Assessing the Benefits, Challenges and Barriers of Peer Intergroup Dialogue Facilitation

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

University of Pittsburgh

2023

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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University of Pittsburgh, 2023

This research project examines Intergroup Dialogue courses in The Program on Intergroup Relations at the University of Michigan. I investigate the various reasons why the demand for these courses which peaked in the late 90s and early 2000's started to decline in 2018. With partisanship at an all-time high in our society, and the ability and willingness to have discourse at an all-time low, the assumption would be that the skills taught in this program would be sought after.

Research has shown intergroup dialogue to be a beneficial experience for participants; yet little research has focused on the experience or outcomes for student facilitators. This study will focus on facilitators that ranged from the Fall of 2018 all the way through May of 2022. During this period there was turnover in teaching instructors who taught these courses and supervised student facilitators, several curriculum changes including a shortened training course, and a shift to online learning through the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of this study revealed that student facilitators perceived an overall positive experience because of the community they built through taking the courses, as well as the applicable skills in working with people different from themselves. One of the main barriers to taking the courses was the perceived time commitment spent in the facilitation course. These tasks involved weekly preparation to lead the dialogue amongst their peers, as well as weekly review of peer journals. The data also revealed that students who took a semester-long training course versus those who took a mini-course felt more prepared to facilitate, as well as felt a greater sense of community through the cohort model that was created

through the whole 2-semester process. There has always been a tension between finding the right balance to fully prepare students to facilitate and the time commitment it takes versus the increasingly busy lives of students. The facilitation experience is fruitful, but it is a matter of convincing students that the process is worth the commitment and sacrifice.

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Preface

I want to acknowledge several people who supported me through this journey filled with many trials academically and personally. First, I want to thank my beautiful wife who has been by my side through the whole doctoral journey. I could not have done this without your full support and the sacrifices you made to allow me to take on this huge endeavor. To my beautiful children who are not here on earth, and whom I did not get to meet, I love you and cannot wait to meet you one day. Hope and Theo, you are my motivation to be a better person every day. Thank you for your childlike innocence, your beautiful smiles, and your infectious laughs. I hope you read this one day and are inspired to shoot for the stars, dream big, and never give up. To my amazing parents and my sister, I would not be in the position I am in without your love, and support, thank you. To my in-laws, thank you for housing us and feeding us during the doctoral journey, and a special shout out to my mother-in-law who advised, edited, and pushed me to press on.

To the Program on Intergroup Relations at the University of Michigan, this study would not have been possible without the wonderful opportunity to work with you. To my supportive colleagues, thank you for teaching me, and allowing me to grow in my understanding of Intergroup Dialogue. A special shout-out to Mark Chesler. You picked up the crumbled pieces of my confidence, through a failed proposal, and put me back together stronger than ever, thank you friend.

To my professors and committee, thank you for your time and effort to get me to the finish line. There were so many times I wanted to give up, but I thank you for pushing me and teaching me with grace and love.

1.0 Introduction

Discourse can at times seem to be a lost art form. The willingness to engage the other and be open to new ideas different than your own appears to be minimal. These trends seem to be at an all-time high within society as we try to move forward after a worldwide pandemic for the first time since 1918. Intergroup dialogue is a facilitated conversation that strives to create empathy and understanding. This model was first utilized in a higher education setting at the University of Michigan and evolved into what is now known as The Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR). The information I present in this dissertation will be pertinent for IGR, given its current situation with decreasing enrollment trends in the ALA 320: Processes of Intergroup Dialogues Facilitation and ALA 321: Practicum in Facilitating Intergroup Dialogues courses. In the peak of IGR (in the late nineties and early 2000s), the program was offering up to 16 dialogues a semester, while in recent semesters it has only been able to offer 3 to 4 as there are so few facilitators. The decline in enrollment has a direct impact on IGR's, ALA 122 Intergroup Dialogue course (see Figure 1). Each intergroup dialogue that is offered requires two student facilitators who have taken ALA 320, and to be enrolled in ALA 321 to run the dialogue. As the pool of student facilitators is limited, the result is that fewer students at the University of Michigan have access to a course that has been demonstrated to have a significant impact on education for democracy and social justice. (Gurin, P., Nagda, B., & Zúñiga, X., 2013). Now more than ever our society is in desperate need of people who have skills to facilitate the dispositions that intergroup dialogue courses build, yet a limited number of University of Michigan students become student facilitators.

Table 1

Training in Intergroup Dialogue Facilitation (ALA 320, 2 Credits)	After Participating in ALA 122, students can take this course to learn to facilitate
⬇	
Practicum in Intergroup Dialogue Facilitation (ALA 321, 3 Credits)	A Support Course that is taken in the same term as facilitating ALA 122
⬇	
Intergroup Dialogue (ALA 122, 2 Credits)	Trained student facilitators lead dialogues

An informal course review was completed in the summer of 2019 to investigate what may have caused the declining interest in IGR's core facilitation courses. There were two major findings from this review. The first was that students felt that the course commitment took too much time, as students had to commit to two full semesters to be trained and qualified to facilitate. The second was that students felt that the benefits did not outweigh the time commitment and energy required to take part in these courses. These costs included weekly preparation to lead the dialogue sessions, as well as peer review of journals, and the emotional toll that it took to lead difficult conversations. Another factor that was offered was that there were other opportunities to peer facilitate across campus. These facilitation experiences offered financial compensation, as well as less time commitment, while IGR courses only offered course credit. This review led to a major revamp in course design for the ALA 320 which went from a semester-long course to a half a semester-long mini-course that met for roughly 4 weeks. These changes led to a slight increase in enrollment for the Fall 2020 ALA 320 course, but the research from this project reveals that there was a sense from the facilitators that they were not as prepared to facilitate intergroup dialogues, compared to students who had taken a full semester course.

Later in this paper, we will see that most of the research done on intergroup dialogue has been on the participants of the dialogues. This previous research suggests that students who participate in ALA 122 likely experience significant increases in student understanding of race, gender, and income inequality, intergroup empathy, motivation to bridge differences, and commitment to social and political action. A personal conversation with Maxwell lead author of *Facilitating Intergroup Dialogues* revealed that she assumes that students who facilitate the dialogues, experience similar growth, maybe even more so, since they need a deeper understanding of the literature, activities, and facilitation skills. This study will help assess and explore the impact of facilitating an intergroup dialogue on peer facilitators and give a longitudinal view of facilitators who took a semester-long training course versus students who took a shortened version. Another unplanned aspect of this research will explore how the Covid-19 pandemic affected the facilitation experience.

1.1 Intergroup Dialogues at the University of Michigan

Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) can be traced back to the mid-late 20th century, through various social movements for marginalized populations fighting for a voice and equality. The first to utilize IGD in a higher education setting was the University of Michigan, starting on an informal basis in 1989. After a student-driven racial protest in the late 1980s, the University of Michigan President, Dr. James Duderstadt, asked for proposals to help address the race issues on campus (Chesler, 2010). What started as a collaboration between the Program on Conflict Management Alternatives and several professors in the Sociology and Psychology department to provide teaching and scholarship about social change and intergroup conflict, has evolved over the last 32 years, into

what is now known as The Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR); Maxwell, Nagda, & Thompson, M., 2011).

Intergroup dialogue occurs when members of two social groups that have a history of conflict meet face-to-face in facilitated meetings. An example of this could be an intergroup dialogue on race, in which one of the groups is made up of students of color, and the other group is made up of white students. These meetings are structured and sustained over an extended period, typically a semester. At the University of Michigan, intergroup dialogues are offered through a credit-bearing course, Applied Liberal Arts (ALA)122. This course is co-facilitated by undergraduate students (alongside an instructor-of-record). The student enrollment for the course is balanced to represent both identity groups, and the co-facilitators are placed intentionally to represent both identity groups as well. This course provides a setting for students to engage in open and constructive dialogue and explore conflicts and understanding of social justice to develop deeper empathy, collaborate across differences, and participate in active social change. There are several dialogue courses that are offered in a given semester, including race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, and educational justice (igr.umich.edu/courses/course-descriptions).

1.2 IGR's use of Student Peer Facilitators

Although an instructor of record oversees the grading of assignments and the final grade, the primary work of leading the course is done by the peer student facilitators. This is a distinguishing factor for the University of Michigan, as several peer institutions utilize a faculty and or staff-led facilitation model. Student facilitators complete an application process and must

take the prerequisite course, ALA 320: Processes of Intergroup Dialogues Facilitation, prior to facilitating a dialogue. The ALA 320 course recently went through a major redesign and was offered as a mini-course (i.e. half-semester) in the Fall of 2020, prior to this it has been a semester-long course. The course continues to be in a mini-course format, although slight changes have made it a 5-week course versus 4.

