

Intergroup Dialogue, Constructive Conflict and Social Power:
Towards Transforming Inequality

Diane R. Swords
Syracuse University

Abstract

Longstanding intractable conflicts around race, gender, economic status, religion, disability and other identities are rooted in inequalities of social and material power. Intergroup dialogue is one intervention in such conflicts. I have been co-facilitating intergroup dialogues on race, gender and religion at Syracuse University for 11 years. The investigation in this paper grows from the dissonance between believing in the potential of intergroup dialogue to improve systemic inequality, while at the same time taking critiques of dialogue very seriously. By foregrounding critiques, then applying theory and research from Conflict Resolution and intergroup dialogue literatures on how dialogue can work towards more equal power, I will highlight the cautions already embedded in the academic intergroup dialogue (IGD) model that address these critiques. Finally, I recommend additional research to further this work for social justice.

Intergroup Dialogue, Constructive Conflict and Social Power: Towards Transforming Inequality

Introduction

Longstanding intractable conflicts around race, gender, economic status, religion, disability and other identities are rooted in inequalities of social and material power. Intergroup dialogue is one intervention in such conflicts. This paper explores the already interdisciplinary literatures of Conflict Resolution and Intergroup Dialogue, by bringing together their contributions to enable us to understand relations of power and to forge paths to greater social justice. Doing so expands “alternatives to conventional adversarial thinking” (Kriesberg, 2015b, p.5)

I have been co-facilitating dialogues on race, gender and religion at Syracuse University while following the Intergroup Dialogue model, IGD, for 11 years. The investigation in this paper grows from the dissonance between believing in the potential of IGD to improve systemic inequality, while at the same time taking very seriously critiques of dialogue (though not necessarily of the IGD model), many of which suggest crucial cautions.

By foregrounding critiques, then applying theory and research from the literatures described on how dialogue can work towards more equal power, I will highlight the cautions already embedded in the IGD model that address these critiques. Finally, I recommend additional research to further this work.

Critiques of Dialogue

Many groups, whether at the interpersonal, community or international level, hesitate to use dialogue to address conflicts involving social inequality or asymmetries of power. Among the common

critiques are that those who participate are betraying their side (Schwartz, 1989, p. 181); that it keeps the parties talking rather than acting or seeking friendship rather than political change (Richter Devroe 2008; Pincock 2008; Gurin, Nagda & Zúñiga 2013) and that it actively maintains or even re-inscribes oppressive power relations rather than overcoming them (Ahmad, Dessel, Mishkin, Ali & Omar, 2015; Richter-Devroe 2008; Rios & Stewart 2015, Sharoni 2012).

Those who feel that dialogue can be too much talk, or only about “friendship” without recognizing power or working for change caution against tokenizing or colonizing. Tokenizing happens when valuing a group’s culture becomes the focus and conversation is about “food, clothes, and holidays”. Colonizing is maintaining this kind of individual/cultural focus without attending to “sociopolitical contexts, relations of domination, and social action” (Gurin, et al., 2013, p. 292). Dialogue can also mask “important differences and inequalities” in the name of civility, which silences certain marginalized forms of communication (p. 293).

A similar way of maintaining power is referred to as “normalization”. Rios and Stewart (2013 p. 116) refer to a pattern of normalization that takes place in any system of privilege, whereby privilege remains invisible, making dominance appear normal, thus maintaining the status quo. In relation to dialogues between Palestinians and Israelis (in Israel or in the diaspora), normalization has been defined as “glossing over the crucial power asymmetries between the two parties to the conflict, the occupier and the occupied”, acting as if the dialogues are between equal parties (Richter-Devroe 2008 p. 36). Ahmad et al. (2015) explain different meanings for Palestinians in different situations, that is, within Israel, or in the diaspora. The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel says normalization characterizes any dialogue that does not have as its goal resistance to the Israeli occupation, while others say normalization is “accepting the status quo without taking action” (p. 239). Sharoni (2012) concludes in reference to Israeli/Palestinian women’s organizing that there must be a

“move away from a focus on dialogue, based on similarities, to a framework of solidarity, grounded in the critical differences between the two communities of women that represents occupier and occupied” (p. 126).

