooks, 1994; Romney, Tatum, and Jones, 1992; Schniedewind, 1992) and social justice education theory and practice (Adams, Bell, and Griffin, 1997) have centered on the integration of content and process in teaching and learning about social justice issues. In intergroup dialogue, for example, although understanding systems of inequalities and ways of challenging those inequalities is critical, attention also is focused on understanding and articulating how the process of learning about such knowledge is designed and facilitated to foster self and collective awareness, affective ties, and social justice commitments.

## Educational Goals of Intergroup Dialogue

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**I**NTERGROUP DIALOGUE IS A CRITICAL-DIALOGICAL APPROACH that integrates three core educational goals: consciousness raising, building relationships across differences and conflicts, and strengthening individual and collective capacities to promote social justice. These goals provide a conceptual framework for the design and practice of intergroup dialogue. This chapter describes each of these goals, its philosophical and pedagogical roots, and its use in IGD efforts.

### Consciousness Raising

Although this goal draws from the work of Freire (1970) and others, consciousness raising has a specific meaning in the context of intergroup dialogue. Consciousness raising has been thought of as an educational process by which members of oppressed groups come to understand the history and circumstances of their oppression. But intergroup dialogue aims at raising the consciousness of all participants, not only those who are members of the less-advantaged groups. For a genuine dialogue to occur, it is just as important for members of privileged groups to understand how they and others have been affected by privilege as it is for members of less-advantaged groups to understand how they have been affected by subordination. All participants need to grapple with understanding their own social identity group's history, involvement in patterns of privilege or oppression, and the impact of this history on themselves and others. Members of both advantaged and disadvantaged groups must gain a deeper understanding of each other's situations and grapple with



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effects of privilege and subordination on their relationships (Collins, 1993). This kind of consciousness raising occurs in individuals and groups and between groups. Eventually, everyone must learn that “the ‘we’ that’s in trouble is all of us” (Johnson, 2001, p. 9).

Moreover, all people are members of several different social identity groups, some of which place them in positions of privilege (in the United States, for example, being white, male, owning or upper class, Christian, and heterosexual) and others that place them in positions of disadvantage (being a person of color, female, a member of a lower economic class, a religious minority, or gay). In dialogues, participants are encouraged to recognize their multiple identities and the relationships among them while focusing on one particular identity to intentionally explore a particular line of intergroup difference. For instance, in a gender dialogue, participants primarily focus on gender relationships while acknowledging the influence of other group identities such as race and ethnicity or sexual orientation. In a race/ethnicity dialogue, members of each group also examine intragroup differences in gender, religion, class, or sexual orientation. These within-group differences affect how members of the groups relate with one another in the intergroup dialogue as well as in the broader social context. Participants must examine these multiple identities and their relation to one another if they are to understand what it means to be a member of a socially situated identity group. Such an approach is, by definition, multidimensional and complex and strives to reflect a multicentric viewpoint (Nagda, Zúñiga, and Sevig, 1995).

The educational goal of consciousness raising in intergroup dialogue takes place through the parallel and interrelated processes of developing awareness and acquiring social system knowledge. Through discussion of readings, experiential activities, reflection, and analysis, participants are invited to explore the origins and contemporary consequences of how group differences are dealt with (for example, history, cultural heritage, social status). Participants take inventory of their experiences as members of social identity groups, examine the origins and effects of stereotypes and information or misinformation about themselves and others, and delve into the dynamics of power, privilege, and exclusion in campus and community life. The conjunction of both cognitive and affective explorations helps participants understand how and why certain

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patterns of intergroup dominance and subordination exist and how these patterns affect them personally. With the support of information and guided facilitation, participants are encouraged to question personal biases and preconceptions and begin to understand each other's perspectives and experiences in a larger social context.

### ***Developing Personal and Social Identity Awareness***

Theorists suggest that the process of understanding one's social identities in relation to systems of oppression such as racism and sexism generally moves from unawareness to exploration to awareness of the impact of social group membership on the self and finally toward internalizing and integrating this awareness (Bennett, Atkinson, and Rowe, 1993; Hardiman and Jackson, 1992; Helms, 1990; Tatum, 1992, 1997). This process of development is not linear. People may move back and forth between stages and may even remain in the same stage for some time. Moreover, both individuals and groups of participants often have different levels of knowledge and awareness about their own and other social identity groups and readiness to actively engage issues of social identity affiliation (Zúñiga, Vasques-Scalera, Sevig, and Nagda, 1996). For example, participants from privileged social identity groups typically report knowing less about the ramifications or impact of their own group membership on others than do people of disadvantaged groups (Zúñiga, Nagda, and Sevig, 2002).

In the process of developing awareness at multiple levels, participants become clearer and more reflective about the meaning of their social identities and their groups' relationships with other groups. Intergroup dialogue acknowledges the centrality of understanding social identity group memberships in light of each group's history and contemporary status. Participants are challenged to consider certain questions: What does it mean to be a member of a specific social identity group? How is who we are shaped by our socialization into specific social statuses in society? How do we benefit from certain identities, and how are we limited or constrained by others? How do we relate to social identity groups that are differentially situated from us? Intergroup dialogue uses both personal and sociopolitical lenses to examine such questions by engaging participants in developing personal awareness, group awareness,

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and awareness of the privileges and disadvantages of group membership in a variety of contexts.

### ***Social System Knowledge***

Consciousness raising also requires the awareness that membership in a social group is only one factor influencing how people see the world. Indeed, individuals' experiences of social inequality and injustice are influenced by their intellectual understanding of the dynamics of social oppression and vice versa. Relationships between groups and the respective statuses of groups in the larger society are shaped and affected by interpersonal, institutional, and societal privilege and power dynamics as well as the groups' histories and present environment. Participants are challenged to consider how the relationship between the social identity groups has been shaped by history and by economic systems and how the relationship continues to be reinforced and reproduced by social institutions and institutional barriers. Increased knowledge of social systems helps participants clarify the meaning and scope of prejudice, discrimination, and oppression and explore the institutional web of discrimination that reinforces the dynamics of power and privilege in educational, judicial, and economic systems. By explicitly attending to social identity at the personal level, patterns of conflict or collaboration at the intergroup level, and systems of inequality at the societal level, participants are often able to see some of the ways systems of oppression (racism, sexism, classism, or heterosexism) shape people's lives. Gradually they may understand that the conflicts in perceptions, tensions, and misunderstandings that surface between individuals and between different social identity groups do not happen in a vacuum or randomly but are a result of the historical and institutional dynamics of privilege and disadvantage.