Facilitation
- ALA/SOC 320, PSYCH 310: Training in Intergroup Dialogue Facilitation (2 Credits)
- ALA/SOC 320, PSYCH 310: Practicum in Facilitating Intergroup Dialogues (3 credits)

Figure 1

Although it is recommended that a student participate in the ALA 122 Intergroup Dialogue course it is not required as a prerequisite to become a facilitator. This course provides students with a knowledge and understanding of intergroup dialogue facilitation skills and the development of self-understanding and awareness as it relates to society. It also allows students to explore how they are involved in social structures of privilege and oppression, how to examine commonalities and cultural differences, and how to contribute to creating a more socially just community. Once students have completed this prerequisite course, they are then allowed to enroll in ALA 321: Practicum in Facilitating Intergroup Dialogues. This seminar course provides instructor coaching and consultation as students co-facilitate intergroup dialogues (ALA 122) during the same semester. This course structure allows for oversight and accountability for the student facilitators, but also a continued development of self-understanding, intergroup dialogue facilitation, and social justice. Along with these benefits, the reasoning behind this model is the belief that the students

who go through a training and facilitation experience gain deeper learning about social justice. The pedagogy assumes that the learning of content is particularly effective when it occurs as peer facilitators are facilitating various experiences and exercises.

1.3 Inquiry Setting

The site of this inquiry project is The Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR) at the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan is a research-intensive public university with approximately 29,000 undergraduate students. Out of the total undergraduate population, 15% are international students. The ethnically diverse student population makes up around 35% of the student body including 15% Asian American, 10% Other/Unknown, 6% Hispanic/Latino American, 5% Black/African American, 1% Native American, and 65% White (https://diversity.umich.edu/data-reports/).

The Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR) reports jointly to the Division of Student Life and the College of Literature Arts and Science (LSA). IGR has 7 programmatic areas, as follows: Administrative and Communications, Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships, Courses/Minor, Student Learning and Leadership, Research, Assessment and Evaluation, Advancing the field, as well as Alumni and Development. My previous role within IGR was to serve as the Associate Director within LSA. I helped to administer the daily operations of the curricular programming. This entailed setting up courses for the minor, securing faculty instructors to teach these courses, recruiting and developing graduate student instructors, and recruiting undergraduate students into these courses. Given the mission of IGR, the work is centered on anti-oppressive work, teaching students about their own personal social identities, how these identities play out within structures

of society, and how they can actively make changes to the discrimination, especially race and gender-based structures at individual, institutional and systemic levels. These ideas are taught and practiced in a curricular and co-curricular setting for students to learn, engage in, and apply to their daily lives while at the University and beyond. Students learn critical analytic skills, problem-solving in groups, intercultural leadership, and a synthesis of intellectual and practical skills to help them navigate in a global society. IGR offers 15 different courses each academic year with a typical annual enrollment of 1575 students totaling 3358 credit hours. Over the last 3 academic years, in each semester there was an average number of 8 students taking ALA 320/321. I will focus on students who have taken these courses.

1.4 Stakeholders

Within IGR, two emeritus faculty are still present and active in leading research and teaching courses: Dr. Mark Chesler and Dr. Patricia Gurin, both co-founders of IGR. Within the College of Literature, Science and the Arts (LSA), IGR has various partnerships, including the Michigan Community Scholars Program, a residential living-learning community that was founded on dialogic and social justice principles similar to IGR and was formerly directed by Dr. David Schoem, a co-founder of IGR. Additional partnerships exist with the Departments of Sociology, Psychology, and American Culture.

Stakeholders also include undergraduate students who take courses through the College of Literature, Science, and Arts, as well as various administrators, faculty, and staff who support IGR either by working directly for IGR or by advocating for it in various ways. These departments and colleagues help to enroll students within their majors and minors to fulfill academic requirements.

Stakeholders on a national level include attendees of the annual Intergroup Dialogue Institute. The Institute moves forward the mission of IGR as a means to disseminate the pedagogical philosophies, and the unique "Michigan Model" for intergroup dialogue and their desire to help advance social justice education. Over the past 14 years, 369 universities have sent over 1000 participants to attend various sessions of The Institute.

Colleagues from other universities often reach out for consultations and additional training to further their respective campuses' efforts to create Intergroup Dialogue initiatives. Consultations are typically multi-day workshops focused on in-depth sharing of the Program's model of intergroup dialogue. In 2018/19 IGR staff made consultation trips to Rutgers University, Calvin College, Princeton University, Southern New Hampshire University, Villanova University, Skidmore College, U-M Flint, Guilford College, and Georgetown University. The hope is that through curricular and co-curricular work at the University of Michigan and other institutions of higher education, social justice concepts and skills would be preeminent in our future leaders of America, and thus create the change necessary to stop anti-oppressive behavior.

1.5 Problem of Practice

Participation in peer facilitation in The Program on Intergroup Relations has decreased dramatically. As stated earlier at the peak of IGR, the program was offering up to 16 dialogues a semester, while in recent semesters it has only been able to offer up to 3 to 4 dialogue courses. This drastically limits the ability to offer co-facilitated intergroup dialogue courses that have been shown effective in addressing intergroup understanding, empathy, and motivation to bridge differences and likely limits what would otherwise be powerful experiences for peer facilitators

themselves. This may be due to the amount of work IGR asks of peer facilitators, an overall lack of awareness of the program across the wider campus, or it may be due to other campus opportunities for peer facilitation that require less time and commitment. Where can IGR find the right balance of preparing students to be facilitators while also limiting the time commitment it takes to go through the process? In these two courses, how do students contextualize the benefits of skills, friendships, and experience compared to the time commitment, workload, and emotional toll it takes to facilitate difficult dialogue amongst their peers? How does IGR apply this research to strengthen the program and maximize the number of intergroup dialogues it can offer?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 What is Intergroup Dialogue?

Intergroup education first appeared after World War II designed to improve intergroup relations after Brown vs. the Board of Education outlawed segregation. Most efforts were focused on anti-bias education and prejudice reduction and can be traced back to Gordon Allport's (1954) contact theory of face-to-face contact sanctioned by authority. While interaction was occurring face to face, a deeper knowledge and understanding of the other group was not. Other programs utilized Johnson and Johnson's (1996) use of mediation between groups in conflict. These social science efforts provided research-based knowledge that is foundational for intergroup dialogue. In addition, educators such as Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, and John Dewey focused on connections between the social environment and personal experience through a learner-centered approach (Maxwell, K., Thompson, M., 2016). These endeavors led to what is now known as intergroup dialogue.

IGD eventually arose within higher education at the University of Michigan in 1989. After several incidents of racial tension that occurred in the mid-1980s at the University of Michigan, student activism led then-President James Duderstadt to create the *Michigan Mandate*. As stated before, intergroup dialogue was one of several proposals accepted by President Duderstadt to help address race issues on campus. Over the last 30 years, IGR has grown immensely. The program now offers several courses and electives on Intergroup Relations, as well as offering a minor. IGR hosts a national conference annually and consults across the United States at several colleges and

campuses on Intergroup Dialogue pedagogy. It is made up of 13 full-time staff along with 3 emeritus faculty members and 1 adjunct lecturer.

Initially created for dialogue across differences in race and ethnicity, Intergroup Dialogue integrates both theory and practice to answer the following questions: "How to address the degree of unity and common purpose required for democracy, and how to give sufficient attention to racial, and gender identities and inequalities" (Gurin, et. al., 2013).

At the University of Michigan within IGR, there are several unique factors that we believe create the best practice for intergroup dialogue.

- Intergroup Dialogues are offered as credit-bearing semester-long courses.

- Dialogues are sustained conversations over a period of time, typically an academic semester, that are in the classroom setting. This creates accountability for the participants to continue to attend even after difficult interactions and conversations that may occur.

- Dialogues follow a four-stage model. Stage 1 Group beginnings, Stage 2 Exploring Differences and Commonalities of Experience, Stage 3 Exploring and Dialoguing about hot topics, Stage 4 Action planning and collaboration.

- Dialogues are peer students facilitated by undergraduates. Students are trained in a course ALA 320: Processes of Intergroup Dialogues Facilitation, prior to enrolling and facilitating in ALA 321: Practicum in Facilitating Intergroup Dialogues.

The 4th bullet is what makes IGR unique in comparison to most other institutions with intergroup dialogue programs. While IGD can be very effective in utilizing faculty, staff, and graduate students to facilitate, IGR distinguishes itself by utilizing undergraduate students.

Undergraduate peers make excellent facilitators because they can be true co-learners and teachers with the participants. This format provides a democratic space of mutual learning for all participants and limits the hierarchy of a traditional classroom setting. The research also states that participants are more likely to verbalize their lack of knowledge to a peer rather than a graduate student or faculty. (Maxwell, Nagda, Thompson, 2011, Ch. 1).