Hammack and Pilecki (2015) distinguish two models of dialogue based on whether they account for power differences. They criticize a “coexistence” model for reinforcing power asymmetries by emphasizing only building relationships, and ignoring the systems of inequality. They promote what they call a “confrontation” model. Their research shows that this model recognizes and disrupts these asymmetries. Maoz (2011), in her research, further breaks dialogue models into four orientations: coexistence, as explained above; joint projects, in which parties work on a common goal, usually not related to the conflict; confrontational, as above; and narrative, which combines “the formation of personal ties with discussions of the conflict and of power relations. She has strong critiques of the first two for not addressing power. She also expresses cautions for the latter two: In the confrontation model, facilitators must guard against verbal violence and de-legitimation of the other group. The narrative model has to balance rather contradictory goals of both being personal and still representing the political context (p. 120-121).

Rios and Stewart (2013) note that those with privilege “reinterpret basic human rights, such as access to education, safe housing, health care and reproductive freedom, as privileges earned” (p. 116). This “myth of meritocracy” (McIntosh, 1989, p. 11) makes power invisible. Recognizing this danger, they offer strategies for “making the invisible visible” (Rios and Stewart, 2013, p. 116). One method they use to do so is to use Global Feminisms Project archive, which includes transcripts from 53 interviews with women from Nicaragua, China, India, Poland and the US that illustrate the workings of power under a wide variety of contexts. They show “the use of visibility and invisibility to create and

maintain privilege, especially at specific intersections such as feminists of color, US anti-capitalist feminists, and Christian Indian feminists” (p.118).

Chesler (2007), a strong proponent of IGD, recognizes its hazards and juxtaposes the hope of dialogue with its possible limitation. The hope is that “it may create better understanding among people whose cultures and traditions differ from one another” ...and help them “understand the ways in which traditions of cultural and material dominance, privilege and oppression play out...”. The limitation of dialogue is that it may *only* accomplish these understandings and only on an abstract level. “If such new insights and understandings about oneself and one’s own cultural group as well as about others’, are not translated into new personal and collective action, a major opportunity has been lost.... And fundamental social structures maintaining privilege and oppression go unchecked” (p. 294).

One confusion that complicates evaluation of dialogue is the many different uses of the word dialogue. In everyday language, it can refer to any conversation. Therefore, to make judgments about dialogue it is important to identify different dialogue programs, and specifically to explain what distinguishes the intergroup dialogue model. Through doing so, I hope to identify the factors that prevent normalization and reinforcement of injustice and move in the direction of greater justice. Not every form of conversation can counter unjust power dynamics, and many, indeed, have the problematic effects for which all dialogue is often critiqued.

These important critiques also parallel those of other conflict resolution processes. For example, Lederach (2003) describes his experience in bringing conflict resolution projects to Latin American relations in the 1980s. Colleagues expressed suspicions that “quick solutions to deep social-political problems would not change things in any significant way” and that the idea of resolution could be “just another way to cover up the changes that are really needed” (p. 1). Just as he validates these concerns and uses them to deepen his practice, and develop the process of “conflict transformation”, some

dialogue models, carefully planned and properly facilitated, can uncover power, rather than cover it up, and begin actions change.

Roots of Dialogue

Both Conflict Resolution (CR) and the intergroup dialogue literature put forth dialogue's potential for social change and justice. Research in both these (overlapping) fields affirms that there are techniques that some (not all) forms of dialogue apply that make it more likely that they will have positive results with regard to addressing structural injustices.

The fields of peace studies and CR began to emerge after World War II when organizations sought to avoid a war between the US and the USSR. It was in this era that colleges began programs in these studies, especially colleges associated with traditional peace churches, as well as the Catholic institutions (Kriesberg, 2015b, p. 33). IGD is rooted in the democratic and intergroup education movements of the 1930s and 1940s, and in interdisciplinary literatures rooted in social psychology.