## **Building Relationships Across Differences and Conflicts**

A second educational goal of intergroup dialogue focuses on building relationships between and among participants from two or more social identity groups with a history of estrangement or conflict. Because intergroup dialogue

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focuses on people's learning as individuals *and* as members of social identity groups, the ways that participants interact and relate with each other are important. A key feature of relationship building is the explicit recognition that relationships in the dialogue group are likely to be affected by the asymmetrical relationships and history of conflict or potential conflicts between the social identity groups involved (Maoz, 2001). Consequently, intergroup dialogue focuses on how relationships occur among people in full recognition of their social group identities. Forging relationships across differences is encouraged through building the capacity for sustained communication and bridging differences.

### ***Building Capacity for Sustained Communication***

Members of different groups may come to the dialogic encounter with different and often conflicting knowledge, experiences, and goals. For instance, Duster (1991) reports that white participants often enter intergroup communications with a desire to get to know other people and to build contacts. Participants of color, on the other hand, often enter such conversations with an eye toward getting support for concerted action to alter systems of discrimination and oppression. Under such circumstances, members of privileged groups often report feeling confused about the anger expressed (sometimes toward them) by members of disadvantaged groups in the dialogue. They may feel naive about the realities of life experienced by members of disadvantaged groups and feel innocent of responsibility for their own and others' location in systems of oppression. On the other hand, participants from less-privileged social groups may be disturbed by the limited knowledge that privileged group members have about particular forms of oppression.

Such encounters can easily turn into polarizing debates that seek advantage or conversion or polite conversations that avoid talking about differences or difficult issues. Intergroup dialogue differs fundamentally from polarizing communication (like policy debates) or mere talk, neither of which promotes meaningful communication. It also differs from one-time training sessions and single in-depth encounters that do not offer sustained contact. Unlike these common variants of intergroup communication and learning, the IGD model relies on extended meetings among participants to develop deeper

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intergroup understanding (even if it is about why there is conflict between the groups), mutual respect, and empathic connection between participants. As participants continue to listen to each other's experiences and perspectives (even conflictual perspectives) over time, they can think through issues together. Because intergroup dialogue is not an event or an isolated encounter but a process that takes place over time, it can create an open space in which people can engage with one another honestly and seriously with a desire to understand and care rather than to win or lose. Moreover, multisession, sustained, face-to-face dialogic communication fosters deeper levels of mutual understanding across lines of difference. By actively listening to one another, sharing personal experiences and views, asking and answering difficult questions, and questioning each other's ideas and beliefs, participants in intergroup dialogue gain perspective into each other's worlds and explore the social context in which they live.

Moving from polite (or impolite) interactions to meaningful engagement can be challenging and frustrating. Creating a conducive climate for learning across differences requires a group environment that supports building relationships in the here and now. It also requires a process that challenges and overcomes patterns of intergroup communication that reflect only, or primarily, the dominant group's norms and styles. By using dialogic methods such as speaking and listening activities and talking circles, participants gradually develop the capacity to listen attentively to each other, talk openly and honestly, appreciate different perspectives, and ask naive or politically incorrect questions. Through planned and sequentially structured activities that provide participants with experiences that increase in difficulty, intensity, and intimacy, relationships are built as the curriculum unfolds. These experiences occur in a structured and bounded (by membership, guidelines, time, and space) environment. Schoem and others (2001) note that trust in this type of group process grows and is tested as dialogue participants feel freer and more confident to raise difficult questions, challenge each other, express anger, offer support, and continue the conversation.

### ***Bridging Differences***

The development of relationships across and within social identity groups offers more than just an opportunity for people from different social identity

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groups to come together and learn about each other. Unlike feel-good types of cross-group encounters that attempt to promote understanding by avoiding, masking, or overcoming conflicts, intergroup dialogue recognizes that communicating about and, if possible, working through conflict are both positive and necessary parts of the intergroup encounter. Such disagreements and conflicts can become valuable opportunities for participants to engage in significant conversations about different perspectives and tensions shaping their relationships.

Given that participants from the social identity groups participating in an intergroup dialogue come from different societal locations and experiences, they may slip into traditional dysfunctional patterns of conversation and interaction in which (1) privileged group members express their goodwill and sense of innocence, ask many questions, and retreat into silence when questioned or challenged; (2) privileged group members deny any responsibility for the impact of their accumulated advantages on others; (3) disadvantaged group members feel (or are made to feel) responsible for educating members of privileged groups and feel constrained to defend their group from what may be perceived as hostile or naive questioning; (4) disadvantaged group members fail to look beyond their sense of oppression to acknowledge problems in their own communities or potential advantages of group membership; (5) all parties try to rank their own or others' oppression; and (6) no one seeks alliances with anyone. These patterns are all sources of immediate conflict among dialogue participants, but they also constitute an agenda for learning. Examining such patterns of interactions can help participants discover some of the intergroup dynamics shaping their relationships. If done with care and connection, even when participants' lived experience is drastically different, the IGD process can build relationships across those lines of difference.

Honest, deep, and sustained conversations about issues of social identity and social stratification inevitably shed light on the complex dynamics of connection and disconnection that result from estranged or hostile relationships between members of social groups in the larger society. Such conflicts become valuable opportunities for participants to engage in heart-to-heart conversations and to figure out new ways of thinking and relating across

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difference, building bridges between and among individuals across group boundaries (Zúñiga, 2003). Such bridging may occur when a white man or a man of color in a gender dialogue acknowledges his own privileged status as a man with more self-knowledge, openness, and sensitivity to the experiences shared by the women in the group and is willing to take responsibility for issues of safety and violence against women on the campus. Intragroup differences also may be bridged, for example, when a heterosexual woman of color in a dialogue about race and ethnicity who had previously challenged gay men of color for failing to participate in organizations involving students of color on campus listens attentively to their experiences with homophobia in the residence halls and asks how she could be supportive or advocate for them. Intergroup dialogue offers participants a space to experiment with such bridging behaviors as well as to cultivate confidence and commitment to continue such bridging across differences outside the dialogue setting.

