personal experience, which can educate dominant culture listeners but exploit the speakers. Social workers must ensure that intergroup dialogue adheres to the two core values outlined in the Standards for Social Work Practice with Groups: rigorously respect the autonomy, worth, and dignity of each group participant and remember that the goal of the group is to create a socially just society (Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups, 2006).

Documenting the effectiveness of intergroup dialogue through rigorous research is a second challenge. Initial effectiveness data have been anecdotal or case examination. Research rigor should be improved and should examine intergroup dialogue's effectiveness for dominant and non-dominant participants, its flexibility across multiple settings, and its limitations (Dessel et al., 2006).

References


Intergroup Dialogue: Overview

Adrienne Dessel

Intergroup dialogue is an innovative and versatile non-therapeutic group work approach that social workers can use to reduce prejudice and conflict, improve communication and relationships, and promote social change (Alvarez & Cabbil, 2001; Miller & Donner, 2000; Rodenborg & Huynh, 2006). Dialogue is a process of exploring one's own perceptions, values, and experiences, and communicating them without either forcing them on others or conforming, as a way to create meaning between people (Bohm, 1992). Intergroup dialogue is a facilitated group experience that is designed to provide a safe space for participants to address divisive social issues (Dessel, Rogge, & Garlington, 2006). Intergroup dialogue may incorporate learning or experiential material, and engages participants in listening, speaking, reflecting on one's own views, and learning about the perspectives of others (Herzig & Chasin, 2006). Such dialogue involves processes of appreciation of difference, engaging self, critical self-reflection, and alliance building (Nagda, 2006). It may also address cultural differences and power imbalances.

Group work pays close attention to participants' personal, cultural, and social identities and dialogues are often co-facilitated by trained facilitators who may represent the social or cultural identities of the groups involved (Brown & Mistry, 2005; Nagda, 2006). The development of group norms is also addressed through the use of established dialogue agreements (Alvarez & Cabbil, 2001; Herzig & Chasin, 2006). Convening and facilitating intergroup dialogues combines the technical skills of social work with the micro skills of critical self-analysis and relational engagement with others (Herzig & Chasin, 2006). The practice of intergroup dialogue builds upon both the interactional group work model that seeks common ground between individual and group needs (Gitterman & Shulman, 2005) and social action group work that promotes empowerment and social change (Breton, 1995).

Social work with groups has a historical yet under recognized purpose of linking group work with social change (Alvarez & Cabbil, 2001). Intergroup dialogue is employed in academic, community, and international settings to address issues such as racism, interethnic conflict, and civic participation (Dessel et al., 2006). The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation identified four primary intentions of dialogue: exploration, conflict transformation, decision making, and collaborative action. The Public Conversations Project has identified goals of intergroup dialogue that include thoughtful speaking and listening before responding, mutual recognition of the authenticity of others, an inquiring stance, and a sense of safety, security and trust (Herzig & Chasin, 2006). The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Democratic Dialogue Project described the goals of their international dialogues as dealing with critical sociopolitical events, addressing challenges of the times, and promoting long-term change.

Groups are a social microcosm of the larger society and successful intergroup contact has been shown to improve intergroup relationships (Brown & Mistry, 2005). Stages of group process inform how a group functions and illuminate the powerful effects of addressing private issues in a public setting (Drumm, 2006). Allport's (1954/1979) contact hypothesis stated that intergroup contact results in positive effects when four conditions are present: (1) equal group status within the group encounter, (2) common goals, (3) cooperative interactions; and (4) support of those with social influence and power. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) found that
change occurs through learning about outgroups, the opportunity for reappraisal and re-categorization of outgroups, the generation of empathy and positive emotion, and the potential for friendships.

Intergroup contact that provides opportunities for "self-revealing interactions" has been shown to facilitate superordinate identity formation and reduce bias (Gaertner, Dovidio, & Bachman, 1996, p. 271). Dasgupta and Rivera (2006) found that the activation of conscious egalitarian beliefs and intention to control prejudicial behaviors can mediate the relationship between automatic prejudice and biased behavior. Furthermore, the provision of a safe and positive opportunity for interactions between different groups may reduce the anxiety and negative attitudes dominant groups have about marginalized groups. Members of non-dominant groups have also reported positive experiences from participating in intergroup education and dialogue.

Interventions that seek to educate and promote self-reflection and empathy, manipulate ingroup and outgroup perceptions, and facilitate intergroup contact and its impact on social identity roles and potential for cross-group friendships have been shown to achieve prejudice reduction through attitude change. Studies in academic settings have shown that dialogue participation has increased white students' perspective taking and sense of commonality with students of color, valuing new viewpoints, understanding the impact of social group membership on democratic settings have shown that dialogue participation has increased white students' awareness of social inequalities, and developing analytical problem-solving skills, leadership, and cultural awareness (Hurtado, 2005). Results of dialogues in community and international settings have included breakdown of stereotypes, facilitation of personal relationships, the establishment of trust and consensus building leading to critical social policy development, and commitment to social change (Alvarez & Caball, 2001; Diez-Pinto, 2004).

The first challenge is to contend with power differentials between majority and marginalized groups. Group work practitioners must take into account inherent privilege and systemic imbalances of power, and their implications for intergroup relationships, when designing and facilitating intergroup dialogues (Brown & Mistry, 2005). The second task is to improve research on intergroup dialogue outcomes. This requires collaboration between dialogue practitioners and researchers, and support for such work from funding sources. Improved research might include studies that use representative samples and random assignment and discuss response rates, attrition and social desirability bias, the use of well-established dialogue intervention protocols and measurement instruments, and employment of rigorous qualitative analysis methods. The final challenge for intergroup dialogue is to expand its potential in both research and practice in order to foster non-traditional means of resolving societal oppression, conflict and violence.

---

**References**


---

**Intergroup Dialogue: Principles**

Mona C. S. Schatz

Social group work plays a major role in building deeply meaningful and growth-filled opportunities for group members. Dialogue groups, developed as a group approach to promote meaningful group interaction, starts where the group members are, letting the group develop from its own point of departure (Konokpa,
Encyclopedia of Social Work with Groups

Edited by
Alex Gitterman
and
Robert Salmon