[ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING]

Evaluating Intergroup Dialogue:
Engaging Diversity for Personal and Social Responsibility

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In 2003, supporters of the University of Michigan's defense of its affirmative action policies filed seventy-four *amici curiae* in the U.S. Supreme Court contending that diversity in educational settings is crucial to student learning. These *amicus* briefs emphasized that interactions with diverse peer groups encourage students to learn from each other, to understand perspectives that reflect different experiences and various social backgrounds, and to gain the cultural competence critical to effective local and global leadership. In support of similar goals, the Association of American Colleges and Universities has called for "a kind of learning students need to meet emerging challenges in the workplace, in a diverse democracy, and in an interconnected world" (AAC&U 2002). AAC&U initiatives like Core Commitments have supported universities' efforts to help students develop a sense of personal and social responsibility that involves taking seriously the perspectives of others, grounding action in ethical considerations, and contributing to the larger society—all outcomes associated with diversity work in higher education.

But what kind of education actually leverages diversity to foster these outcomes? Evidence presented to the Supreme Court in 2003 and research conducted since has made clear that if diversity is to have educational benefits, colleges and universities need to make full use of it as an institutional resource (Chang et al. 2003; Gurin et al. 2002). Colleges and universities must create academic initiatives that engage students intellectually and foster an understanding of group-based inequalities and other dynamics that affect intergroup relationships. Educators must provide guided interaction among students of different backgrounds to ensure that students engage constructively to understand their similar and different experiences, and develop individual and collective efficacy to influence the world around them.

Intergroup dialogue (IGD) programs are one way to engage students in meaningful and substantive interaction across difference. Given the increasing number of such programs nationwide, they represent an opportunity to assess the value of a diversity education effort across institutions. We recently conducted a nine-university collaborative study to evaluate the effects of gender and race/ethnicity intergroup dialogues.[1]

IGD Practice and Theory

Intergroup dialogue initiatives bring together students from two different social identity groups in a sustained and facilitated learning environment. As an educational method, IGD engages students to explore issues of diversity and inequality and their personal and social responsibility for building a more just society (Zúñiga at al. 2007). Dialogue is a collaborative communication process that engages students in self–other exchanges that illuminate intellectual and experiential similarities and differences. Intergroup dialogue may occur between women and men, people of color and white people, or people of different religions.

The IGD practice we researched follows the theoretical model shown in figure 1 (Nagda 2006). The three broad goals of intergroup dialogue, represented as *outcomes*, are: to develop *intergroup understanding* by helping students explore their own and others' social identities and statuses, and the role of social structures in relationships of privilege and inequality; to foster *positive intergroup relationships* by developing students' empathy and motivation to bridge differences of identities and statuses; and to *foster intergroup collaboration* for personal and social responsibility toward greater social justice.

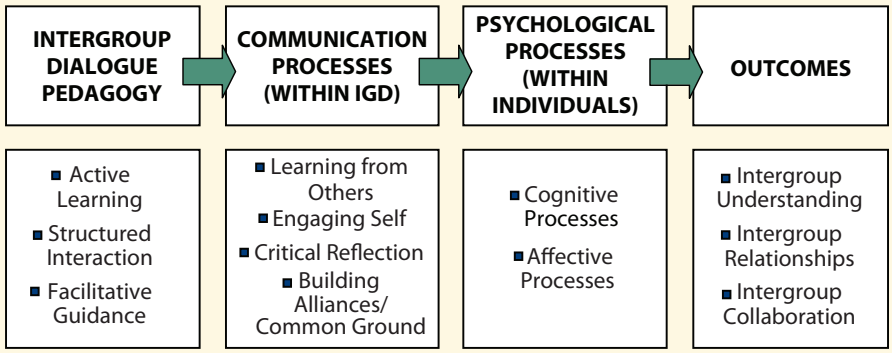
IGD learning pedagogy involves three important features:

1. Active and engaged learning: IGD course curricula include readings (historical, sociological, scientific, and narrative), didactic and experiential activities, writing assignments, and questions to stimulate reflection, critical analysis, and dialogue. Writing assignments provide space for reflection and help students integrate their learning from the dialogue sessions, readings, and experiences inside and outside of class.

2. Structured interaction: Through credit-bearing courses, IGD brings together equal numbers of students from at least two identity groups for sustained engagement. IGD classes usually meet for two to three hours per week over a period of ten to fourteen weeks. Students learn interdependently as they practice listening, asking questions, exploring contentious issues, and making connections with others. With the help of facilitators, students develop guidelines for respectful dialogic engagement, including working with disagreements and conflicts.

3. Facilitated learning environments: A team of two cofacilitators, one from each identity group, works together to guide intergroup dialogue. Before

Figure 1: Theoretical framework of Intergroup Dialogue Practice and Research



facilitating an IGD, faculty, professional staff, and graduate or undergraduate students undergo intensive knowledge and skills development. They learn how to create an inclusive and involved learning environment, use structured activities to promote reflection and integration of academic content, and model dialogic communication and collaboration.

Research Questions and Design

In the multiuniversity research project, we wanted not only to understand *what* outcomes result from intergroup dialogue, but also explain *how* intergroup dialogue affects student learning, which we refer to as *processes*. We focused on two sets of processes: the psychological processes that occur *within* individuals (Dovidio et al. 2004), and the communication processes that occur *among* individuals (Nagda 2006). We theorized that these processes mediate the impact of intergroup dialogue pedagogy on outcomes, as shown in figure 1.