### **Strengthening Individual and Collective Capacities to Promote Social Justice**

The third educational goal of intergroup dialogue, strengthening individual and collective capacities to promote social justice, is made possible by the other two. By supporting new ways of thinking about oneself and others and the social structure in which both exist, intergroup dialogue promotes thinking about and acting for social change. The capacity to act together rests on developing commitments to fellow dialogue members and a sense of shared responsibility for challenging discrimination and creating greater justice. The process of building bridges across and within differences in social identity groups provides a structure that can empower participants to improve intergroup relations on campus and to take more responsibility for promoting equity and social justice in society at large.

Action commitments in intergroup dialogue go beyond preparing members of privileged groups to become allies with members of disadvantaged groups or empowering disadvantaged groups to enact change. Members of privileged groups can also take action on their own to counter or disown

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privilege, and members of less-privileged groups can forge alliances with one another. Intergroup dialogue fosters a critical understanding and enactment of alliances across differences that challenge all forms of domination and oppression. Participants are encouraged to ask questions: How do my or our actions affect others or the other group? How are my or our actions empowering or disempowering others?

Intergroup dialogue can contribute to a more socially and economically just society by graduating participants who have a commitment to social change and the skills and dispositions needed to work with other groups to make positive changes. Participants become more aware, active, critical thinkers who value their own and other people's voices. By engaging deeply with people different from themselves and by recognizing how their own identities and social locations affect themselves and others, participants learn to care about how people from both privileged and disadvantaged groups are affected by social injustice, to feel responsible for social injustice, to feel confident in their skills and abilities to develop and sustain relationships even when conflicts exist, and to feel hopeful about the possibilities of working together across differences toward a shared vision of social justice.

Toward these ends, participants in the dialogue are provided opportunities to explore actions they can take that challenge exclusion, discrimination, and institutional oppression. For example, participants are invited to examine their spheres of influence (self, friends, family, school, work, community) and identify actions they can take to intervene in unjust or hostile situations (Goodman and Schapiro, 1997). They may decide to band together with other groups to effect change, join a social justice organization on campus, take more courses on topics of identity and social justice or change, become a resident assistant to create a more inclusive intergroup climate on campus, educate members of privileged groups about their privileged location, or actively confront racism, sexism, and homophobia in their resident halls or in the local community. They can also prioritize actions and identify possible strategies and risks. Doing so moves the learning process from dialogue and reflection to visualizing actual steps to effect change. In some instances, participants practice intergroup collaboration through the planning and implementation of



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action projects (Zúñiga, 2004). Participating in a dialogue about these potential and real actions can help participants to reflect on the extent to which they feel ready to take action for social justice and to identify the kind of support they may need. In envisioning and then taking action, participants create opportunities to continue to learn and to carry the skills and commitments they have developed in intergroup dialogue to settings outside and beyond the dialogue.

## Design and Practice Principles in Intergroup Dialogue

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**T**HIS CHAPTER DISCUSSES DESIGN ELEMENTS, the four-stage design, and core principles of practice used in intergroup dialogue to achieve the goals described in the previous chapter. It begins by outlining the pedagogical assumption that informs the IGD educational design and then highlights key design elements guiding the IGD curriculum, including the four-stage design. The chapter concludes with a discussion of three principles of practice that weave together the various design elements of intergroup dialogue.

### A Key Pedagogical Assumption

The learning process in intergroup dialogue is conceived as a social process that is coconstructed and sociopolitically and historically situated (Brookfield and Preskill, 2005; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994, 2003; Stage, Muller, Kinzie, and Simmons, 1998). In contrast to banking approaches to education, where knowledge is transmitted to students by the teacher expert, intergroup dialogue relies on student-centered pedagogies that assume students can cocreate knowledge through active learning processes that value learning from experience as well as from content materials (Lewin, 1951; Stage, Muller, Kinzie, and Simmons, 1998). Participants learn to name and describe their personal and identity-based experiences and worldviews. They use historical and conceptual frameworks to critically situate their experiences in the context of systems of power and privilege. They learn to listen and care about their relationships with others by asking questions, identifying disagreements and conflicts, and further exploring differences and commonalities in and across social identity groups.

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## Design Elements

In the divided and contentious society in which we live, critical and reflective dialogue between members of social identity groups does not occur naturally or easily. A well-designed educational approach is necessary if participants are to critically explore the often hidden and contested territory of social identities and intergroup relationships. Moving from polite and superficial conversations to meaningful and honest dialogue across lines of difference requires direct and active involvement by both individuals and the group. A sequential design that aligns goals, concepts, and structured activities with dialogic methods can foster individual participants' learning as well the group's development (Bell and Griffin, 1997; Brooks-Harris and Stock-Ward, 1999; Saunders, 1999; Weber, 1982). We rely on four design elements to structure the learning in intergroup dialogue: (1) sustained and intimate engagement across differences, (2) explicit attention to issues of process and content, (3) intentional selection of structured activities and dialogic methods to support both content and process, and (4) sequencing of dialogue and learning. Together these design considerations, which represent the distinctive features of intergroup dialogue, provide coherence and continuity to individual and group learning over time.

### *Sustained and Intimate Engagement Across Differences*

Intergroup dialogue is premised on the consistent finding that for intergroup contact to be positive, it has to allow for intimate sharing over a sustained period of time (Pettigrew, 1998). Intergroup dialogue draws on many of Allport's original conditions (1954) for positive intergroup contact—equal status, acquaintance potential, and interdependency. The composition of the membership in IGD groups mirrors the social identity groups participating so as to foster a sense of equal status inside the dialogue. In intergroup dialogues we see acquaintance potential, later reconceptualized as friendship potential (Pettigrew, 1998), manifested in the personal sharing and dialoguing processes themselves (Yeakley, 1998). Students share their own experiences, listen to and learn about others, and reflect on the similarities and differences. In so doing, they move from exposure and contact to real engagement. Combining such intimacy with interdependency in learning about

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social inequalities and forging intergroup collaborations empowers students to build friendships and create alliances for greater social justice (Nagda, 2006).

