

Teaching Appreciation for Differences via Intergroup Dialogue (IGD)

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Abstract

There are many ways to teach appreciation for differences. Most often, this involves a one-and-done session with little room for continued growth or monitoring of skill development. To be effective, however, the method used to teach concepts around differences must recognize the personal and communal pain, hurt, shame, and vulnerability that marginalized groups feel resulting from the dominant culture's lack of awareness of and sensitivity to diversity and inclusion. Recognizing these aspects helps individuals respond to feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy. The difficulty is that people often attribute blame to others and think the responsibility for change belongs to someone else. Intergroup dialogue offers an interactive four-stage model that can help teach appreciation for and sensitivity to differences.

This chapter presents and defines inter-group dialogue (IGD) and shares information about some of the skills generated from using IGD. These skills can help participants gain awareness and foster action and can help educators teach appreciation for differences, integrate the model into their courses, and measure the outcomes. It is through awareness and action we author our own endings and advocate for social justice. The IGD four-stage model is a

face-to-face facilitated learning experience that brings together different social identity groups over a sustained time to 1) build trust by creating boundaries for communicating about difficult topics, 2) share and understand commonalities and differences while examining the nature and impact of social inequalities, 3) dialogue about difficult topics and 4) explore ways of working together toward greater equality and justice (IGD in Higher Ed, 2007, p. 2). This chapter will begin to explore these ideas and how they can help inform teaching. only 3 stages defined

Teaching Appreciation for Differences via Intergroup Dialogue

Campus communities are engaging in meaningful, yet difficult, conversations pertaining to race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and other social identities. Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), an urban university with approximately 30,000 students, adapted the four-stage intergroup dialogue model from the University of Michigan's Program on Intergroup Relations to help with this practice (The Trustees of Indiana University, 2017). Intergroup dialogue (IGD) has gained popularity among college campuses as a rigorous pedagogical tool to help students, faculty, staff, and leaders grasp how to communicate and lead when called upon to discuss the sensitive topics related to diversity and social, economic, and environmental justice.

Recent national events demonstrate the need for leaders to thoughtfully and effectively work in multicultural environments and who can help others navigate the inherent conflicts and tensions that emerge. For instance, advocacy for same-sex marriage, the right to use public bathrooms based on gender identity rather than birth gender, and other LGBT rights are perceived by some religious groups to infringe on their religious freedoms. *Black Lives Matter*

highlights the long-standing frustration within the African-American community towards law enforcement, the justice system, and the need for corrections over issues like police stops, police-action shootings, sentencing guidelines, and mass incarceration. Fears of international terrorism and debates about immigration adversely influence the rights and freedoms of many U.S. citizens, lawful aliens, and others seeking lawful entry and protection within U.S. borders that have no association with terrorist activities. These and many seemingly less dramatic issues and events based on differences in cultural values and social identities negatively impact the ability of individuals and groups to communicate and to work and live together in many settings, including the workplace, community, neighborhoods, schools, churches, and public spaces. While IGD can benefit any undergraduate or graduate student, it will particularly benefit those seeking a greater awareness and practice with skills in civil discourse, intercultural communication, conflict resolution, and leadership.

The IGD teaching model contrasts markedly from traditional diversity educational approaches. Research demonstrates that learner comprehension of, engagement with, and willingness to converse on such topics are significantly enhanced through this model (Dessel & Rogge, 2008). The traditional diversity educational approaches introduce controversial topics absent from structured, thoughtful efforts to establish group norms, foster cohesiveness, and form trusting relationships beforehand. IGD, on the other hand, focuses on creating those relationships from the beginning. General expectations when using IGD are for students to gain transferrable skills for multicultural work, personal, and professional life settings including, but not limited to intercultural listening, conflict resolution, promotion of empathy and equality, and an increasing understanding of and appreciation for cultural differences. These experiences

are essential to prepare students to discuss issues and topics around race or other social identities, to help them identify ways to engage in and promote issues of social justice, equity, and inclusion, and to foster multicultural communication and understanding in their future endeavors as both students and professionals in their chosen fields.