2.2 Critiques of Intergroup Dialogue

Like many educational practices based on educational and social scientific concepts, IGD has some critiques, which are all matters of contention. The first argument is that IGD is too dialogic. The methods rely too heavily on human relationships and ignore power, inequalities, and social change. This can potentially lead to tokenization of marginalized members of the dialogue, as well as reinforcing unequal power that benefits the privileged group. The second critique is that IGD is too critical. IGD creates spaces that are too uncomfortable, asking participants to explore dissonance without paying attention to the emotional toll. Third, IGD leads to too little action. There is a huge amount of effort and time spent learning about yourself and others, but does it really lead to social and structural change? While these critiques have some relevance, the research showcases that those benefits for participants of all social identities are significant (Gurin, et. al., 2013).

2.3 Principles of Intergroup Dialogue

Intergroup dialogue encourages deep conversations about and across topics such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. These topics are not regularly discussed amongst students across different social identities and are avoided on college campuses. IGD pedagogy fosters a communication process that enables learning from different social identities. Both dialogic and critical communication processes occur. Dialogic processes are those that enable students to learn from each other and co-create a relationship with one another. In this process, students who might not have been able to speak openly about their experience without judgment are able to do so, while each participant is engaged in deep listening and examines their own judgments and biases. Along with critical reflection intergroup dialogue examines personal narratives in the context of structures of inequality to create a learning process that allows for the understanding and examination of how systemic oppression is intertwined in all aspects of society.

To make sense of all these communications, critical reflection is key as a part of the learning process. As Freire (1973) suggests, inquiry and reflection allow for meaning making, instead of passively accepting what we view as "normal" social realities. Participants engage in deep analytical thinking about society, and their own identity and consider multiple perspectives. Another result is affective positivity. Participants experience positive emotions and comfort while positive interactions occur amongst the dialogue group. As a result, the outcomes of an intergroup dialogue are intergroup understanding defined as a recognition of inequalities and attitudes about diversity and intergroup relationships, meaning empathy and motivation to bridge differences, and intergroup collaboration which can defined as tangible action towards reducing inequalities and social responsibility (Gurin, et. al., 2013). Understanding these concepts allows participants to understand various perspectives that help to explore meaning, and what is behind the assumptions

that they use to inform their individual perspectives. Once the discovery is made, it allows for one

to reappraise their thinking considering these exchanges (Gurin, P. et. al, 2013)

IGD integrates several approaches of psychology, multicultural education, and social justice

education, but many of its foundational roots can be traced back to John Dewey, and as previously

mentioned Gordon Allport and Paulo Freire. Dewey's, *Democracy and Education* (1916)

championed the idea that schools were to be utilized as social centers to educate youth to be trained

in democratic citizenship.

In Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1973), he argues that there are two classes or

categories of people in this world: Those who are oppressed and those who are oppressing. The

systems and structures that are put into place continue to perpetuate this inequity that exists among

those who are privileged and those who are marginalized. Critical consciousness is a realization

that the normative behavior and current structure is not equitable or humane. Once the oppressor

gains an awareness of how they oppress others, and that this behavior is widely accepted and

encouraged, they may begin to make changes towards liberation for all. The education model that

Freire advocates asks for mutual vulnerability from the oppressor and the oppressed that can be

created in a dialogue. While this process may seem simple in concept, the work toward

understanding oneself and others is a difficult journey that takes a lifetime of humility, dissonance,

and empathy. As the journey to self-understanding and learning is constant, the liberation for all

is never-ending. The process of moving towards this goal results in critical consciousness (Freire

1973). This realization occurs on several levels; self-awareness of one's positionality compared to

others, as well as how these positions are structured within institutions and systems.

Oppressive structures have been normalized as the status quo. To counter the existing

systems, education needs to be critiqued and changed. Freire referred to most teaching interactions

and models as a "banking concept of education". Knowledge is passed along like a currency. Students are the depositories, and teachers are the depositors. This education model lacks acknowledgment of power dynamics, thus creating no accountability for the teacher. Educators are put into positions of power to continue to socialize students in what is "right and wrong" as well as other messages that allow for the continuation of the structures set in place.

Freire (1973) calls for liberatory education which aligns with bell hooks concept highlighted in the title of her book: *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (2010). hooks states, "Critical thinking involves, first discovering the who, what, when, where, and how of things- finding the answers to those eternal questions of the inquisitive child, and then utilizing the knowledge in a manner that enables you to determine what matters most" (2010). Critical thinking requires all participants in the classroom to be engaged and allows for all perspectives to be shared and have an equal voice. This creates empowerment for everyone.

Freire (1973) states "It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism but must include serious reflection" (p.39). When considering both Freire's call for liberatory education and hooks critical thinking, a foundational roadmap is set to use education to teach critical consciousness.

Another foundation theory utilized within Intergroup Dialogue is Audre Lorde's "*There is No Hierarchy of Oppression*" (Lorde, 1983). She states,

> As a Black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, poet, mother of two including one boy and a member of an interracial couple, I usually find myself part of some group in which the majority defines me as deviant, difficult, inferior or just plain "wrong."

From my membership in all of these groups I have learned that oppression and the

intolerance of differences comes in all shapes and sexes and colors and sexualities;

and that among those of us who share the goals of liberation and a workable future

for our children, there can be no hierarchies of oppression. I have learned that

sexism and heterosexism both arise from the same source as racism.

Lorde's words express how she as an individual cannot be oppressed in more ways than

others, and how efforts towards liberation should be to dismantle the systems in place, rather than

spend energy over who has it worse.

Another key concept for intergroup dialogue is the concept of Harro's *Cycle of
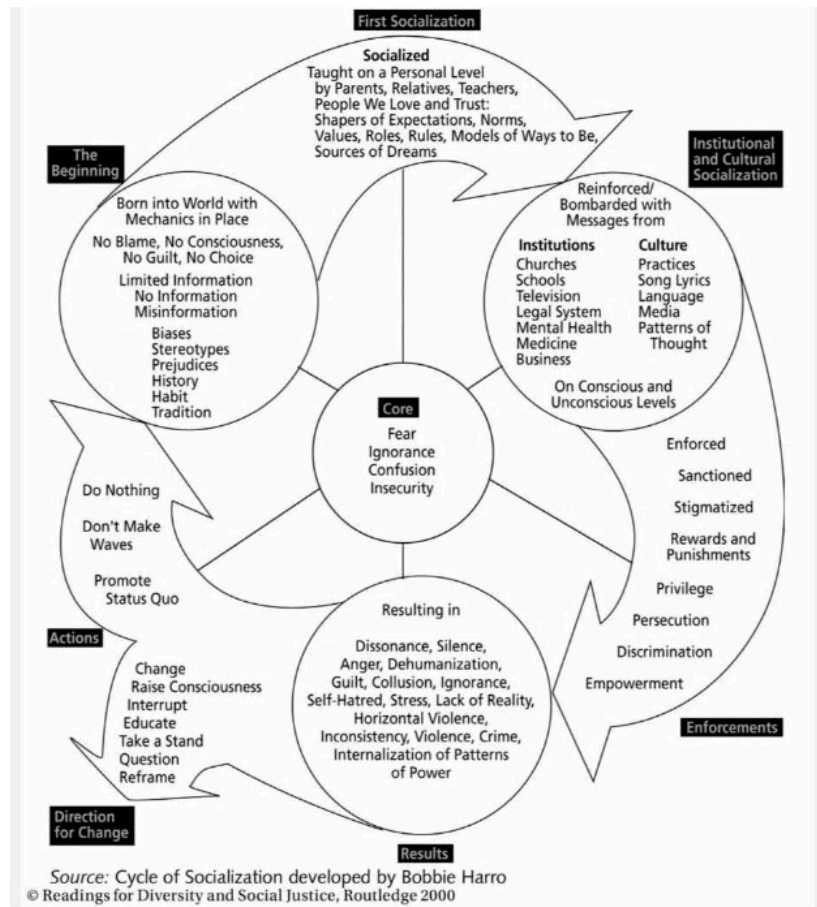
Socialization (2004).*

First Socialization

Socialized
Taught on a Personal Level
by Parents, Relatives, Teachers,
People We Love and Trust:
Shapers of Expectations, Norms,
Values, Roles, Rules, Models of Ways to Be,
Sources of Dreams

The Beginning

Born into World with
Mechanics in Place

No Blame, No Consciousness,
No Guilt, No Choice

Limited Information
No Information
Misinformation

Biases
Stereotypes
Prejudices
History
Habit
Tradition

Institutional and Cultural Socialization

Reinforced/
Bombarded with
Messages from

Institutions   **Culture**
Churches   Practices
Schools   Song Lyrics
Television   Language
Legal System   Media
Mental Health   Patterns of
Medicine   Thought
Business

On Conscious and
Unconscious Levels

Core
Fear
Ignorance
Confusion
Insecurity

Do Nothing

Don't Make
Waves

Promote
Status Quo

Actions

Change
Raise Consciousness
Interrupt
Educate
Take a Stand
Question
Reframe

Enforced

Sanctioned

Stigmatized

Rewards and
Punishments

Privilege

Persecution

Discrimination

Empowerment

Enforcements

Resulting in

Dissonance, Silence,
Anger, Dehumanization,
Guilt, Collusion, Ignorance,
Self-Hatred, Stress, Lack of Reality,
Horizontal Violence,
Inconsistency, Violence, Crime,
Internalization of Patterns
of Power

Direction for Change

Results

Source: Cycle of Socialization developed by Bobbie Harro
© Readings for Diversity and Social Justice, Routledge 2000

Figure 2

Harro (2004) theorizes that all humans are born with no blame and no consciousness. These biases, social norms, and standards are socialized in different cycles as you grow older and are exposed to different ideas, people, and institutions. There are negative consequences to rejecting these standards and we have a choice to break away from these ideas or continue to perpetuate them.