### ***Explicit Attention to Content and Process***

Explicit attention to blending content and process is critical to support cognitive, behavioral, and affective growth when addressing issues that are both personal and sociopolitically situated (Adams, Bell, and Griffin, 1997; Beale and Schoem, 2001; Romney, Tatum, and Jones, 1992). Content typically refers to concepts, conceptual frameworks, literature, theory, empirical data, and personal stories that challenge assumptions or misinformation or stimulate questions, reflections, observations, or new behaviors (Beale and Schoem, 2001; Zúñiga, Nagda, and Sevig, 2002). Process, on the other hand, refers to the intrapersonal and interpersonal reactions, interactions, and reflections stimulated by experiential learning or exploration of controversial issues or hot topics such as immigration, reproductive rights, gay marriage and civil unions, and affirmative action. In this context, concern for process is associated with the quality of the learning process as well as the interpersonal and intergroup relationships established in the group (Beale and Schoem, 2001; Brockbank and McGill, 2000).

What (content) and how (process) participants reflect on and discuss with one another are essential to the way they generate meaning, work together to explore controversial questions, and critically examine social identity-based relations and the issues that divide them. The IGD educational design encourages participants to share their own experiences and insights (experiential content), to contextualize these experiences using materials such as relevant readings, demographic data, and conceptual frameworks to the goals of intergroup dialogue (knowledge content), and to build and actively engage in cogenerative processes with diverse peers (active learning process). All dimensions of learning—cognitive, affective, and behavioral—are woven together in an intentional IGD educational design.

### ***Structured Activities and Dialogic Methods***

The IGD design integrates structured activities and dialogic methods to support content and process learning. Structured activities help introduce concepts such as socialization, explore and reflect on experience (for example,

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growing up as a boy or a girl or as a white person or a person of color), and apply new knowledge and awareness to the examination of a controversial issue. Structured activities such as icebreakers, story telling, and gallery walks can support recalling and reflecting on a past or present experience; fishbowls, read-arounds, and historical timelines can help participants share and acquire new information; role plays and speaking and listening activities aid the practice of new knowledge or skills; and action plans assist in planning for application of new knowledge, awareness, or skills (Brooks-Harris and Stock-Ward, 1999). In selecting structured activities, it is helpful to consider various learning modalities and participation styles to actively support all students in the dialogue (Bell and Griffin, 1997; Brooks-Harris and Stock-Ward, 1999; Svinicki and Dixon, 1987).

Readings and conceptual organizers also help introduce new information in the dialogue. Readings can support participants' learning about a topic from various perspectives or can further challenge participants to consider experiences and perspectives other than their own. Conceptual organizers introduce concepts or frameworks for participants to use in developing specific competencies or examining their own and others' experiences in systems of advantage (Bell and Griffin, 1997). For instance, we use Bohm's building blocks of dialogue (1990)—suspending judgments, deep listening, identifying assumptions, and reflection and inquiry—as a conceptual organizer early in the educational design to help convey some of the skills involved in fruitful dialogue (see the appendix). Subsequently, we may ask participants to read Jeanne Weiler's interview of Linda Teurfs (1994), a well-known dialogue practitioner, which reviews Bohm's building blocks in preparation for the skill-building segment scheduled in the upcoming session. When addressing issues related to social identity, we offer Harro's cycle of socialization (2000b) to help participants take stock of their experiences growing up as members of a particular social identity group and to help contextualize socialized attitudes and behaviors. We may then structure a social identity-based affinity group discussion to encourage intragroup dialogue on socializing messages received while growing up as men, women, white people, or people of color. In this way, a conceptual organizer can help frame a structured activity and ground the conversation that may evolve from processing or debriefing participants' reactions to an activity.

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Debriefing structured activities can stimulate inquiry, reflection, and conversation (Bell and Griffin, 1997; Brooks-Harris and Stock-Ward, 1999; Steinwachs, 1992). Dialogue methods can help unfold meaning by keeping a conversation going through deeper questioning, active listening, and connected responding (Brookfield and Preskill, 2005). Questions can help crystallize overt or covert issues by helping participants get more involved in deeper examination of emerging patterns of thoughts and feelings, and disagreements and conflicts. The kinds of questions we ask and the ways in which we ask them can make a difference in how a conversation unfolds (Brookfield and Preskill, 2005). Although some conversations may not go far, others will evolve into a “complex communal dialogue that bounces all around the room” (Palmer, 1998, p. 134). For instance, questions that ask for clarification or that encourage building on each other’s comments or questions can foster mutual understanding and connected dialogue. Questions that ask for assumptions can encourage participants to articulate more explicitly the reasoning or values behind thoughts and feelings (Brookfield and Preskill, 2005) (see the appendix). Listening with the purpose of understanding can foster perspective taking and empathy and stimulate new questions that can further the conversation. It can also help participants identify common ground and points of conflict. The extent to which participants acknowledge and respond to each other’s observations or questions can create “conversational momentum and continuity that may lend new meaning and purpose to discussion” (Brookfield and Preskill, 2005, p. 100).

A variety of formats can be used to structure these conversations. Dyads, small groups, and large-group discussions all help the conversations move beyond individual reflections. Other dialogic methods that help maximize participation as well as deepen the learning include “go arounds” (Silberman, 1998), “circles of voices” (Brookfield and Preskill, 2005), and “fishbowls” (see the appendix). These structures help get conversations started on a specific topic or support reflection on the experience. At certain points in the group learning, it is also helpful to build in reflections on the dialogic process itself. For instance, “dialogue about the dialogue” allows participants to discuss the quality of the conversational process, identify concerns and feelings that may be hidden or visibly troublesome such as tardiness or a few who monopolize

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the conversation, and perhaps set goals for improvement (see “Dialogue About the Dialogue” in the appendix).

### ***Sequencing of Dialogue and Learning***

To address issues of social identity, prejudice, and oppression, intergroup dialogue builds on the idea of sequential organizers commonly used in antibias and social justice education to introduce concepts and activities incrementally (Bell and Griffin, 1997). These organizers help pace content and process across sessions so that the overall flow makes sense to facilitators and students.

