

# Intergroup Dialogue in Promoting Social Change

By Karla Perelstine, M.Ed.

It was the first day of the inaugural cohort Health Sciences Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) Facilitator Training. The co-facilitators, Mario Browne and Erika Gold Kestenberg, after introductions, introduced suggested ‘ground rules’ and established iterative group agreements in partnership with the 14-member group. The group is a sacred space of confidentiality where everyone’s voice is to be respected - a brave space, where participants “challenge the ideas of others, not the person”, and “seek mutual understanding”. The goal of the eight sessions was an immersive IGD experience where participants would gain skills and confidence to facilitate the IGD model in their respective units and schools.

Intergroup dialogue facilitator training was developed in the 1980s at the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor in response to racial and cultural tension. The curriculum for the training introduces four stages of learning. Each of the four stages promote the building of relationships while exploring the commonalities and differences of experience, identity, social relations, and conflict. The product outcome of the training is to plan action and build alliances.

Browne and Kestenberg have been facilitating trainings together for over ten years. Erika was introduced to the concept of intergroup dialogue by Mario and was thrilled to discover there was a name used to describe her personal desire to help magnify the need for justice in the world.

In giving it a name, it was no longer a concept, but a tangible effect, one that she could create with others to transform ideas and elevate healing. Mario “accidentally stumbled upon” intergroup dialogue 20 years ago while presenting at a graduate student conference at the University of Michigan. He recognized its utility as a force and strategy that could move individuals toward deeper understanding of self and others, and away from conflict and towards justice. Since that time, he has been “knocking down doors” across Pitt’s campus seeking “partners in crime”, or as Erika prefers, “partners in healing” to institute IGD into the academic culture here at Pitt. Erika and Mario both agree that while transformation can occur through intergroup dialogue, one must continuously engage in the practice for true transformation to occur. As they put it, “this work is about the journey”. Therefore, they suggest practicing IGD in classes, in residence halls, at meetings and even at the family dinner table. It is time to shift from debate to dialogue.

For additional information regarding upcoming facilitation trainings, please contact Mario Browne at [mcb77@pitt.edu](mailto:mcb77@pitt.edu) . Mario and Erika’s chapter, Intergroup Dialogue: Transformation From the Inside Out in the edited book, *Diversity Across the Disciplines: Research on People, Policy, Process and Paradigm* (2020) can be found [HERE](#).

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Browne, M.C. & Kestenberg, E.G. (2020). Intergroup Dialogue: Transformation From the Inside Out. In A. J. Murell, J.L. Petrie-Wyman & A. Soudi (Eds.), *Diversity Across the Disciplines: Research on People, Policy, Process, and Paradigm* (pp. 119-130). Information Age Publishing, Inc.