Both Conflict Resolution literature and IGD literature take Allport's (1954) contact theory as a beginning point. Everett and Onu (2013, p. 1) summarize the four conditions Allport claims must be fulfilled for contact to have positive results:

- 1) equal status of both groups in the contact situation;
- 2) intergroup cooperation
- 3) common goal and
- 4) support by social and institutional authorities

While research on contact under ideal conditions often reveals positive results (Maoz 2011, p. 117), our concern is with those groups that do not have equal status – whether it is racial groups, men and women, or political situations such as Israel/Palestine. This paper asks what happens if the equal status condition is not fulfilled.

Many of the developments in both CR and IGD respond to this issue of unequal status. The constructive conflict approach concedes that “the benefits of a conflict generally are not equal for all the contenders, but some benefits may accrue to many contenders and highly destructive consequences for the contenders can be avoided” (Kriesberg, 2015b, p. 7). An emerging concept in the 1970s studied “how conflicts can be nondestructively escalated to advance freedom, justice and other widely shared values...” (p. 180). Two broad strategies of the constructive conflict approach emerged: nonviolent action and conflict intervention. Nonviolent struggle was laid out in Gene Sharp’s (1973) *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, and carried out in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and democratic struggles in numerous other nations (p. 181). Conflict intervention takes many forms, and dialogue is one of these. As Kriesberg notes, “the emphasis on conflict transformation in the constructive conflict approach helps avoid grandiose expectations...and focuses attention on how conflict can be re-framed or re-defined to be more constructively managed” (p. 183). Northrup suggests this when she calls for dialogue as a “long-term strategy for the transformation of identities in the case of larger social and political conflicts” (1989, p. 81)

I discuss the CR literature in two parts: theory on the potential of dialogue, and some samples of different models. In reviewing IGD literature, I begin with a definition that distinguishes it from other models; I then discuss theory on the potential of dialogue, and research and strategy on addressing power in IGD. Attention to both critiques and affirmations leads me to highlight best practices for addressing power asymmetries, and a future research agenda towards the most effective pedagogies.

The Constructive Conflict Approach and Dialogue

The potential of dialogue

Publication of *Intractable Conflicts and Their Transformation* by Kriesberg, Northrup and Thorson (1989) was a landmark in the field of conflict resolution studies. This publication came right at

the end of the Cold War and signaled new thinking in the whole idea of intractability. As Elise Boulding notes in the forward, the message of this book is that “there are no unresolvable conflicts, only conflicts in which the parties stubbornly resist solutions” (p. ix). A significant role for dialogue is identified as one strategy to be explored for its potential to transform seemingly intractable conflicts. Northrup (1989) addresses it when she discusses changes in identity in conflict transformation. While dehumanization “is one of the basic processes that is hypothesized to maintain the domination-submission relationship” (p. 72); transformation becomes more possible when there is “change in the dynamics of the relationship between parties” (p. 77).

The potential for dialogue to have an effect beyond the interpersonal level is critical to addressing power differences that are embedded in social structures. Schwartz states that “grassroots dialogue can affect high-level decision-making, including government policy, providing it can overcome difficult obstacles” such as disbelief that they can have an effect; fear that they can harm their cause, or fear of personal safety” (1989, p. 186). He concludes that linking together numerous grassroots dialogues to bring policy recommendations to decision-makers could make a difference in large-scale conflicts such as the Israel/Palestine conflict. He hopes for a time when dialogue is a” customary response to intractable conflict” (p. 202).

More recent work supports these claims of the importance and potential of dialogue and the need to further study its outcomes in terms of action. Kriesberg (1998, p. 235) describes a series of sustained dialogues after the Cold War that focused on changing the relationships of the participants by moving through 5 steps. Conflict resolution interventions with small groups help to “establish the preconditions which will allow effective settlement of the conflict at the official level” (Ross 2000, p. 1024).