Two content-related sequential organizers are important in structuring learning about social identities and systems knowledge (Bell and Griffin, 1997). First, for individuals, *personal to institutional sequencing* confirms participants’ lived and socialized experiences as valid knowledge. These personal explorations increase participants’ readiness to grapple with larger institutional and system dynamics. Sharing experiences becomes the content for learning and aids further inquiry into how group affiliations and institutions such as the educational, legal, and political systems affect individual experiences. Second, for social groups, *diversity to justice sequencing* begins by attending to commonalities and differences in and across groups and proceeds to examining how they are structured by the dynamics of social inclusion or exclusion, privilege or oppression, and agency or powerlessness. The focus here is on valuing and understanding personal and social identity-based differences before proceeding to an analysis of systems of dominance, social power, and privilege that have been built around these differences. Participants are then more open to understanding that in everyday practice “difference is not neutral” (Bell and Griffin, 1997, p. 55). Kolb’s phases of experiential learning—concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (1984)—are helpful to consider in facilitating learning and dialogue along these two sequences: personal to institutional and diversity to justice. Facilitators may begin a unit or a session by asking participants to reflect on past experiences to tap into what participants already know about a topic. Then they may incorporate concepts or a discussion of an assigned reading to expand the perspectives available in the group.

Other sequential organizers help participants to negotiate the IGD experience at the affective level. *Lower- to higher-risk sequencing* takes into

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consideration participants' need to feel safe so they can openly engage and examine deeply held beliefs, feelings, or confusions. Such sequencing helps to pace the risk level embedded in structured activities and dialogic methods so that participants become acquainted with each other before exploring difficult and controversial questions in the large group. Moving from individual reflection to dyads or small groups before engaging in large-group dialogues can help individuals take progressively greater risks. The high priority given to exploring difficult issues, sharing vulnerabilities, and taking risks in intergroup dialogue makes it vital that a strong foundation be built early to encourage affective ties among participants. Participants are more likely to voice their thoughts and feelings openly and to take risks in an emotionally safe setting where they feel for and care about one another. Even though we acknowledge that no absolutely safe place exists in a society marked by social stratification, division, and hostilities, some removal from contentious debate, gaming, and advantage seeking is essential for meaningful dialogue to occur.

Given the societal constraints that discourage honest exploration and contemporary patterns of dominance and subordination and their effects on individuals, many participants will be reluctant to step outside their comfort zones to explore new territory without both support and challenge (the "push and pull" dynamics of learning encounters). We therefore rely on the group developmental stages of forming, storming, norming, working, and ending (Weber, 1982) to sequence the IGD group process and learning. For instance, in the formation stage of the group, participants may explore hopes and fears, generate group guidelines for engagement, begin to practice the habits of dialogue, and get to know each other. In the next stage (storming), participants may need to be challenged to question one another and prior knowledge and go beyond prior (often stereotypic) assumptions and accustomed ways of behaving and interacting. Mapping the causes and effects of group inequality can help clarify the relationship among the social identity groups in the dialogue. Once norms and relations are more established in the group, inquiring into controversial topics such as reverse discrimination, reproductive rights, and racial profiling helps to uncover the complex dynamics underlying interpersonal, community, and institutional relationships across the social identity groups participating in a dialogue.



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## The Four-Stage Design of Intergroup Dialogue

The educational design of intergroup dialogue relies on stages or phases of dialogue (Saunders, 1999; Stephan and Stephan, 2001; Zúñiga and Nagda, 2001) to map the topics and activities of the sequential design. The four stages, elaborated below, build on one another and sequence the movement in the intergroup dialogue from group beginnings to exploring differences and commonalities to dealing with hot topics or difficult questions to considering or taking action (see Exhibit 1). This design is a conceptual framework that allows facilitators and participants to understand the progression of goals, objectives, topics, and activities that support their work together.

### ***Stage 1—Group Beginnings: Forming and Building Relationships***

In the first stage, the focus is on establishing the foundation for creating an environment conducive to honest and meaningful exchange. The main goal of this stage is to support the formation of the dialogue group and build relationships across differences. Facilitators focus on creating a safe space for participants to share their thoughts and experiences. They begin to lay the groundwork for future sessions by attending to group building as well as introducing participants to the meaning of dialogue. Participants discuss why it is important to talk about the focus of the dialogues (see “Why Talk About Race/Ethnicity, Gender, or . . . ?” in the appendix) and their hopes and fears about the experience, identify needs and expectations, and establish guidelines for communication and confidentiality. Distinctions are drawn between dialogue and debate (Huang-Nissen, 1999; see “Dialogue and Debate” in the appendix), and the importance of speaking clearly from the mind and heart is emphasized. Participants are introduced to the characteristics of dialogue and subsequently practice some of the skills involved (see “Building Blocks of Dialogue” in the appendix). The activities in Stage 1 begin the process of building relationships and exploring personal and social identities. Two to three sessions are usually scheduled for this stage.

### ***Stage 2—Exploring Differences and Commonalities of Experience***

During the second stage, social identity–group commonalities and differences are explored. Although this stage is where the goal of consciousness raising is given primary focus, clarifying and sharing information about multiple social

**EXHIBIT 1**  
**Overview of the Four-Stage Design of Intergroup Dialogue**

Stage	Content and Process Objectives		Structured Activities and Dialogue Starters
	Content Objectives	Process Objectives	
<p><b>STAGE 1</b>            Group Beginnings: Forming and Building Relationships (2–3 sessions)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build knowledge, values, and skills for dialogue</li> <li>• Clarify the meaning of “dialogue” and other forms of communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish the foundations for honest and meaningful dialogue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging in group-building activities; exploring goals and expectations</li> <li>• Distinguishing dialogue from debate; introducing Bohm’s four building blocks of dialogue (1990)</li> <li>• Practicing interactive communication: speaking, listening, paraphrasing, and giving and receiving feedback (Bidoi, 1986)</li> <li>• Exploring personal and social identities</li> </ul>
<p><b>STAGE 2</b>            Exploring Differences and Commonalities of Experience (3–4 sessions)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore meaning of key terms such as prejudice, discrimination, and oppression and their impact on students’ lived experiences</li> <li>• Increase awareness of multiple social group memberships and dynamics of inequalities</li> <li>• Promote understanding of the systemic basis of group differences and conflicts in perceptions and experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage listening and perspective taking of experiences and perceptions different from one’s own</li> <li>• Explore meaning of key terms such as prejudice, discrimination, and oppression in personal experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring multiple social identities: cultural chest activity</li> <li>• Terminology activity to generate meaning about key terms</li> <li>• Discussion of Harro’s cycle of socialization (2000b)</li> <li>• Identity-based discussions and fishbowls to encourage introspection and deeper dialogue: web of oppression activity</li> </ul>