With the utilization of these foundational concepts within Intergroup Dialogue, the outcome of the process is to increase self-awareness about one's own social identities and how they create both privilege and marginalization. The ability to communicate with people with varying social identities and have dialogue, rather than discussion which lacks depth, or debate

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whose purpose is to point out the difference, and to move towards actions that work in collaboration with others to create a more just and equitable society.

2.4 Principles for Peer Facilitation of Intergroup Dialogue

Peer student facilitation at IGR allows for six different spheres of development for students who take the ALA 320 and ALA 321 courses. The types of experiences and awareness vary for students entering these courses. Because of the wide spectrum, all students are encouraged to first develop an understanding of self and their social identities. The next sphere is for students to gain an understanding of interpersonal skills and how to communicate with members of different social identities.
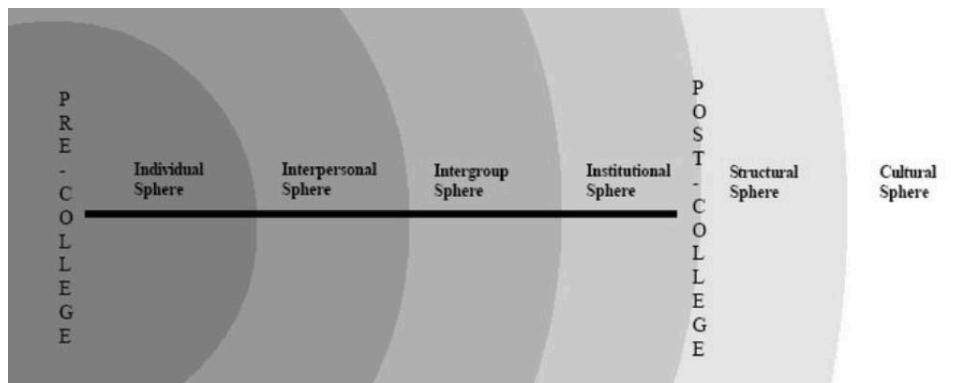

Figure 3: Spheres of Student Development (Maxwell, K., Fisher, R., Thompson, M., Behling, C., 2011)

They then begin to understand the broader implications of social identities for their own groups and others in the intergroup sphere and move toward understanding how power and society connect in the institutional sphere. The last two spheres are structural and cultural which helps

students to connect how structures socialize our judgments of what is "good" "right" and "valued" in our society (Maxwell, K., Fisher, R., Thompson, M., Behling, C., 2011).

Figure 4 (IGR, University of Michigan 2019)

Peer facilitation within IGR is framed by affective and cognitive learning. A variation of Jackson and Hardiman's Passion, Awareness, Skills, and Knowledge (PASK) is used as a standard for competencies needed in facilitation (see Figure 3). Keagan's three dimensions of learning: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal are also used to combine both cognitive and affective learning approaches. The belief is that knowledge and skills are not enough, but the effect of the emotions tied to these issues in passion and self-awareness create tangible steps of moving toward social justice (Maxwell, K., et. al, 2011). Within the ALA 320 course, students are asked to do a self-assessment and reflection on the PASK at the beginning and end of the course. This process allows students to see their own growth and understanding in facilitation as they move forward into ALA 321. This assessment also allows teaching instructors and coaches to understand what type of support the students need when facilitating.

2.5 What are the benefits for participants?

One major study has been done on the participants in intergroup dialogue. One of the foundational pieces is from the project: "Intergroup Dialogue and the multi-university Intergroup Dialogue Research Project" which began in 2003 and concluded with a book entitled *Dialogue Across Difference: Practice, Theory, and Research on Intergroup Dialogue* written by Patricia Gurin, Biren (Ratnesh) Nagda, and Ximena Zúñiga (2013). The study compared dialogue student participants to a control group of students who did not take a dialogue and were enrolled in an introductory social science course. Compared to the control group, dialogue participants had an increased awareness of inequality and its relationship to institutional and structural factors (intergroup understanding), increased motivation to bridge differences and greater increases of

empathy (intergroup relationships), and increased motivation to be actively engaged in their post-college communities by influencing social policy and political structure (intergroup collaboration and engagement) over their control group peers (Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, Zúñiga, 2009). Similar results were found in a review of empirical literature on the evaluation of intergroup dialogue, done by Adrienne Dessel and Mary Rogge. They cite research done by Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin in 2002 that participants reported increased learning about the perspective of people from other social groups, further development of problem-solving skills, a better understanding of social inequalities, an increased value of new viewpoints and a raised awareness of racial identity. (Dessel, A., and Rogge, M.E., 2008)

2.5.1 Research Questions:

Another foundational text was published in 2011 entitled *Facilitating Intergroup Dialogues* written by Kelly Maxwell, Biren (Ratnesh) Nagda and Monita Thompson. The primary focus was understanding and knowledge of intergroup dialogue facilitation. In this book, they cite several benefits that participants gain by facilitating an intergroup dialogue including an increased interest in political issues and awareness of institutional and structural causes of group differences as well as a deeper understanding of the perspective of others and more appreciation for commonalities and differences between and within groups. While these are positive effects for participants, these benefits are amplified through the peer facilitation process.

Student peer facilitators experience deeper learning compared to those who participate in an intergroup dialogue (Maxwell, et.al., 2011). The following excerpt from a dialogue facilitator demonstrates this:

-As a facilitator, I took a journey with my participants through our social identities and their impact on our lives as well as the lives around us….I have developed a newfound respect for oppressed groups individuals, and even myself. Surely, my experience with intergroup relations will not end at the closing of this semester. I hope to continue to explore different areas of awareness, and I am committed to a lifelong pursuit of combating social justice. (Maxwell, et. al., 2011, p. 41)

However, there is still a need to do more formal research on the effects of peer facilitation of intergroup dialogues. Further research can help determine whether the outcomes of participants align with the facilitators, how are they applying the facilitation skills that they learned to other aspects of their life and vocation, as well as what positive and/or negative aspects of facilitation you gain compared to only being a participant. This project will help to continue the ongoing research on the benefits of peer intergroup dialogue facilitation. As stated earlier, most of the research has been dedicated to the participants of intergroup dialogue, but the focus of this research will be on the facilitator experience.

Inquiry Question 1: How do facilitators conceptualize the perceived benefits of peer facilitation?

Inquiry Question 2: How do facilitators conceptualize the perceived barriers and challenges of peer facilitation?

3.0 Methodology

In this section, I will go over the description of participants in this study as well as their demographics. My positionality regarding the participants, and how this may have affected the study as well as review the procedure I followed to collect the data. I will conclude by summarizing my methods of creating themes utilizing qualitative software.

3.1 Participants

All students who completed the Applied Liberal Arts (ALA) ALA 320: Processes of Intergroup Dialogues Facilitation *and* ALA 321: Practicum in Facilitating Intergroup Dialogues course sequence from the academic years of 2019-2021 will be asked to participate in this study. Students enrolled in these courses are admitted into the University of Michigan and will be a minimum age of 18 years old. Students who have enrolled in these courses have completed an application and interview process. In ALA 320 Training, students showcased their desire as to why they want to be peer facilitators as they learned a dialogic pedagogy and the foundation of awareness, knowledge, understanding, and skills needed to effectively facilitate multicultural group interactions, including structured intergroup dialogues. ALA 321 Practicum students conduct applied work in facilitating intergroup dialogues. This course focuses on helping students develop and improve their skills as dialogue facilitators. Effective facilitators apply previous skills and knowledge from their ALA 320 course as they co-lead a peer-facilitated dialogue on specific topics which include and not limited to Race and Ethnicity, Social Economic Status, Gender, and

Sexuality. Moreover, by debriefing their actual dialogue experiences, facilitators can deepen their learning about identity, discrimination, privilege, and social justice. I invited a total of 83 former students to participate in this study. Because several of the participants have graduated, a satisfaction rate of a minimum level of participation was set at 10-12 students, with an ideal sample size of 16 to 20 participants. For this study, I ended up with 20 participants. I had access to participants' demographic information through IGR's student database.