Kopecek, Hoch and Baar (2016) describe the “importance of civil society in conflict transformation” (p. 446), listing several conflict transformation activities in which civil society can

engage. Included in these are alternative media, election monitoring, youth work, education reform, cultural work among others. Dialogue, in this case interfaith dialogue, is also listed as a transformative initiative (p. 446). They note the importance of “informal (legally unencumbered) activities of citizens” but also warn that it is possible that civil society organizations could hinder conflict transformation or “directly fan the flames of conflict” (p. 447).

Amisi (2014) notes that women in Somaliland, Liberia and Sierra Leone found dialogue attractive and that “through a variety of performances and mechanisms of mobilization, they managed to persuade the public, conflicting parties and international actors, that peaceful resolution of war through dialogue was an opportunity for all to be agents of peace instead of agents for war” (p. 109-110).

Dialogue Models

The term dialogue is often used in common parlance to mean “just talking”. However, as Cornel West once observed, “Dialogue is a form of struggle; it’s not chitchat” (Gurin et al 2013, p. 294). Rather, formal dialogue practices are specific and structured. According to Zúñiga and Nagda (2001), “Early Greek philosophers, Native Americans, and Quakers have used, or continue to use, forms of this practice” (p. 306). They outline four general models of dialogue currently being practiced around the US in schools, communities and organizations: 1) Collective inquiry, whose goal is to find shared meaning and develop relationships; 2) Community building and social action, which aims to act on a specific project; 3) Conflict resolution and peace-building models that seek to achieve agreement to resolve conflicts and disputes; and 4) Critical-dialogical education models, which aims to develop individual consciousness while also creating change in social systems (Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001, p. 307-8). Dessel and Rogge (2008) summarize 23 different intergroup dialogue programs, illustrating that “the contemporary practice of intergroup dialogue has a wide purview, ranging from academic to global arenas” (p. 200).

Harold Saunders developed the Sustained Dialogue model (SD) from experience in the Middle East and Tajikistan (Svenson & Brouneus, 2013, p. 566). Saunders (2001), whose career path led from the National Security Council to the US State Department to the Kettering Foundation, changed his way of operating during this time. He called for a paradigm shift following the end of the Cold War, from “power politics” (36) to a focus on relationship (p. 37). SD is “an interaction that continues over a significant period of time” ... that “allows for building a cumulative agenda, developing a common body of knowledge and experience, and learning the ways in which relationships can be transformed” (Saunders, 2001, p.39). The final goal of a SD series is for the group to design action and take it into the community for it to be carried out by others (p. 41), thus infusing insights from the dialogue into broader circulation, including in the political arena.

Saunders lists things that only governments can do, “such as negotiating, enforcing and funding binding agreements and important programs” (p. 43). But he goes on to say that governments cannot “change human relationships, social behavior and political culture” (p. 43). He concludes “sustained dialogue is the essential instrument of citizens outside government” (p. 43). In his book *Politics is about Relationship* (2005), Saunders devotes a chapter to describing SD in Tajikistan, which helped to resolve the civil war there.

Svenson and Brouneus (2013) investigate the outcomes of an SD intervention in a conflict in Ethiopia. Their study shows both an “increase in perceptions of ethnic discrimination and sense of ethnic identity”. But as this is coupled with increased trust in the other group, they conclude that it supports using dialogue in situations involving “political conflict and ethnic violence” (p. 573). They further observe that while this program affects attitudes, it does not change behavior. They call for development of more “behavior-oriented dialogue programs, which may be in a better position to create change in how individuals act toward each other” (p. 573).

Dane (1997) called the ARIA framework, another dialogue model developed by Rothman, the “most clarifying model now available” because it helps people be more aware of their own values and motives (p. 506). Rothman uses this model in national, organizational and community settings to address identity conflicts. The initials stand for “Antagonism; Resonance, Inventing, and Action” representing the four phases of the process. The antagonism phase exposes negative emotions. Resonance occurs when the group has explored the needs and values of individuals and any threats to these. They then recognize common concerns, and realizing that resolution would benefit all sides. Once these interests are recognized, participants can develop mutually agreeable means of resolution, which is then carried out in the action phase (p. 507).

