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

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Content Objectives</th>
<th>Process Objectives</th>
<th>Structured Activities and Dialogue Starters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STAGE 1</strong>&lt;br&gt;Group Beginnings: Forming and Building Relationships (2–3 sessions)</td>
<td>• Build knowledge, values, and skills for dialogue&lt;br&gt;• Clarify the meaning of “dialogue” and other forms of communication</td>
<td>• Establish the foundations for honest and meaningful dialogue</td>
<td>• Engaging in group-building activities; exploring goals and expectations&lt;br&gt;• Distinguishing dialogue from debate; introducing Bohm’s four building blocks of dialogue (1990) &lt;br&gt;• Practicing interactive communication: speaking, listening, paraphrasing, and giving and receiving feedback (Bidol, 1986) &lt;br&gt;• Exploring personal and social identities</td>
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<td><strong>STAGE 2</strong>&lt;br&gt;Exploring Differences and Commonalities of Experience (3–4 sessions)</td>
<td>• Explore meaning of key terms such as prejudice, discrimination, and oppression and their impact on students’ lived experiences&lt;br&gt;• Increase awareness of multiple social group memberships and dynamics of inequalities&lt;br&gt;• Promote understanding of the systemic basis of group differences and conflicts in perceptions and experiences</td>
<td>• Encourage listening and perspective taking of experiences and perceptions different from one’s own&lt;br&gt;• Explore meaning of key terms such as prejudice, discrimination, and oppression in personal experiences</td>
<td>• Exploring multiple social identities: cultural chest activity&lt;br&gt;• Terminology activity to generate meaning about key terms&lt;br&gt;• Discussion of Harro’s cycle of socialization (2000b)&lt;br&gt;• Identity-based discussions and fishbowls to encourage introspection and deeper dialogue: web of oppression activity</td>
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(Continued)
### EXHIBIT 1
Overview of the Four-Stage Design of Intergroup Dialogue (Continued)

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<td>STAGE 3 Exploring and Discussing Hot Topics (3–5 sessions)</td>
<td>• Explore differences and similarities of perceptions/experiences of controversial issues across and in social identity groups • Encourage analysis of systems of privilege, power, and oppression • Explore some of the roots of conflicting perceptions and experiences (historical, cultural, institutional, interpersonal)</td>
<td>• Encourage informed/meaningful dialogue and inquiry • Probe for deeper levels of thinking, feeling, and responding</td>
<td>• Dialogues about controversial topics • 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. • 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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>STAGE 4 Action Planning and Alliance Building (2–3 sessions)</td>
<td>• Explore range of continuing learning opportunities and actions to promote diversity and social justice • Explore ways of moving from dialogue to action</td>
<td>• Bring closure to the dialogue experience</td>
<td>• Discussion of Harro’s cycle of liberation (2000a) • Develop action plans and skits to illustrate various ways of taking action for inclusion and social justice • Affirmation activities to bring dialogue experience to a close</td>
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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
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
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