Table 1

Pseudonym	Sem vs. Mini	Dialogue Topic	In Person/ Remote/Hybrid	Took a Course with Me	Race/Ethnicity	Class Standing during ALA 321
Elise	Semester	Race	In Person	Yes	Asian	Junior
Iris	Semester	SES*	In Person	No	Asian	Junior
Carol	Mini	Race	Remote	Yes	White	Soph
Lizzy	Mini	Race	Remote	Yes	Latine	Soph
Jason	Mini	WRID**	In Person	Yes	White	Senior
Jose	Mini	Race	Hybrid	Yes	Latine	Soph
Joanne	Mini	Race	Hybrid	Yes	White	Soph
Angelica	Semester	SOC***	Remote	Yes	Black	Junior
Amanda	Semester	Race	In Person	Yes	White	Junior
Beverly	Semester	Race	In Person	Yes	Asian	Junior
Candy	Semester	WRID	In Person	Yes	White	Junior
Chaz	Semester	SOC	In Person	Yes	Latine	Junior
Lilian	Semester	Ed Justice	In Person	Yes	Black	Soph
Reese	Semester	Race	In Person	No	White	Junior
Tina	Semester	Gender	In Person	Yes	White	Junior
Jasmine	Semester	Race	In Person	No	White	Junior
Mary	Semester	Race	In Person	No	White	Junior
Nelson	Semester	Race	In Person	Yes	White	Junior
Rebecca	Semester	Gender	In Person	Yes	White	Soph
Shana	Semester	Race	In Person and Remote	No	Middle Eastern	Junior

*Socio-Economic Status
**White Racial Identity
***Students of Color

3.2 Researcher Positionality

Referring to Table 3, it is important to note that most of the participants (17 out of 20) took a course with me while this study occurred. When comparing sample sizes to other qualitative studies, where true anonymity can occur, my connection to these participants allowed me to gain a sample size of 20, because of an established relationship. A limitation that needs acknowledgment is that some bias may have occurred while participants were being interviewed. In contrast, the previous relationship with these participants may have also led to more vulnerability and trust as this was built over several semesters of intentional coaching and learning. The common experience allowed for deeper reflection on specific times in class that we could refer to, as well as a better sense of the group dynamics. It is also important to note the power dynamic of working with former students. All classes were concluded, and grades were given before participating in this study.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

I took a qualitative design approach to this study. I asked students to participate in a 60-minute semi-structured interview. Individual interviews allowed me to get more detailed information on the aspects of the courses and the facilitator experience. Using semi-structured interviews allowed me to establish co-construction of meaning (Wilkinson, 1998) by getting more details that would be missed in a pre-set quantitative approach. The interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of how the students were able to grasp critical consciousness as well as various skills of facilitation, through the power of story (Glesne, 2016) as well as in the process of

instruction. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews took place virtually through Zoom and were recorded.

I took precautions to keep all participants' responses anonymous and confidential. Students were given pseudonyms when reporting any data. During the data collection process, I did not have students in my ALA 320/321 courses participate in the study, until after they had completed the course to limit the bias and power dynamic I would have as a teaching instructor over a student. While students will have already received final grades for the courses they have previously taken, and some will have had me as teaching instructor, participants were reminded before and after the interview, that the information they shared was held as confidential and reported as anonymous.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

I used a semi-structured interview protocol designed to gather information on the overall experience of peer facilitation. Probing questions were utilized to get specific details about challenges the facilitator faced throughout the process, as well as benefits that they felt they gained. Additionally, I spent time in the interview process gathering information about specific skills and knowledge that the facilitator gained such as affirmative inquiry, active listening, how to relate to people different from you, and the general skill of facilitation. Some of the questions utilized were the following:

- Tell me about your facilitation experience. Probe: What was the most difficult part? What did you enjoy the most? What did you get out of your experience?
- In what ways did your knowledge and skills for social justice change through the training and facilitation process?

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- Can you tell me about a time when you used the skills that you learned in the training and facilitation courses to interrupt bias, derogatory comments jokes, and/or microaggressions?

- Probe:-What was your hope in interrupting?

All interviews were automatically transcribed through Zoom. The transcription allowed for the collection of common information across all participants (Creswell, 2003). I utilized memos after each interview to capture my initial analysis of the data and looked for any themes that reoccurred. I reexamined the common codes and themes from the memos and tabulated them across all participant's interviews. I utilized NVIVO (Lumivero 2020, NVivo Version 14), a qualitative software analysis program, for data analysis. I developed a coding system to help understand the interpretations of critical consciousness based on the student's experiences.

Table 2: List of Common Themes Found

Benefits
Challenges
Overall Experience: Positive/ Negative
Passion, Awareness, Skills, Knowledge
Tangible Use and Application

Based on my interview questions I was able to find common themes throughout each participant's answer (See Table 3). Each participant reflected on their perceptions of the benefits they gained from the experience, as well as the challenges they faced. I then quantified these themes into a net positive or net negative overall experience for each participant. I also asked specific questions on whether the participants' overall Passion, Awareness, Skills, and Knowledge

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(PASK) of Social Justice were changed in the facilitation experience and was able to find common themes in these categories. I cross-listed the PASK themes into the overall benefits theme as there was significant overlap in these two categories. I also concluded the interview with a question on how they were able to apply the skills they learned and found that this was a significant theme for all participants in this study.

From these common themes, I was able to create a chart of overall benefits which included, seeing growth in students, community, and relationships, skills gained, interaction with people different from themselves, being able to view things from a different perspective, and if the overall benefits outweighed the costs. I was also able to create a chart of overall challenges/costs. These categories included lack of exposure to the Process Content Outline (PCO) or detailed agenda, huge time commitment, improvisation, amount of work during the facilitation process, emotional toll, and facilitating hot topics. The charts allowed me to quantify further the overall experience of common themes that were experienced by the participants, which allowed me to gain a deeper understanding and analysis of the training and facilitation process for the participants of this study.

4.0 Findings and Analysis

In this section, I will first discuss the facilitators' perceived benefits of their facilitation experience, then focus on the perceived challenges and barriers that they experienced through the facilitation process. I will conclude this section with common themes that came through the research process, and an unintended discovery that occurred between students who took a semester-long training course versus those who took a shortened mini-course format.

4.1 How do facilitators conceptualize the perceived benefits of peer facilitation?

4.1.1 Increased Passion, Awareness, Skills, and Knowledge in Social Justice:

Through the two courses, facilitators are asked to take a self-assessment called the "PASK" (Passion, Awareness, Skills, and Knowledge). I asked each facilitator to reflect on whether their personal passion, awareness, skills, and knowledge about social justice changed in the process of taking these two courses. 18 out of the 20 facilitators (90%) shared that their awareness and knowledge toward social justice was changed for the positive through the facilitation process. One facilitator Rebecca said the following about her change, "So just understanding myself, what my own identities were, and realizing that if I didn't know that I had all these different identities that had different advantages and disadvantages in society. Like there's no way that most people think about these things." She went on to describe how the experience of utilizing these concepts while facilitating helped her in her own personal journey, "And so just being able to explain those

concepts to other people and understand them when going about my own work was really helpful."
Facilitators often spoke of how they were able to utilize these skills throughout their various
courses, leadership roles, and interactions with their friends and family. Carol spoke on how the
knowledge gave her confidence to challenge other people in her life, 'but also having those
conversations in different spaces and I feel like because of idea training and facilitation. Because
I spoke to people as my peers, now I feel comfortable challenging professors, I feel comfortable
challenging staff at the university, I feel comfortable going above and beyond, and I wouldn't have
had that confidence if I hadn't had the exposure that I had." Rebecca, said the following about her
experience:

> I think anytime that you sit with people and share space with people in which the base of
> your learning is each other's experiences is really, it's insightful, but it's also incredibly
> humanizing. And especially as a white person and as a person with a lot of privilege, I often
> don't think about, and don't have to think about these things. So being in a situation where
> I spent a year training and then facilitating in which I was just constantly hearing people's
> experiences that were both similar and different to mine is incredibly valuable because
> everyone's experience is different, but it's often tied back to the systemic things that were
> that we're examining.