There are numerous community level dialogue models such as “Everyday Democracy” that use dialogue to bring people together around common interests and projects. Their website states: “Whether you’re grappling with a divisive community issue, or simply want to include residents’ voices in city government, the dialogue to change program can help community members take action and make their voice heard. The program focuses on three core components, organizing, dialogue, and action” (<https://www.everyday-democracy.org/dialogue-to-change/>)

Intergroup Dialogue

Zúñiga and Nagda (2001) place intergroup dialogue within the “critical-dialogical model”, as it aims to develop individual consciousness while working towards social change at the structural level. This model is used on many college campuses, and it is these programs that are the main focus of this paper. However, many of the strategies outlined here are also applicable in community settings and can be adapted for some international arenas.

Intergroup dialogue (IGD) as an academic course was developed at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in response to racial conflict on many campuses in the 1980s. This dialogue model was based

on pedagogical principles, academic knowledge, and empirical research. It is a “face-to-face facilitated learning experience that brings together students of different social identities 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” (Zúñiga et al 2007, p.2)

IGD is distinctive in its social justice pedagogy for addressing issues of identity, social location and access to critical social and material resources in the context of systems of power and privilege. Central to the project is the opportunity to “explore ways of working together toward greater equality and justice” (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, and Cytron-Walker, 2007, p. 2). This approach interrupts mainstream academic ideology which opposes activism and advocacy under the banner of impartiality (see “multipartiality” below).

A number of factors define the IGD model and are discussed at more length below:

- IGD involves face-to-face meetings sustained over several sessions. It is “a process, not an event” (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001).
- The curriculum develops through 4 stages: getting to know one-another and ourselves (individual identities); understanding social identities and social/structural inequalities; addressing “hot topics”; and planning collaborative action.
- Dialogues are led by trained co-facilitators of differing identities related to the topic of the class, who are committed to “multipartiality” rather than “impartiality” (Routenberg et al 2013).

- Classes are small and composed of mixed groups based on the identity of focus (eg ½ “white” and ½ “students of color”; or ½ male-identified, ½ female-identified; or ½ Christian, ½ other faiths, ½ Jewish and ½ Palestinian, etc.) This structure also contributes to multipartiality.
- Whatever the topic of focus, all classes are taught intersectionally.
- The curriculum moves from lower-risk to high risk; from individual to institutional, from knowledge and relationship to action.
- Power relations and social structures are central to the curriculum.
- Personal experience is put into context of social institutions such that affective learning supports academic understandings of inequalities and vice versa.
- Substantial focus is *put* on the collaborative action projects which provide experience working for social change, and a sense of efficacy that students have few opportunities to develop in other classes.

Research outcomes – action for structural change

A variety of research projects measure successes of intergroup dialogues in bringing about action for social change. In summarizing outcomes of 23 intergroup dialogue studies, Dessel and Rogge (2008) identify important outcomes in academic, community and international settings. Among these outcomes were “improved communication and cross-racial interaction skills, provision of support and development of friendships and uncovering common ground” (p. 226). These tend to be interpersonal level outcomes that may not address power. But institutional or structural level outcomes are also found. They measure ways in which relationships “translate into personal and collective action” and lead to “joint action on shared issues of concern”, “social change actions”, and “an increase in civic

engagement” (p. 226). These would be behavior-change outcomes as called for by Svenson and Bruneus above (2013 p. 573). It is these efforts that may lead to improving asymmetries in power and privilege.

A five- year research project involving 9 universities compared 3 types of dialogue outcomes with outcomes of students in non-dialogue classes. The outcomes studied were: “intergroup understanding”, “intergroup relationships” and “intergroup collaboration and engagement”, again the latter being most relevant to actively addressing inequality. Results showed the IGD model to produce “consistent positive effects across all three categories of outcomes” (Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen & Zúñiga 2009, p. 5-6).