IGD Competencies

Once an instructor has used the IGD training in their course, students may quickly demonstrate leadership capabilities to support others through intergroup conflicts and to help them better function as teams, corporate citizens, and community members. Specifically, the students will be able to implement the five core steps of IGD in personal, professional, and social settings. These steps include

- 1) Create a space for dialogue [a negotiated space and time to truthfully share]*
- 2) Create rules and structure for the dialogue*
- 3) Set boundaries for one group to talk and the other to listen and reverse this process before drawing conclusions as a group*
- 4) Prepare to build community through shared space and engagement*
- 5) Draft plan of action for change with their voice and within their comfort zone*

(Zuniga, 2003)

For all educational institutions, especially those in higher education, incorporating IGD into the environment can help to advance the intellectual growth of its citizens through research, creative activity, teaching and learning, and civic engagement. IGD aids in promoting educational, cultural, and economic development through a demonstrated commitment to diversity while offering concrete activities for co-curricular learning. The interactive nature of the sustained in-class dialogues and the development of dialogue facilitation skills provides students high impact curricular and co-curricular experiences supported through cross-cultural knowledge and civic responsibility centered on social justice. As some may argue, this is where

art and science meets, in that through the lived experiences of students, we can interpret perspectives understood differently from personal realities to change meaning and interpretations of difference, creating a culture that fosters inclusivity.

IGD Defined

There are many ways to teach appreciation for differences. Most to now have involved a one-and-done session with little room for continued growth or monitoring of skill development. To be effective, however, the method used to teach concepts and change thinking about differences must recognize the personal and communal pain, hurt, shame, and vulnerability that marginalized groups feel resulting from the dominant culture's lack of awareness of and sensitivity to diversity and inclusion. Recognizing these aspects helps individuals respond to feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy. The difficulty is that people often attribute blame to others and think the responsibility for change belongs to someone else. This chapter presents the skills generated from IGD to teach participants about how to bring awareness and foster action. This chapter highlights IGD as evidence-based practice, which can help educators **teach** appreciation for difference, integrate the model into their courses, and measure the outcomes. It is through awareness and action we author our own endings and advocate for social justice.

Intergroup Dialogue was developed in the 1980s by the University of Michigan Ann Arbor during campus racial conflict (University of Michigan, About, 2017). The IGD four stage model is a face-to-face facilitated learning experience that brings together different social identity groups over a sustained time to 1) understand commonalities and differences, 2) examine the nature and impact of social inequalities, and 3) explore ways of working together toward greater equality and justice (IGD in Higher Ed, 2007, p. 2). IGD is not a diversity training

model. It does not espouse to define or teach to diversity, though an outcome of engagement in IGD is that of better diversity outcomes. IGD explores, in a safe space, with both groups present, power relations, problem solving, and dialogic interactions (time in session for discussion). As its tenets IGD, unlike diversity trainings, explores the history and current differences of the topic under exploration and fosters conversation based on earned trust, authentic connections, and dialogues. As a best practice, it integrates cognitive learning about **identity, difference, and inequality** with affective involvement of **oneself and others** through shared intimate personal reflections and meaningful critical dialogue to build relationships. Through relationships, sustained change and appreciation can occur. The intentional omission of the one-and-done mentality is one of the hallmark principles of IGD, relying on the belief that we can better appreciate difference if we have time to learn about and from each other while reserving judgement. It brings to life the statements we hear often in defense of “I am not...(fill in the blank)...because I have a friend who...(fill in the blank)”. It presumes that if through the investment of time we cultivate relationships where we are able to see beyond the “fill in the blank” to call someone a friend then we should be able to use the micro example to make a macro impact.

IGD 4 Stage Model (developed by the University of Michigan)

Stage 1: Group Beginnings: Forming & Building Relationships (2-3 sessions)

GOAL: To support the formation of a dialogue-building relationship across differences. Establish group norms and rules for behavior during the process.