The majority (80%) of the facilitators spoke about the passion and awareness they gained
toward social justice in their experience. Angela, said the following:

> If anything, I would say that my passion and awareness for social justice, definitely
> intensified. For the passion, like I said, it's like you can take a test, you can take a class and
> you can learn about all these different injustices, but hearing people speak about their

experiences, how they were facing oppression firsthand. Like it just hits differently, when you've developed these relationships with people and you've gotten to know them, it sparks such a fire like within, and you want to take all of that passion and just use it to make the change and to challenge the participants even more to, help them to use, what other people have said in class to kind of bring them back to those things that were said.

4.1.2 The Ability to Interact with People Different from Themselves:

All but one (19 of 20) facilitators stated that a benefit of facilitating an intergroup dialogue was that they were able to interact with people different from themselves as well as gain a different perspective and view things from another lens rather than their own perspective. Lizzy shared, "Overall, it was an incredible experience. It was amazing. I got to build rapport with people from all different backgrounds." Jason said the following regarding the impact it had on his perspective about learning from others:

> I think that it has provided me with a plethora of skills that will be usable in my future career. It'll also be usable in my personal life. I think it's just been a very valuable experience for me overall. I also think that aside from skills gained, I also think I've just gained this vast amount of knowledge about people. Maybe that's a skill too but now I just feel I've gained a lot of perspective from the people that I've interacted with through facilitation as well as just a lot of insight on myself and other people more generally.

> Another facilitator Jose had a similar experience stating, "I think being able to hear different perspectives from people, especially the ones I don't agree with, I think it really helped challenge my own views about things." He reflected on how this became a driving force to increase his desire to learn more and become more educated on things he disagreed with and how to be

more informed. "I think the experience really helped me be more conscious about how I go about seeking information to help further my development with different social justice issues." Angelica talked about how it created more awareness stating, "I can like preach about oh yeah, this is what people go through, but I literally didn't know anything outside of my own identity, and so, even within regards to my privileges I do not think about them at all, and so within IGR and within facilitation spaces…it's still like there are other identities that are people of color that are like going through things just as much."

4.1.3 Community Building:

A large majority (16 out of the 20) stated that the community and relationships built through facilitation were a key benefit in their experience. Iris stated the following, "I really enjoyed the relationship that I was able to build with my co-facilitator. We're still friends to this day. I've been to her house. She's been to my house multiple times. Even after graduating, I've really enjoyed that. I really enjoyed the community building that we were able to do." Chaz who took the semester-long course said the following:

> I think also the relationship thing, like getting to know all these new people, especially in training, like my cohort we got really, really close and even the other cohort like coming back together and actually facilitating in a group with all those people, even though we hadn't been together regularly in training, it was just really cool to have that group and have all those relationships, because many of those people are still really close friends of mine.

Carol, spoke to the group experience and co-facilitation model, "Well, I really liked my facilitation partner. I really enjoyed working with him. I think that my favorite might have been the Monday sessions that we had as facilitators to debrief because I found it really helpful to hear about the other dialogues and to also process things that were happening in ours. Cause then I felt I wasn't just learning from the dialogue I was facilitating, but I was learning from an entire cohort." Amanda reflected on her training cohort model and said the following, "I think the community that we built… it just was like it was more than just dialogue. It felt like sometimes like there was like our friendships developing and so that was exciting."

4.1.4 Seeing Peer Growth:

The final overall benefit that resonated amongst the facilitators was the gratification of seeing the growth and learning of others first-hand. 17 out of the 20 reflected on feeling gratification in seeing their peers learn and grow throughout the course. Elise said the following about this experience:

> I enjoyed just like seeing the growth in the students, obviously, I feel like everyone's going to say that, just to see kids who came and had such fixed ideas and then you see them open up and grow and to know what kinds of questions to ask was like my favorite thing that I learned. How to kind of push people, how to reflect, how to make people feel comfortable and empowered in those spaces to use their mind. And then I think a sense of like giving back, kind of like a sense of like, I feel good about myself because I know I helped people grow in their thinking."

Jose reflected with a similar feeling, "I think the most enjoyable experience was the final session, it was a great way to see how much everyone grew from where they were at the beginning to where they were at the end." Beverly stated the following about this benefit,

> I think the benefits were more important because I remembered and really held on to the fact that I was making change, even if it was a little bit I was hoping … that somebody in that class of 14 left with at least something different if not just the knowledge of what the tree of oppression is. That's good enough for me. Somebody wanted to do something right, so kind of holding on to the fact that I was doing something to create change. Somebody in that class might have just needed this class to push them to take that next step to work in related to social justice stuff and I so kind of hold on to that.

4.2 How do facilitators conceptualize the perceived barriers and challenges of peer facilitation?

Compared to the perceived benefits where most of the facilitators shared similar experiences (6), the challenges for the facilitators had several categories (16) with only four themes that had at least 50% reflecting on similar experiences. The most common challenge stated by the participants (12 of the 20) was the time commitment involved in being a peer facilitator. 11 of the 20 participants said one the of most challenging aspects for them was to be able to improv and move away from the Process Content Outline (PCO) which is a very detailed facilitation guide. Half (10 of 20) mentioned that the amount of work to facilitate was a big challenge for them. This work included weekly reports that needed to be customized and gone over with their coach, a weekly feedback form about their co-facilitation partner, grading their participant's journals, and

prepping for the actual class to feel prepared to lead the weekly session. Half (10 of 20) of the facilitators also stated that one of the biggest challenges for them was the emotional labor of facilitating such difficult and heavy topics throughout the semester.

4.2.1 Time Commitment:

Most facilitators (15 out of the 20) stated that they thought the biggest challenge was the amount of time it took to be a facilitator. The time commitment in the Practicum course (ALA 321) included weekly class time to prepare for their facilitation course, weekly feedback forms for their co-facilitator (F3s), weekly planning forms (P3s) that they would turn in to their coach, grading weekly journals from their participants, on top of the actual facilitation. Amanda stated the following about this challenge, "So, in general, facilitating did take a lot of effort we knew that it did take a lot of time, but even doing this, it seemed like it was more taxing because we had to put in a lot of outside work to get there". Similarly, Beverly stated the following, "I think the biggest costs, I found with both was just time, so I felt like I was investing a lot of time and of course, while you're facilitating you have a three-hour block, but also you have to plan and prepare, so you have to do a lot of work." Lizzy stated something similar, "I knew that the time commitment was going to be fairly large, but I didn't realize the different ways in which it would be a time commitment."

Mary said the following about the workload:

Also from it just being more of a classroom experience and a workload during the semester, I don't think I was prepared for how much work it was. Not that there's anything that anyone can really do to prepare you besides to tell you that it's a lot, but I think that when you're in practicum for three hours and then in the classroom facilitating for three hours, and then

outside of that grading journals and doing your F3s and making your PCOs, I think that was just more laborious than I expected.

4.2.2 Emotional Toll:

Half of the facilitators mentioned one of the more difficult challenges was the emotional toll that they endured through the process. Some of the emotional toll was the reality that they would not know how students would react and the inability to feel prepared for this. Rebecca said this about the unknown aspect,

> I think the most difficult part was I like to feel prepared for things like a presentation or whether it's like a test or something. And this is a situation where you can't really prepare just because there's so much uncertainty as to what students are going to say. So you can prepare in terms of knowing the content and preparing good, like guided teachings or activities for that day. But you never know what a student's going to share that might trigger another student that might come off offensive. So you kind of just have to be ready for everything, which I thought was pretty difficult, but a good learning experience.

The range of this emotion varied, based on the topic that they were facilitating, as well as having to wrestle through their own social identity development. Nelson stated, "It was a whole lot more emotionally taxing than any other class I'd ever taken. Like, I needed a whole lot of mental preparation to go into each dialogue that I was facilitating." Jason, who facilitated a white racial identity dialogue said the following about his experience," I found myself having to face a lot of personal barriers that I haven't had to face in a long time… I had to face a lot of things that I had done in my past or that I had experienced or ideas that I maybe still held in my head that

I had to work through. That was difficult to be in a position where I was tasked getting students to get over their own biases, their own opinions, their own thoughts, and reflect on that." He went on to say, "It was the getting over all of the mental and emotional barriers that I had placed in front of me. I grew up in a conservative household, so it was like, 'Holy crap. There are a lot of things to reflect on.'"

This type of emotional toll is expected in the facilitation process and ingrained through the training course, as well as in the practicum course. In ALA 320 students practice facilitating hot topics and difficult conversations. Teaching instructors utilize classroom time to debrief and reflect on a weekly basis to normalize these types of emotions as a part of the growth process for the participants and the facilitators. IGR recognizes that the discussion of emotions and leading difficult conversations are not easy but considers getting into the learning edge and out of students' comfort zones to be a part of what makes the learning so impactful.