Lopez and Zúñiga (2010) also note that college presidents such as Nancy Cantor and Beverly Daniel Tatum, as well as scholars on race and affirmative action say IGD “provides opportunities to practice engaging difference within contemporary contexts of unequal power and privilege (36). Besides engaging students in challenging institutional discrimination, IGD also increases “frequency and confidence in taking action individually or with others”, that is, intergroup collaboration. This effect is observed to carry over to “post-college commitment to action” (p. 38).

Strategies and tools of IGD

Many aspects of the IGD model are designed to address the critiques mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Principles of 1) class design 2) curriculum and 3) facilitation are carefully crafted to address social structures of inequality.

Class design

IGD programs involve an application process to achieve approximately equal numbers of dominant and targeted identities along the dimensions on which the class focuses. Sustained meetings

take place over several sessions. Fourteen sessions allow for a four-stage design with 3 or 4 sessions of about 3 hours each per stage.

At the beginning of the semester, guidelines are agreed upon. These are best created with the participation of the group, and the process can be used to consciously introduce issues of power in the space (Gurin, et al., 2013 p. 30), aiming for and raising participants' awareness of such factors as social influence and speaking time (Hammack & Pilecki, 2015, p. 376). To address speaking time, for example, a useful guideline might be "make space, take space" to consider whether one is likely to dominate or hold back and to encourage them instead to aim for balancing talk time. "Share the plot but not the characters" encourages members to share ideas from class without breaking confidentiality, making it easier to voice sensitive personal stories and experiences. "Challenge by choice" encourages risk-taking, with an acknowledgement that participants retain a right to considering their sense of safety. In these cases, participants should always be reminded to examine their motivations in choosing (or not) to challenge themselves. We should always ask "how do power and privilege play into our experiences" and decisions (Gurin, et al., 2013, p. 53). Important in this discussion is analysis of the degree to which safety is possible, the recognition that progress will not be made without discomfort, and the ways in which some ideas of safety can be used to advantage already dominant groups. For example, accepting a common ground rule of "agreeing to disagree" allows "agent group members to exercise their privilege to opt out of a conversation that makes them uncomfortable" (Arao & Clemens, 2013, p.143).

Curriculum

The IGD curriculum is based on a four stage design, beginning with exploring one's own identities and those of classmates. Exercises help students distinguish personal and social identities, attributed identity from how one sees oneself, targeted from advantaged identities, etc. Concepts such as salience and intersectionality are introduced. A narrative biography of each member's understanding of

themselves and experiences they have had as a person of the identities related to the course (and others that are important to them) is shared with the group at the end of the first stage. These help the students build trust with one another and learn about experiences that are unfamiliar in their lives.

The second stage places these identities in larger social context and looks at systems of oppression and advantage. One of the main activities for this stage is experiencing the “web of oppression” a physical web that represents social structures and institutions and how they intersect to advantage some while disadvantaging others. Students read cards that are attached to the web, organized by institution. These cards have facts about the differential data based on identity (race, gender, religion, etc.) As with all activities, the debriefing is essential. This is an excellent opportunity to bring in issues of intersectionality and ways that we are simultaneously advantaged in some areas while oppressed in others. Another activity, called the “privilege walk” is often used at this stage. Participants begin in a straight line in an open space. Statements are read related to experiences of identity. They step forward if they have a positive experience related to the statement, or back if negative. For example, one statement might be “Step forward if the history and accomplishments of your racial group were regularly taught to you in school”. After a number of statements, the social stratification of the group becomes obvious. Good facilitation can bring out issues of merit, history, visibility and invisibility, social systems, oppression and internalized oppression that become apparent in this exercise.