Stage 2: Exploring Differences & Commonalities of Experiences (3-4 sessions)

GOAL: To explore meaning, increase awareness, improve listening skills, and promote understanding through relationship building.

Stage 3: Exploring & Dialoguing About Hot Topics (3-4 sessions)

GOAL: To support and challenge risk-taking in communication about sensitive issues

Stage 4: Action Planning & Alliance Building (2 sessions)

GOAL: To acknowledge contributions and celebrate collective efforts with action

Literature Review

Through IGD, we prepare to build community and affect change by creating a space for dialogue. This becomes a negotiated space for truth where a group can create rules for dialogue, allow clear boundaries for one person to talk and the other to listen (and reverse) before drawing conclusions. Brene Brown in her book *Daring Greatly* offers the following inspiration for this type of risk-taking communication:

When we spend our lives waiting until we're perfect or bulletproof before we walk into the arena, we ultimately sacrifice relationships and opportunities that may not be recoverable, we squander our precious time, and we turn our backs on our gifts, those unique contributions that only we can make. Perfect and bulletproof are seductive, but they don't exist in the human experience. (Brown, 2013, TEDx Houston)

IGD assumes that we will be imperfect. It is through this imperfection that we can learn more about ourselves and build community together. Research has shown that sustained intergroup dialogue processes like these, which support both cognitive and personal experiential learning, foster greater commitment among students to issues of diversity and social justice upon graduation compared to more traditional diversity education programs.

The four-stage model was evaluated for validity through a Multi-University Intergroup Dialogue Research Project, assessing student learning through intergroup dialogue programs at nine institutions (Gurin, Nagda & Zúñiga, 2013; Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, & Zúñiga, 2009). Researchers compared the effects of intergroup dialogue on three categories of learning outcomes between traditional content courses on race and gender and similar courses that included an intergroup dialogue component. First, regarding intergroup understanding, students in dialogue courses showed a “greater increases in awareness and understanding of both racial and gender inequalities and their structural causes” than their counterparts in traditional content courses. Second, regarding intergroup relations, students in dialogue courses demonstrated “greater motivation to bridge differences and greater increases in empathy.” With respect to the third category involving intergroup collaboration and engagement, these students felt “greater responsibility for ‘challenging others on derogatory comments made about groups’ and for participating in coalitions to address discrimination and social issues.” They also “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” (Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, & Zúñiga, 2009, pp. 5-6).

With respect to secondary education, in a study on the “Mix it Up program” sponsored by Study Circles and the Teaching Tolerance Project, three-fourths of the educators involved reported that “students said dialogues were a positive experience, and that students held honest discussions and evidenced more respect and were more willing to cross social boundaries” while half of these educators observed conflict in school decrease which they attributed to the dialogue program (Dessel & Rogge, 2008). In a study of 178 eleventh graders in two multicultural Midwestern high schools, participation in intergroup dialogue “increased critical social awareness and new friendships with students with different social identities, students’ belief in the importance of building relationships before stereotyping, increased knowledge of different social identity groups, and increased awareness of prejudice and decreased prejudice” (Dessel, 2010b, pp. 417-18). These results indicate that IGD is a rigorous pedagogical tool that can and should be used in educational settings at all levels to promote an inclusive culture and climate.

In a study of empirical literature on intergroup dialogue outcomes, Dessel and Rogge (2008) found that participants across academic, community, secondary education, and interethnic settings generally report positive experiences with respect to improving intercultural communication and understanding and intergroup collaboration. In an academic setting, both students of color and white students participating in race dialogues reported feeling a greater sense of commonality with students from the other group (Dessel & Rogge, 2008; Gurin, Peng, Lopez, and Nagda, 1999; Gurin, Nagda, and Lopez, 2004). In pre-experimental and qualitative studies of student participation in dialogues, students reported “increased learning about the perspectives of people from other social groups, development of

analytical problem solving skills, valuing new viewpoints, understanding the impact of social group membership on identity, gaining increased awareness of social inequalities, and raised awareness of racial identity for both white students and students of color” (Dessel & Rogge, 2008, p. 224). Again, these results indicate positive outcomes for using IGD in many different types of settings.