Among other questions, we asked: What are the primary effects of intergroup dialogue on the three major categories of outcomes? Do both race/ethnicity and gender dialogues show these effects? Do the effects of intergroup dialogue exceed those of content learning about race/ethnicity and gender—i.e., are intergroup dialogue groups more effective than courses on race/ethnicity and gender that do *not* use the dialogue method?

The research design addressed issues of selectivity, causality, and dialogue topic through the following features:

Random Assignment: At participating institutions, interested students applied online to enroll in intergroup dialogue courses. Institutional teams matched applicants by race and gender and randomly assigned students to dialogue groups (experimental groups) or to groups whose members did not participate in any intergroup dialogues (control groups). This design allowed us to control for student self-selectivity and attribute observed learning outcomes to intergroup dialogue practices. Participating researchers conducted a total of twenty-six race/ethnicity dialogues with twenty-six control groups, and twenty-six gender dialogues with twenty-six control groups.

Comparison Groups: In addition to the control groups, the study included comparison groups consisting of social science classes on race/ethnicity and gender that used a lecture-discussion format. These comparison groups allowed us to test whether observed effects could be attributed to the dialogue method rather than simply to content learning about race/ethnicity and gender. Participating researchers conducted fourteen race/ethnicity and fourteen gender social science comparisons.

Assessment Methods: The project consisted of a mixed-methods study. Students in the dialogues, control groups, and comparison groups completed a survey at the term's start, a survey at the end of the term, and a one-year longitudinal follow-up survey. The surveys were supplemented using qualitative methods (videotaping, content analysis of students' final papers, and interviews).

Result Highlights

Analyses of pre- and postsurvey data (table 1) indicate that intergroup dialogue produces consistent positive effects across all three categories of outcomes:

Intergroup Understanding: Awareness of inequality and its relationship to institutional and structural factors (economically disadvantaged schools, discrimination, low availability of adequately paying jobs, unequal access to education) are important measures of intergroup understanding. Students in both the race/ethnicity and gender dialogues showed greater increases in awareness and understanding of both racial and gender inequalities and their structural causes than did students in the control groups or the social science classes. Race/ethnicity dialogues also significantly affected students' understanding of income inequality, although gender dialogues did not have the same result. Another measure of intergroup understanding that showed a positive impact was identity engagement: a student's ability to think and learn about his or her group identity and its relationship to perspectives that the student and other group members tend to hold.

Intergroup Relationships: Dialogue increased students' positive intergroup relationships. In contrast to students in both the control and comparison groups, dialogue participants showed significantly greater motivation to bridge differences and greater increases in empathy. These effects were consistent across both gender and race/ethnicity dialogues.

Intergroup Collaboration and Engagement: Assessments of how

dialogue fosters intergroup collaboration toward personal and social responsibility revealed consistent positive effects. Dialogue participants, more than students in the control groups and comparison classes, expressed increased motivation to be actively engaged in their post-college communities by "influencing social policy," "influencing the political structure through voting and educational campaigns," and "working to correct social and economic inequalities." Dialogue also increased students' confidence in taking action and their actual behaviors. After completing the dialogues, students indicated greater personal responsibility for educating themselves about "biases that affect their own thinking" and about "other groups." They also showed greater responsibility for "challenging others on derogatory comments made about groups" and for participating in coalitions to address discrimination and social issues. All these results were greater for the students participating in the dialogues than for those in comparison classes.

Final Thoughts

Developing and acting on a sense of personal and social responsibility are lifelong endeavors. Our work with intergroup dialogues, both through practice and evidenced in our research, confirms that higher education institutions can support students as they develop these capacities. Through sustained dialogue with diverse peers that integrates content learning and experiential knowledge, intergroup dialogue encourages students to be intellectually challenged and emotionally engaged. These facilitated relationships influence students' understanding of their own and others' experiences in society and cultivate individual and collective agency to effect social change.

Yet if intergroup dialogue is an effective learning practice, assessments that confirm its worth and explain its mechanisms are also essential. Educators and researchers must continue to provide evidence of the value of educational diversity as we strive to strengthen the role of higher education in building just futures. This article has emphasized evidence relating to some selected predicted outcomes of intergroup dialogue. Further evidence related to the whole theoretical model will be presented in forthcoming articles and a book expected in summer 2009.

Table 1: Effects of intergroup dialogue across time

	OUTCOMES	EFFECT OF DIALOGUE VS. CONTROL	EFFECT OF DIALOGUE VS. SOCIAL SCIENCE COMPARISON
INTERGROUP UNDERSTANDING	■ Awareness and Structural Understanding of Gender and Racial Inequality	***	***
	■ Structural Understanding of Income Inequality	*	*ns*
	■ Identity Engagement	***	***
INTERGROUP RELATIONSHIPS	■ Empathy	***	***
	■ Motivation to Bridge Differences	***	***
INTERGROUP COLLABORATION	■ Anticipated Post-College Involvement in Redressing Inequality	***	***
	■ Confidence and Frequency of Taking Action	***	***

*This table shows change over time comparing intergroup dialogue participants to students in the control group and the social science classes. These effects are consistent across race/ethnicity and gender dialogues with the exception of structural understanding of income inequality (significant effects demonstrated for race/ethnicity but not gender dialogues). The level of significant difference is indicated thus: *** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$, ns = non-significant effect.*

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1: *Participating institutions were: Arizona State University, Occidental College, Syracuse University, the University of California-San Diego, the University of Maryland-College Park, the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, the University of Texas-Austin, and the University of Washington-Seattle.*