Overall participants unequivocally stated that the benefits outweighed the costs (overall time commitment, the time to prepare for dialogues, peer review of journals, and the emotional tax of facilitating difficult topics). One facilitator's experience Iris, stood out to me as I was interviewing her. She was very candid about the negative aspects of her experience whether it was the emotional tax that she went through, the uneven setup of her dialogue in which there was not a balance of privileged students compared to marginalized, as well as the amount of time and work she had to dedicate to the process. Her answer to the question, 'Did the benefits outweigh the costs?' was the following, "The benefits outweigh the cost. In spite of all of [my critiques], I would say IGR was one of my greatest undergrad experiences, IGR and study abroad. I think they were very formative. The people I met through IGR, I'm still friends with, I've met the greatest people in undergrad in IGR".

Another facilitator Nelson had a similar answer to this question:

I like the costs. I don't think it even really comes close to the benefits of being a facilitator. I learned there were so many skills that I gained throughout the whole process that are just life skills that I can carry on with me forever. The only cost was like it was emotionally taxing at times, and it was challenging to deal with a couple of the participants. But like I said earlier, it was a good challenge, like I was trying to demonstrate growth and teach them how to see things. But lifetime skills I think far outweigh those costs.

4.3 Other Findings

4.3.1 Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The pandemic and related shut-downs caused a huge shift in teaching as all classes were remote. Even coming back in person had its challenges as strict protocols needed to be followed. Joanne said the following about facilitating during this time:

I think for a personal note, I'm very much of a perfectionist. Every week, especially during COVID, there are things that you're not going to be able to see whether that's you getting sick, or your participants getting sick. Going in, I was like, "I'm going to stick to the PCO and I'm going to be very rigid about this because here's what we planned, and if it doesn't work, I don't know what I'm going to do. By the end, we would just have many participants out and our plans wouldn't work. My co and I were just like, "Okay, we know what we're doing, we know enough to talk about this, we'll just change the plan. That was really helpful for me, is that I was able to let go of that need for control and that perfectionism.

Carol spoke about the difficulty in an online format of being able to push her dialogue participants:

> I think sometimes it was hard to push back on things particularly because it was on Zoom because I feel like in-person it would be easier to stay after with someone and follow up with them on what had been said, or just even make some eye contact to let them know. It was not like they weren't in trouble. It was just like a quick follow-up and even just head nodding and one on one, body language, I think made it harder for me to feel comfortable pushing back when people said things that I thought were maybe like problematic. Whereas I feel in person I would've felt I had more control over the room and would've been able to guide the conversation more.

4.3.2 Improvisation:

Although much preparation goes into facilitation, facilitators noted that they could never fully know how their participants might react to a certain activity or reading. Although this was emphasized in the training course, as well as in the planning and preparation for the dialogues every week, while working with a very detailed process content outline (PCO), there would be times when facilitators would need to deviate from the planned agenda. Examples include taking more time to debrief an activity or skipping an activity because the facilitators felt like the objective had already been met. These were real-time decisions that needed to be made at the moment, without a direct instructor at the time of facilitation. Elise reflected on this concept:

> I think deviating from the script of the PCO was difficult, but not because like I think that having a coach was super helpful to know how to kind of address that, but to read the room and to know what exactly they needed at that moment was kind of challenging. And then

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to know where we could take liberty because 'I wasn't sure how much we needed to stick to the PCO versus how much we could kind of craft their own thing. Yeah. And I think also because different students were at different phases in their learning and there was also hard to kind of adapted to not be boring, to stand too big of a stretch to others. Obviously when we had to go off script, it was challenging, but it was like a fun challenge like it was never something where I was like, oh' I don't think I can handle it.

Rebecca shared a similar thought about how you can never fully be prepared because anything can happen during the facilitation, "this is a situation where you can't really prepare just because there's so much uncertainty as to what students are going to say." This was a part of the weekly preparation for teaching instructors to help the facilitators think of potential ways things might not go well, or how to have a contingency plan if their participants were not picking up on a concept. She went on to say,- "but you never know what's a student's going to share that might trigger another student that might come off offensive. You kind of just have to be ready for everything, which I thought was pretty difficult, but a good learning experience.""

4.3.3 Differences in Facilitators who took a Semester-Long Course vs. a Mini-Course.

A common factor for the facilitator experience was the amount of exposure and time that they had to learn and practice complex theories and facilitation tools such as affirmative inquiry, and multi-partiality. It typically takes a few weeks to have a baseline understanding of these concepts, and then put them into practice. The facilitator is then aware of when this learning occurs in the facilitation process and can see the learning take place with their participants. Angelica a facilitator who took the semester-long training course said the following, "You don't know how

your conversations really lack depth at the end of the day…I was able to really turn up my listening skills to like 1000 and get to a place where I'm really questioning and leaning into what people are telling me."

Chance, another facilitator who took a semester-long training course stated "there's so much I could say, I mean, I found a family, you know that was huge." He went on to say, "But dialogue and training both, they made me feel like I was part of something bigger than myself." Candy another facilitator who took the semester long training course said the following, "I think, also just like again, the relationship thing like getting to know all these new people like, especially in training, like my cohort we got really, really close and even the other cohort like coming back together and actually facilitating in a group with all those people…it was just really cool to have that group and have all those relationships, because many of those people are still really close friends of mine."

Lizzy who took the mini-course reflected the following:

> I would say the training course was less challenge that I thought it would be. I think I felt that it was very fast-paced, but I also felt that it was difficult to necessarily learn skills in the moment, while I was watching my peers facilitate…it was not emotionally pulling, I think because it was so fast paced, and because a different group facilitated each time, it wasn't as intense, people were very cautious about what they were talking about and very sensitive, and we were all remote so it was really easy to hide discomfort. I couldn't tell if others were uncomfortable, and we weren't crying at that point to get to the master narrative or talk about experiences. We weren't at all very vulnerable with each other in that format. I would say it definitely wasn't as emotionally tolling as facilitating.

Within my research and my time teaching students who took a semester-long course versus those who took the mini-course format, I can anecdotally say that students who took the semester-long course were more comfortable with the more complex theories as they were able to practice facilitate several times throughout the semester. Compared to the students who took the mini-course in which I had to go over concepts of affirmative inquiry and multipartiality for several weeks in the practicum course. Students who took the semester-long course also mentioned that the assignment to create practice facilitation outside of the classroom with a group of peers, along with transcribing the session was a key part of the learning in the semester-long training course. Students who took the mini-course were only able to practice once in class and did not complete the practice facilitation outside of the classroom.

It was also interesting to see how a cohort was more developed in a semester-long course versus those who took a mini-course. Although no student felt fully prepared to facilitate because of the factor of unknown how their participants would react to various activities and readings, it seemed, the semester-long students felt more prepared, as they were able to practice facilitate on several occasions throughout the semester.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The following table is a summary of benefits and challenges, as well as some nuances that were discovered through the interview process of students who were able to take a semester-long training course, versus a mini-course format.

Summary of Interview Responses Regarding Peer Facilitation

Benefits

- Facilitation skills gained (active listening, affirming inquiry, etc.)

- Interaction with people different from themselves

- Being able to hear and see different perspectives

Challenges

- Emotional Toll

- Time commitment:

    o   The process to become a facilitator

    o   The amount of work while facilitating

Semester vs. Mini-Course

- Improvisation and knowing how to deviate from the detailed agenda

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Figure 5

5.1.1 Benefits

In a previous section, a review of essential literature about the effect intergroup dialogue has on its participants concluded that students who participated in an intergroup dialogue had an increased awareness of inequality and its relationship to institutional and structural factors, an increased motivation to bridge differences, and greater increases of empathy and increased motivation to be actively engaged in their post-college communities by influencing social policy and political structure (Nagda et al. 2009). These concepts and pedagogy were grounded in Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1973), as it ties not only conceptual knowledge of oppression, but the humanization of others to create a critical consciousness that leads to action. This cognitive learning was also referenced by Maxwell et al. (2011) in that the belief that knowledge and skills are not enough, but the effect of the emotions tied to these issues in the passion and self-awareness create tangible steps of moving towards social justice. As experts in the field of intergroup dialogue, Maxwell, Nagda, and Thompson (2011), stated that peer facilitators experience a deeper learning compared to those who participate. The results of this study align with this conclusion. As stated earlier, this study is one of few to measure the impact of intergroup dialogue on the peer facilitators. The results were conclusive the impact on the facilitator experience has immense benefits as they continue to use the experience, skills, and knowledge in their personal lives as well as in their careers. Lilian reflects on her overall facilitation experience and how she wanted to use it moving forward:

> I feel like moving forward in my time at Michigan, I can use some of the conversation skills I learned or even just also like teamwork and my group work with my partner. I feel like I can use some of those skills in my classes to like, make my projects go more smoothly or make assignments easier for the people in my groups. And besides, like outside of

Michigan, I feel like in general, taking IGR classes just pretty much changed my perspective. Maybe I didn't realize it before about how I would l was a little bit closed-minded. So I think after Michigan, I'll be able to enter new situations with an open mind and not be shocked at some of the things I see.