(Continued)

**EXHIBIT 1  
Overview of the Four-Stage Design of Intergroup Dialogue (Continued)**

Stage	Content and Process Objectives		Structured Activities and Dialogue Starters
	Content Objectives	Process Objectives	
<p>STAGE 3 Exploring and Discussing Hot Topics (3–5 sessions)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore differences and similarities of perceptions/experiences of controversial issues across and in social identity groups</li> <li>• Encourage analysis of systems of privilege, power, and oppression</li> <li>• Explore some of the roots of conflicting perceptions and experiences (historical, cultural, institutional, interpersonal)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage informed/meaningful dialogue and inquiry</li> <li>• Probe for deeper levels of thinking, feeling, and responding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dialogues about controversial topics</li> <li>• Hot topics vary, depending on IGD focus. They may include interracial relationships, reproductive rights, safety on campus, separation and self-segregation on campus, sexuality and religion, gender and the media, immigration, affirmative action, marriage and civil unions.</li> <li>• Use a dialogue starter to ground and open the conversation such as movie clips, a gallery walk, or a take-a-stand activity followed by extensive debriefing, questioning, and dialogue.</li> </ul>
<p>STAGE 4 Action Planning and Alliance Building (2–3 sessions)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore range of continuing learning opportunities and actions to promote diversity and social justice</li> <li>• Explore ways of moving from dialogue to action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring closure to the dialogue experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion of Harro’s cycle of liberation (2000a)</li> <li>• Develop action plans and skits to illustrate various ways of taking action for inclusion and social justice</li> <li>• Affirmation activities to bring dialogue experience to a close</li> </ul>

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identities requires the development of mutual trust and provides another way to build trust and relationships among group members. Moreover, consciousness raising requires understanding how those identities reflect systems of social power and resource allocation and are often expressed in conflictual relations among groups. In this stage, members of both privileged and disadvantaged groups begin to understand their roles in maintaining systems of social discrimination and oppression through structured activities such as the web of oppression (see appendix), readings, and reflective writing. They can also explore both the views and interests they hold in common and those in which they differ or conflict.

These issues of dominance and subordination are often played out in the actual conduct of the dialogue. Because participants coming from different identities and backgrounds bring with them varying amounts of social power, generally reflecting their status positions in the society, some participants may talk more often, dominate air time, and overinfluence the direction of discussion. Other students may talk less, participate less actively in group activities, or withdraw from engagement. To overcome these typical patterns, it is necessary to foster the development of a relatively safe place where participants can take risks in sharing and inquiring into each other's perspectives and experiences even if it means asking "dumb" questions, departing from stifling norms, and entering potentially conflictual turf. Dialogic methods and structures that encourage speaking and active listening in dyads, triads, affinity groups, and fishbowls are widely used in this stage (see the appendix). Three to four sessions are usually scheduled for this stage.

### ***Stage 3—Exploring and Dialoguing About Hot Topics***

The third stage of intergroup dialogue involves dialogue about controversial topics or hot-button issues that cause tension between people of different social identity groups. The topics selected for discussion vary according to the focus of the intergroup dialogue. For example, in a dialogue about race and ethnicity, students or facilitators may select topics such as interracial dating, separation and self-segregation on campus, racial profiling, immigration, affirmative action, and racism on campus. In a gender dialogue, such topics might include single-sex or coed residence halls, friendship between men and women, safety

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on campus, reproductive rights, gender and the media, and sexism on campus. In a dialogue focusing on gender and sexuality, topics might include families and relationships, gender roles, compulsory heterosexuality, sexuality and religion, marriage and civil unions, and campus policies regarding benefits for partners and gender-neutral bathrooms.

Participants are encouraged to identify and voice their perspectives on and experiences with such issues and then to relate their position on an issue to the members of their social group. At the same time, participants are discouraged from stressing the rightness or wrongness of any position and encouraged to engage in dialogue, not debate. The ability to explore difficult topics in a trusting environment depends on a continued emphasis on consciousness raising and relationship building. It also calls for both support and challenge for risk taking. The intentional use of various structured activities and dialogue methods can support a range of participation styles and modes of questioning, listening, and responding to deepen the conversation (see “Getting Conversations Started” and “Methods for Deepening the Conversation” in the appendix). Activities such as dialogue about the dialogue can be helpful in identifying which aspects of the dialogue process are going well and not so well for participants. The third stage typically schedules one session per hot topic and includes one open session during which participants may explore emergent topics or issues or hold a question-and-answer session. Three to four sessions are usually scheduled for this stage.

#### ***Stage 4—Action Planning and Alliance Building***

The final stage of intergroup dialogue builds on the prior stages but also shifts the discussion from reflection and dialogue to taking individual and group actions with others. As participants understand more about the personal and social costs of systems of discrimination and privilege and their own enmeshment in these systems, many are moved to think about taking action and engaging in efforts at social change. Some of these action plans or commitments may focus on individual behaviors such as one’s own discriminatory behavior or prejudiced statements by roommates or parents, while others may focus on institutional policies and programs such as biased admissions policies or evidence of racism and sexism on campus. Because many of these activities

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may be undertaken in concert with others—or at least with the support and advice of others—attention is paid to building alliances and developing collaboration in and across social identity groups. In this last stage, participants also acknowledge everyone’s contribution to the dialogue process and celebrate the collective effort. Two sessions are usually scheduled for this stage.

The four-stage design is not a rigid formula, and it is pedagogically important that the educational design match the flow of participants’ organic learning processes. Although the stages may appear to be linear in their progression, intergroup dialogues may flow back and forth between stages as participants address and work through relationships and issues in the dialogue. Practitioners using the design may also need to adjust the topics covered in each stage to match specific group dynamics or participants’ needs. For instance, intergroup dialogues launched in volatile environments may need to consider participants’ emotional needs carefully and perhaps rely on much preparatory work to set the stage for dialogue (see, for example, Saunders, 1999, for methods used in high-conflict situations).