Another highly impactful activity in the second stage is “caucus groups”, in which students gather with those of their identity (by race in the race dialogues, gender in gender dialogues, etc). This comes at the end of the second stage and usually takes the dialogue to a much deeper level. Some participants commonly complain about this activity, asking “why did you divide us just when we had become such good friends?” This is usually voiced by the dominant group, while the relief and pleasure the targeted group often feels is evident in their enthusiasm. Discussions in caucus groups are often

deeper, while also revealing the complexities/intersectionality of their identities within the dimension on which they are divided (Ahmad et al 2015, p. 250-251). This is one of the points when participants realize more deeply the outside constraints on their relationships and the power involved in their different placement in society in spite of their intentions. When they return to the larger group, they repeat their caucus dialogue in “fishbowls” (that is, one identity group watches silently while the other group, seated in the middle, re-plays their caucus group experience). One of the impactful recognitions is usually that they DID say things to their “own” group that they did not feel comfortable saying in front of the “other” group. In debriefing, students share emotional responses and power analysis: “Different sources of power and ways of exercising and sharing power are analyzed in order to better help students understand the nature of power, how and why it is tied to social identity, and what they might work towards in terms of equalizing power inequalities” (Ahmad et al., 2015, p. 249).

In the third stage, students use the dialogue skills they’ve been learning and practicing to discuss “hot topics”, encouraging them to take risks. This stage particularly requires frequent questions or observations about who is speaking, how authority is claimed (or not), how power is operating, what are the dominant narratives on the topic, and what narratives are missing. Facilitators will raise those questions not raised by participants, but by this point, students also have become aware of these factors and often point them out themselves.

All through the semester, students have been developing an “Intergroup Collaborative Project” (ICP) which culminates in the fourth stage with a presentation to the class in one of the last sessions. Groups are put together by facilitators, are composed of 3-5 members each, and are carefully designed to require work across different identities. The project is intended to help the groups explore models of social justice action and use their knowledge to create or participate in action. Goals include to increase their sense of efficacy, their repertoire of possible actions and how to form strategies, as well as their

commitment to future action. But the most important learning often comes from the dynamics of working together in groups with people of different identities. The concepts of alliances (working *with* allies, not *for* less privileged groups) (Maxwell, Nagda and Thompson, 2011, p. 182), and of building coalitions (Chesler, 2001, p. 302) are explored to increase their repertoire for creating systemic change.

Weekly reading assignments help to provide insights about groups not present in the room and place their identities and experiences in the larger context of social structures. Writing assignments guide students to reflect upon the relationship between their experiences in class, their personal lives, and the readings. Another feature of this program is

Facilitation

Dialogues are led by a pair of trained facilitators matching the identities of the class (ie, a white facilitator and a facilitator of color in the race dialogue, etc.) Co-facilitation has numerous benefits. These pairs can model the types of interactions of risk-taking, power analysis, emotional awareness, and commitment to justice that we are seeking in the class. They strive to model “power with”, geared towards empowerment and equality, rather than “power over” (p. 182), as we hope to support in our students. Facilitation is in itself an act of allyship that provides a glimpse of what that can be for students.

A distinct difference of IGD from some other forms of dialogue is the use of multi-partiality (as opposed to impartiality). Multi-partiality is “a technique to level power within interactions” (Routenberg, Thompson and Waterburg, 2013, p. 174), one which “engages all sides and participants” (Ahmad et al 2015, p. 252). Multi-partiality is based on the realization that there is no “view from nowhere”, no “gods-eye view” (Harraway, 1989) no neutral position. Since dominant or master narratives have power behind them, they often stand unchallenged. Multi-partiality makes space for

“counter-narratives”, those perspectives from marginalized viewpoints. Facilitators can provide these or open the way for students to share theirs. Facilitating these narratives requires a delicate balance in order to encourage students’ own analysis, and keep those who believe the dominant narrative in the conversation. Used well, this tool “strengthens our bonds with students experiencing oppression and guides students unaware of their privilege to increased awareness” (Routenberg et al., 2013 p. 175).