Infusing IGD in a Course

Because of the excellent work of the founders and evaluators of IGD, infusing it in a course is simple. First, identify how much time is available to incorporate the work into the course schedule. Ideally the minimum amount of time would be four class sessions of at least three hours per session over four weeks or four weeks of two shorter sessions per week. Longer is always preferable because of the depth of the content and the time it often takes to build trust within the group. In our courses, we designed the course schedule to meet these minimums. Once you have the time identified, divide the four-stage model into a structure that works well for your students. For example, in our three-hour long class session, stages one and two occurred on the same day, stage three occurred in weeks two and three, and stage four occurred in week four of the dialogue structure.

Since Stage 1 is about building relationships and fostering trust, on the first day of the dialogue work, we had students brainstorm and create a list of rules for behavior (using some samples to get them started). They came up with rules like “be authentic” and “what happens in this room stays in this room” among others that were appropriate for these particular groups. During the Stage 2 portion of the class, they explored their differences and

commonalities with activities where they could share details about their own identities by completing a social identity wheel (e.g. <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/2017/08/16/social-identity-wheel/>) and about their cultural backgrounds by bringing a *culture box* with items that represent something about their culture. In Stage 3, skilled facilitators helped students dialogue with each other about student-generated difficult topics and navigate the safe space of our classroom. In Stage 4, students listed actions they were comfortable seeing themselves taking in the future for how to become an ally and continue to expand the work they began in this class.

Going back to the five objectives mentioned earlier, we met these objectives by helping students to create a safe space where they can share their truths with negotiated rules and structure for the dialogue fostered by skilled facilitators. Guided active listening activities in pairs helped build trust, and since the courses were roughly split in half, one half of a class was able to talk and the other to listen by using a group activity where an inner circle would talk about a given topic and an outer circle would actively listen, and then the group as a whole debriefed about the process. We helped students engage with each other and build community in many aspects of the class interactions, and students were able to leave class with a draft of their own action plans that they created within their comfort zones and using their own voices.

One major challenge with infusing this model into a course is finding facilitators who know the IGD stages and have experience participating in dialogues so they can bring facilitation skills to the classroom and foster the type of environment that is necessary for this depth of sharing. In the original model, peers are facilitators. However, at our institution,

because we are early in the implementation stages, we do not often have enough trained students to participate in peer facilitation. The University of Michigan offers a week-long summer Institute to learn more about IGD, and some of our faculty have attended this Institute and participated in several dialogues on campus, so we have well-trained faculty members who can facilitate (in lieu of students for now) and teach this type of course. We have recently created an IGD certificate program and have developed several courses where students can experience a deeper level of IGD principles and practices and even learn to become peer facilitators (and do just that in their capstone course) to help meet this challenge.

Another challenge is that students sometimes miss class, which can create a problem if they miss the relationship-building portion of the course. We minimized this challenge by stating the mandatory dialogue dates early so students would know when to be sure not to miss, but there is always someone who is ill or cannot make it.

Yet another challenge is to be certain to leave enough time for debriefing and reflection about the process and the learning, which is where a large amount of growth occurs. For the example herein, we used the four-week, three-hour class schedule, and we added a fifth week for debriefing, which helped meet this challenge.

Methods

Prior to the course start date, we administered a short questionnaire to learn about our students and determine a topic to use for the dialogue so we could, as equally as possible, split members of the class into two groups (see sample in appendix). Once determined, we discussed the resulting topic with the class to get their agreement and modifications. We then

shared materials on IGD, the stages, and other definitional information to guide the discussions and allow for comfort with the process. To get specific assessment information from our students, prior to the dialogue days, we identified the characteristics we wanted to measure. Factor-loaded questions with noted reliability and validity through Cronbach's alpha were identified to develop a pre and post-test. Five traits were measured 1) empathy, 2) awareness of social inequality, 3) beliefs about inequality in society, 4) capacity to engage in dialogue, and 5) communication regarding differences.