5.1.2 Challenges

It was also previously mentioned that IGR held a focus group was held to gain perspective on why enrollment for the ALA 320 and ALA 321 courses was in decline. A common theme from the group was the time commitment to become a facilitator as being one of the main hurdles for students to opt into these courses. This was true of the participants in this study, but what became apparent was that within the category of time commitment, was the amount of work that was expected of facilitators while facilitating. These responsibilities included going to class prepared with detailed agendas and facilitator feedback forms ready for review, as well as the actual facilitation of their peers, and the review of their journal entries.

Another common theme that came out of this study for the facilitators was the emotional toll it took to lead difficult dialogues amongst their peers. These included the mental and self-realization of past experiences and the connection to being oppressed, or vice versa of oppressing others within the intersections of social identities and power and privilege. It also showed up in having the responsibility to push their peers in the dialogue utilizing skills such as multi-partiality to challenge participants to dig deeper and be brave and vulnerable. All these experiences were veiled under the presumption of the fear of the unknown, meaning you could never fully be prepared to know how participants would react to any exercise or situation.

5.1.3 Semester vs. Mini-Course

The challenge for any instructor teaching a course is to find the correct balance of how much content to put into a course and how much time to spend on each unit to distribute it throughout the course. This is not a perfect science and in a responsive climate, students can give feedback about how the course is moving too fast, or if they are not understanding the concept. There are also ways for the instructor to invite feedback to assess whether students are understanding the learning objectives, through assignments and tests that can assess the learning that has occurred.

Within IGR there are plenty of concepts and theories that need to be covered, but like many skills, they also need to be practiced repetitively with active coaching. As IGR continues to adjust the training course (extending the mini-course into six weeks), strategies should be taken to build the cohort experience. The results of this study suggested that community building is an important aspect of the facilitator experience, and IGR could aim to build on that finding. Although there are benefits of offering several mini-courses within one semester, namely, a bigger pool of students who are trained, what is lost is the camaraderie that may be gained in a full semester course. This may seem like a small element, but the trust and vulnerability that is built through the cohort model is what helps to sustain facilitators during difficult moments of facilitating their peers.

Most importantly, the semester-long course also allows for more practice facilitation which was a key factor in students feeling more prepared to facilitate. Practice facilitation allows students to gain valuable feedback from their peers as well as their teaching instructors in a setting that allows for mistakes. It also allows facilitators to see the more difficult concepts such as multi-partiality in real time.

5.2 Recommendations for IGR

5.2.1 Setting up facilitators for success

Within a dialogue, many logistics need to be handled before the course starts. There is an element of the enrollment process that is uncontrollable. Students drop courses at the beginning of the semester, for various reasons. This can lead to an unbalanced dialogue group which can make it difficult for the facilitators. Having an unbalanced dialogue can lead to a difficult facilitation experience. All measures should be taken to avoid situations like this. As so many elements of a dialogue can go wrong, IGR must do everything in its power to put facilitators in a position of likely success.

As changes have been made to the training course, very little has been changed in the practicum course. Given that the main challenge for most facilitators was the amount of work that had to be done to prepare for their weekly dialogues, along with all the administrative responsibilities, IGR should look into strategies to lighten the load that has to be done from week to week. As a former teaching instructor for this course, it was very important to be able to gauge how each dialogue was going from week to week. Observations of each section happened only once during the semester, so the use of weekly detailed lesson plans (P3s) was an important assessment to see if facilitators were on track with their dialogues as well as to keep facilitators accountable in the planning of their dialogues. Facilitator Feedback Forms(F3) was another outlet for facilitators to be honest about how their co-facilitation was working or not working rather than just verbally giving a report in front of their peers in class. I also recognized the repetition and monotony of doing this on a weekly basis for a whole semester. To break up the lack of variety I would suggest giving facilitators the option to audio/video record their detailed lesson plans (P3s)

and co-facilitator feedback forms (F3s.) I tried this technique in the training course when students were required to give journal reflections. Students enjoyed the option of verbally processing the content.

5.2.2 Marketing and Recruitment

Lastly, one of the most difficult parts of recruiting for IGR was that most students have no idea what "Intergroup Relations" or "Intergroup Dialogue" is at first glance. I would suggest building partnerships with multiple schools across the University to offer a facilitation training certificate that can count toward their major. Currently, IGR courses count toward Psychology and Sociology majors, as well as a Social Work and IGR minor. Because facilitation skills are so in demand, I believe establishing a facilitation certificate within the Ross School of Business, the School of Education and the Ford School of Public Policy would increase the demand for IGR facilitation courses and give more students a valuable experience of intergroup dialogue. I would also suggest that a requirement of the certificate would be to first participate in an Intergroup Dialogue Course, and then go through the training and practicum process.

There is a huge potential to continue to grow IGR at the University of Michigan. The power of intergroup dialogue facilitation is inevitable if given the proper settings and parameters. Increasing enrollment in these courses will have a lasting effect in greater society as graduates of this program will have tools to work with different types of people, engage in difficult dialogue, have empathy and understanding of all types of social identities, the ability to analyze inequity, and have a critical consciousness that will lead to pushing back on societal norms that are unjust.

5.3 Recommendations for Programs at Other Universities

Regarding the greater field of intergroup dialogue, I would challenge programs that utilize faculty and staff to facilitate dialogues to pilot peer-facilitated groups. There is a tremendous educational opportunity for students that is being lost when a peer-to-peer model is not being utilized. The study also makes it clear that a significant amount of time to train students to be facilitators is a very important aspect of setting dialogue groups up for success, but the benefits outweigh the costs if set up properly.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

As research is limited to the facilitator experience in intergroup dialogue in IGR, I would recommend a longitudinal study of facilitators who took a semester-long training course versus those who have taken the mini course.

In closing, through this research, it was clear that the challenging experience of peer facilitation was rewarding and beneficial to all the participants in this study. The outcomes of recognizing inequalities, building empathy, and tangible action toward reducing inequalities and social responsibility (Gurin, et. al., 2013), were met. Facilitators continue to use the experiences, skills, and concepts in other courses that they took, in their daily interactions with family and friends, as well as in their careers. The time and investment that the University of Michigan has put into IGR is well spent and further action should be taken to increase the capacity for students to be able to participate and facilitate these opportunities.

Appendix A

Appendix A.1 Questions and Protocol:

The following protocol was used:

Thank you for participating in this interview for the purpose of Scott Hwang's dissertation project at the University of Pittsburgh. This interview will roughly take 60 minutes. I appreciate any insights you can provide into your experience in taking ALA 320/321 courses. The data that will be gathered will not only help to complete my dissertation of practice, but also give valuable knowledge to IGR and help us to determine how to further market and invite students to participate in peer facilitation. The more facilitators we can recruit and train into the program, the more dialogues we can offer. Your participation will make a difference in continuing to help students at the University of Michigan to become more socially just and conscious. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You can stop the interview at any time or skip any questions. To maintain your anonymity, you will be given a pseudonym. All data received from you will be used in conjunction to this pseudonym and not your real name. All of your responses are confidential, and data will be kept under lock and key. We will not associate the information you provide with your name in reports, but it may be possible for someone to think they can identify you. Given these conditions, do you agree to participate in this interview?

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. Over the next 60 minutes, you will participate in an activity with prompts, that will be followed by open ended questions conversations

Q1

Tell me about your facilitation experience?

Probe: What was the most difficult part? What did you enjoy the most? What did you get out of your experience?

In ALA 320/321 you did a PASK Assessment (Passion, Awareness, Skills, and Knowledge). I'm going to go through each of these categories and ask you to reflect on if and how the training and practicum courses changed your understanding and behavior of these categories. (Attach a copy of PASK)

Q2

In what ways did your passion and awareness for social justice change through the training and facilitation process?

Q3

In what ways did your knowledge and skills for social justice change through the training and facilitation process?

Q4

Can you tell me about a time when **you** used the skills that you learned in the training and facilitation courses to interrupt bias, derogatory comments or jokes and/or microaggressions.

Probe:

-What was your hope in interrupting?

Q5

How do you think you might use what you learned from your experience moving forward in the rest of your time here at the university and beyond?

Q6

Would you say that the training and or practicum course was more or less challenging than you thought it was going to be?

Probe: How did you overcome the challenges?

Q7

How did you balance the costs and benefits? Would you say that benefits outweigh the costs?

Q8

Anything else that you would like me to know about your experience?

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