Conclusions

If, indeed, all of these strategies make it more likely for dialogues to result in greater social justice, fears that participation could betray one’s group (Schwarz, 1989 p.181) could be lessened. Recalling the normalization critique, it is clear that IGD does not “gloss over power asymmetries” (Richter-Devroe, 2008, p. 36) or “accept the status quo without taking action” (Ahmad, et al., 2015, p.239), however difficult it is to do otherwise. While action projects encourage students to move beyond the classroom and act on their commitments to justice, the entire semester involves exploring inequalities and ways to redress them. A frequent difficulty is moving from seeing social justice as being about “just being nice to each other” to seeing the connection to larger structures. A suggestion made by Ahmad et al. (2015) to move from a “co-existence model” to one of “co-resistance model” (p. 240) can inform dialogues in the academy or larger contexts. They list numerous models of co-resistance in relation to the Palestinian/Israeli situation, including participation in existing campaigns to end the occupation, such as the Boycott, Divest and Sanction movement, and, especially in the case of Jewish students, education of their own community (p. 240).

As for Sharoni’s call to “move away from a focus on dialogue, based on similarities, to a framework of solidarity, grounded in the critical differences between the two communities of women that represents occupier and occupied” (2012, p.126), it appears that she is critiquing “coexistence

dialogue” - dialogue that focuses on similarities and obscures power difference. The IGD efforts at alliances and coalitions with attention to power seems fit her framework of solidarity across difference.

Multipartiality is a direct answer to Hammack and Pilecki’s (2015) concern that the power of dominant groups will control the stories that are told about history. From the above discussion, I venture a tentative answer to their key question: “Can history, however, serve as a tool for social and political change, rather than simply reproduce the status quo” (p. 372)? By making space for counter-narratives, while keeping dominant voices engaged in the conversation, deeper understanding and empathy can develop, and a culture of destructive conflict can move towards a culture of constructive conflict and mutual problem-solving. Multipartial facilitation goes a long way to prevent the “verbal violence and de-legitimation” that Maoz cautions about in the confrontation model (2011, p. 120-121), while empowering the marginalized voices.

Dialogue does not always produce positive results. But research shows that when asymmetries of power are taken into account and carefully researched methods are used to address them, better communication, better relationships, better working alliances and long-term structural changes are advanced. Clearly these methods are not fool-proof or easy to employ, but they provide a path to better communities and a more just world.

One of the comments many of our students make at the end of a semester, is how much they appreciate the friendships they made and how they expect these will continue. This is neither a sign of success or failure. Friendship, or at least positive relationships, can be a motivation to understand social structures and how they affect classmates in differential positions. It can also make alliance work, coalition building, and co-resistance more likely. These results ARE signs of success.

Future Research

Intergroup Dialogue has an extensive research base. A sampling of the research efforts are mentioned above. There is still much room for studying the effect of current practices on social justice knowledge, collaboration and action, and possible changes to improve upon them. Most relevant to the goals addressed in this paper would be a study of the action project. While the specific goals of action for social justice are infused throughout all IGD classes, the Intergroup Collaborative Project (ICP) is the centerpiece and culmination of that effort.

I would suggest four research questions that can be addressed through qualitative methods:

- 1) To what extent do students in their projects describe relationships and dynamics of interactions with their group members in terms of social identities as well as personal ones? That is, what indications do they mention that show their understanding of power relations among the group members and the ways that their identities place them in a context that goes beyond the classroom and the individual intentions of the group members. What pedagogical strategies are referenced as supporting these understandings (if any)?
- 2) How well does their project reflect an awareness of social structures and power dynamics among the people outside the class whom the project addresses or interacts with? As with the first question, what language indicates (or not) an understanding of the ways people of different identities are implicated in larger structures?
- 3) To what extent do students find ways to match actions with the problems they wish to address in ways that can actually affect inequalities and injustices? How do they discuss cause and effect relations of the problem they identified, the tactics they chose, and the outcomes achieved?
- 4) A year after the class is over, how many students engaged in some form of social justice action?

I would hope to see this project carried out across several IGD programs on college campuses, and if possible, with programs that use similar models for community dialogues. Ideally pre- and post-semester interviews, and follow-up a year later could be recorded and analyzed on these 4 questions. Writing assignments and project presentations could also be assessed. Comparing different programs along these dimensions could help us tease out pedagogies that create the most positive results.

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