## Practice Principles for Intergroup Dialogue

Although the four-stage educational design model provides a blueprint for the IGD curriculum, several underlying principles inform the planning and facilitation of the intergroup dialogue. Instead of an either/or approach, these principles focus on integrating person and structure, exploring commonalities and differences, and linking reflection and action. All practice principles integrate content and process concerns.

### *Integrating Person and Structure*

In intergroup dialogue, attention must be given to both the personal and structural aspects of social group distinctions. The intergroup focus of intergroup dialogue requires that participants develop an understanding of the group-based nature of differences among people and the ways in which individuals are located in and experience systems of group privilege or subordination. Intergroup dialogue also addresses interpersonal and intergroup experience and analysis. By integrating and balancing these perspectives, intergroup

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dialogue invites participants to consider various manifestations and explanations of group differences. This aspect is important because of the tendency to explain the causes and effects of racism and other forms of oppression by focusing on the motivations and actions of individual people. Group and structural perspectives are necessary in a society that encourages us to think that the “social world begins and ends with individuals” (Johnson, 2001, p. 84). Although it is important to hold individuals accountable for biased and discriminatory actions, the prevalence of individualistic thinking can distort understanding of social events by underscoring the notion that an individual’s values, attitudes, behaviors, and ideologies can be understood apart from social norms and structures. Furthermore, Johnson (2001) argues, individualistic thinking can paralyze conversations between people from privileged and targeted groups because it conveys the message that racial and gender oppression are, for example, a person of color’s problem or a woman’s problem rather than everyone’s problem. At the same time, it is important to avoid the suggestion that macrosocietal and historical forces so overdetermine daily life that no personal responsibility or choice exists for individuals of more- or less-privileged groups. Considerations of personal agency and the relevance of both personal and structural levels of analysis can help to counter the passivity and inertia that often result from this tendency.

As mentioned earlier, conceptual organizers such as Harro’s cycle of socialization (2000b) can be valuable in helping frame conversations that address both personal and structural dimensions of social identity. When combined with testimonial narratives focusing on a diverse range of socialization experiences, these activities help participants to reflect on their own and others’ experiences growing up as members of more- or less-privileged groups. The idea that group differences are socially constructed and both emanate from and lead to social stratification may help participants from different groups understand why some of their experiences have been so different. Subsequent content may examine the ways that these differences have been organized institutionally, culturally, and personally to establish and maintain patterns of societal oppression and privilege.

Person-structure integration may also occur when participants are encouraged to consider how social institutions such as the economic system, legal

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system, educational system, and organized religion shape and regulate the attitudes and behaviors of members of advantaged and disadvantaged social groups. Breaking away from individualistic thinking starts when participants in the dialogue begin to realize that they are all implicated and affected in one way or another by the patterns of inclusion and exclusion reflected in the operation of these systems (Hardiman and Jackson, 1992; Johnson, 2001). Structured activities such as the web of oppression can visually illustrate the systematic nature of prejudice, discrimination, and oppression and the roles we all play in reinforcing power and privilege (see “Web of Oppression” in the appendix). Readings, fact sheets, cultural artifacts, and conceptual organizers such as Katz’s levels and types of oppression (1978) can further help participants to understand and integrate the personal and structural dimensions of power, privilege, and exclusion in educational, legal, and economic systems.

### ***Exploring Commonalities and Differences***

Intergroup dialogue strives to find a balance between exploring differences and finding common ground. Doing so can be difficult in a pluralistic society where both difference and sameness are often emotionally loaded because of the ways that these categories have been used or are commonly understood. The emphasis may be placed on the values and interests that people have in common to promote social cohesion, on the one hand, or to render invisible real differences in status, opportunity, and power, on the other. Similarly, targeted or disadvantaged groups may emphasize group differences to resist cultural assimilation or build solidarity in their group, while this same emphasis, taken to an extreme, may prevent recognition of shared interests or the development of cross-group coalitions. Intergroup dialogue assumes that it is equally important to explore the issues, values, identities, experiences, and concerns that participants hold in common as well as those that differentiate them.

Many diversity education efforts in higher education aim for students to develop a sociohistorical understanding of inequalities and an increased awareness of culturally and institutionally supported prejudice and discrimination. Although necessary, Pharr (1996) argues, these educational goals are not sufficient if we are to truly engage across differences. We also need to grapple with



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each other's similar and distinct perspectives and to empathize with both joys and struggles with the hope of redefining and sharing power (Collins, 1993; Harro, 2000a; Pharr, 1996). Intergroup dialogues bridge the critical awareness dimensions that attend to how participants are differentially affected by systems of power and privilege through dialogic processes that are sustained over time. This form of communication facilitates the appreciation of different perspectives and the development of affective ties (Nagda, 2006). We discourage debates about pros and cons and discussions about right and wrong because they promote polarized interactions, usually at the expense of one of the sides of the argument (Huang-Nissen, 1999).

Commonalities and differences are often explored by situating participants' experiences in the context of their social identities as men, women, white people, people of color, or as appropriate for the particular dialogue group. In initial explorations of social identities, for instance, we introduce Harro's cycle of socialization (2000b), which maps the interpersonal, cultural, and institutional reinforcements of socialization on individuals based on their social group memberships. Participants then meet in social identity-based affinity groups (Zúñiga and Nagda, 1993b), where they explore thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to their racial, ethnic, gender, or other socialization, their lives on campus, and their interactions with members of the other group(s) in dialogue. When alone with members of their own group, targeted or disadvantaged group members often reveal the common and different ways in which they have experienced discrimination. At times, members who have had common experiences discover that only some have understood these experiences as a result of societal discrimination. At other times, they find that they have had different experiences resulting from intragroup differences based on gender, socioeconomic class, citizenship status, first language, religion, or sexual orientation. Similarly, members of dominant groups sometimes find that they can express perspectives and experiences associated with their privileged location more openly in their affinity group. They too may find that experiences that they thought were unique to them are actually more common with other members of their own group. At the same time, they learn that some of their experiences have been very different as a result of other social identities or experiences.