Sample questionnaires for assessment

Comfort in Communicating With People of Other Groups (race/gender) (pre α =.696: post α =.732)

- *a. I find it hard to challenge opinions of people in other racial/ethnic (gender) groups
- b. I am able to respect and interact positively with people in other racial/ethnic (gender) groups whose views on social issues differ from my own
- *c. I have difficulty expressing myself when discussing sensitive issues with people in other racial/ethnic (gender) groups
- e. I feel comfortable asking people of other racial/ethnic (gender) groups about their perspectives on issues involving their groups
- *f. I avoid conversations with people of other racial/ethnic (gender) groups who hold really different perspectives from my own
- *h. I worry about offending people from a different gender/race when I disagree with their points of view

A qualitative and quantitative mixed method design was used. Both focus groups and pre-posttests were employed. The instrument was a 45-item survey for pre- and posttests. The posttest included two open-ended questions.

Preliminary Results

Undergraduate students in their first year of their major in a program at a Midwestern university in both fall and spring semesters participated in this study. The total sample size was 127 students in seven sections. Originally, eight sections were scheduled to participate in the study (all different instructors, six in fall, two in spring) with three instructors not using the IGD intervention and five using IGD; however, one of the classes that did not use IGD was unable to complete both the pre and posttests, so was eliminated from the data set, so only two sections that did not use IGD are represented in the data. One instructor used IGD in the first four weeks, one used it in the last four weeks, and three used it spread over the semester. For this chapter, we looked only at the pre and posttest results for two of the areas: empathy and awareness of social inequality. Overwhelmingly, the four instructors who used the IGD intervention in their courses showed the most improvement in the 13 questions about empathy and awareness of social inequality (10/13, 11/13, 10/13, 13/13), whereas the instructor who used it in the first four weeks and the instructors who did not use IGD all showed improvement in only 7/13 questions. The students who were not exposed to IGD and those who were exposed during the first four weeks had similar results, indicating that students may need more time to experience the IGD concepts more fully.

This study focused on five traits: empathy, awareness of social inequality, beliefs about inequality in society, capacity to engage in dialogue, and communication regarding differences. For this chapter, we looked only at the pre and posttest results for the first two: empathy and awareness of social inequality, which indicates a positive relationship with infusing IGD in a course. Further results and analysis will be reported soon.

Discussion and Conclusion

Preliminary data suggests that students who used IGD in class throughout the semester (not in the first four weeks) were better able to develop their awareness of issues surrounding social justice regarding empathy and awareness of social inequalities. The quantitative data in this study begins to show trends toward a better understanding of differences and communication, confirming that appreciation for differences via IGD is worth spending additional time on for implementation and study. Additional work will include looking at the other questions in the remaining three areas, looking at qualitative data in depth, making course changes to help improve outcomes, and looking at additional courses that incorporate IGD across this campus.

Intergroup dialogues are prevalent in community, government, civic, social, and political settings at municipal, state, and national levels, suggesting the need for professionals from public affairs, law enforcement and related disciplines to lend their dialogue facilitation skills and expertise to support such initiatives. Walsh (2006) has identified over the course of 15 years more than 400 cities in 46 states and the District of Columbia that have implemented intergroup dialogue programs to improve race relations. Past undergraduate student participants in intergroup dialogue programs report direct benefits from and application of the skills, knowledge, and abilities developed through such programs to their current academic and career pursuits (Gurin, Nagda and Zúñiga, 2013).

Infusing IGD into academic courses makes sense for students and for our communities. While outcomes may differ from course to course and among institutions, students and

communities will be better for having participated. We must provide all our students with more opportunities to learn how to communicate with our growing diverse world. If we continue to offer IGD-infused courses, collect and analyze data from those courses, and improve our course development and share best practices, we can also continue to improve the outcomes, speak to program successes, expand assessment, and, in so doing, disseminate more information, as additional work is needed to conduct more comparative assessment. All of these tasks are imperative to help develop awareness and continue to promote a culture and climate of inclusivity.

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