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After meeting in their affinity groups, participants usually engage in a “fishbowl” activity to move the personal sharing to the large group. The purpose of a fishbowl is to support voicing and deep listening across the social identity groups participating in an intergroup dialogue. One group, seated in an inner circle with members of their own affinity group, dialogues about their insights from the separate group meeting. The other group, seated in an outer circle, listens to the dialogue but does not respond immediately. At the end of the first group’s sharing, each member in the outer group may acknowledge one thing that he or she heard in listening to the inner group. This format is then repeated with the groups’ switching roles (see the appendix). Following the structured fishbowl, participants are able to ask each other additional questions, bring in insights from readings and conceptual frameworks, and explore ways to deepen the dialogue as well as continue their own learning. In this way, participants begin to understand that their social identity–group experiences may be marked by similarities and differences across and in groups. Furthermore, participants are encouraged at this point to remember that personal experiences are influenced by historical, political, economic, social, and cultural dynamics.

In exploring differences and common ground, participants may also begin to see points of connection that develop out of a discussion about real or perceived differences. For example, participants in a gender dialogue who have listened empathically to women describing their fear and lack of safety walking on campus at night might learn that gay men, transgender individuals, men of color, people with physical disabilities, and others have also felt unsafe on campus. Facilitators may invite participants to identify how and why people feel unsafe and how such experiences might be similar and different for different groups. The next step in a gender dialogue might be for participants to discuss how working together to develop strategies for increasing women’s safety on campus might be used to make the campus a safer place for everyone.

### ***Linking Reflection and Action***

Although many multicultural education efforts focus on increasing knowledge or awareness about discrimination and oppression, intergroup dialogue

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assumes that it is important for students to acquire knowledge and awareness *and* the skills and dispositions needed to become active participants in creating a more inclusive and socially just society. This acquisition is important because a major challenge faced by college students who want to translate their learning into concrete actions is knowing where to begin (Zúñiga, 2000). Like Tatum (1992), we believe it is unethical to ask students to critically examine issues of social oppression without offering hope and practical tools for creating change.

Through active, experiential, and dialogic methods, intergroup dialogue fosters critical reflection and strengthens individual and collective capacities to work in and across groups to promote social justice. This approach to learning fosters a dynamic and multidimensional (intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup) reflection process by which “an experience, in the form of thought, feeling or action, is brought to consideration” (Brockbank and McGill, 2000, p. 56). In intergroup dialogue, the issues brought forth may relate to participants’ past experiences or they may involve here-and-now events that occur in the group’s life (Marshak and Katz, 1999). Reflecting about these experiences may occur privately (through writing) or publicly in dyads or in the large group. Such exploration, however, involves more than just “sharing” and “getting to know you/getting to know myself” types of processes. These experiences are continually linked to reading that illuminates and analyzes the larger social, economic, cultural, and historical forces that shape people’s perceptions and lives in different ways for different “kinds” of people.

The four-stage design provides a number of opportunities for participants to move from reflection to action. For instance, skill building, debriefing, and dialoguing support the development of dispositions and behaviors needed to engage in active and inquiry-focused learning about themselves and others (see “Methods for Deepening the Conversation” in the appendix). In addition, the design allows participants to understand enough about the dialogue process itself so that they can transfer their learning to other situations and endeavors. The opportunity to discuss the quality of interaction and discourse at the end of a session can transform conflicting relationships as participants gain a deeper understanding of why there is tension and misunderstanding and how

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to work with each other's realities. The ability to deal constructively with issues of conflict and injustice in the dialogue may then be applied to situations outside the dialogue.

Although an increased awareness of the causes and effects of group inequality is necessary for participants to improve relationships across differences or challenge social inequities, it does not necessarily lead to action for change outside the dialogue group (Chesler, 2001). Experimenting and practicing with new behaviors inside and outside the dialogue can actively support participants in developing new skills and commitments. As members of a small group that is also a microcosm of the larger society, IGD participants experience some of the issues that arise in groups (for example, inclusion-exclusion dynamics of norms guiding group engagement, membership, participation, and influence) and may replicate familiar intergroup power relations. Paying attention to and trying to change these processes in the group provides additional insights about ways participants can interrupt and change their own and others' behaviors that intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate oppressive group dynamics.

Even though the process of envisioning new commitments toward action for social justice is ongoing through the four stages of intergroup dialogue, it is most prominent in the third and fourth stages. Toward the end of Stage 2 or at the beginning of Stage 3, participants are encouraged to experiment with new behaviors. They are invited to deepen their conversations, to consider ways of applying what they have learned in their spheres of influence outside the dialogue, and, in some cases, to participate in action projects (see "Stage 4" in the appendix). They are encouraged to plan ways they can use their new individual and group skills to take collaborative actions that promote inclusion and social justice. Such carryover requires that participants clearly understand the process as well as the content lessons embodied in intergroup dialogue. When learning that occurs in an intergroup dialogue can be identified and named, it is more likely that participants will extend or translate these lessons to situations outside the dialogue.

To help participants develop confidence in taking action, skill-building activities, learning assignments, and role plays are incorporated in the design. For example, participants are invited to examine the action continuum

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(see the appendix) and their spheres of influence (self, friends, family, school, work, community) and to identify actions they might undertake in each sphere to intervene in unjust or hostile situations (Goodman and Schapiro, 1997). They can also prioritize actions and identify possible strategies and risks. This exercise moves the learning process from awareness and reflection to visualizing actual steps they can take to effect change. If time allows, role-play scenarios can also be enacted in which participants can practice taking action. Some participants will be more ready and committed than others to take action for social justice. Toward the end of the dialogue, some participants may be ready to change the world, while others may want to focus on learning more about social inequality and still others may be ready to alter their own personal attitudes and behaviors.

As is evident from this discussion, the three practice principles are themselves highly interrelated. Participants' ability to fruitfully explore commonalities and differences often relies greatly on understanding how societal structures affect their individual, personal experiences. Similarly, the bridging of differences can also positively affect their motivation and confidence to participate in social justice efforts. And as students engage more with the society at large, they discover more ways in which issues of inequality are manifest in their own educational institutions, the media, and in other aspects of their daily lives.