

Final Summary Report

Importance of the Experience:

Facilitating dialogue is important to me because I consider social justice to be one of my core values. As such, it is something that I am devoted to on a daily basis. Social justice comes about through change, and as a facilitator, I help create that change through instilling awareness and teaching responsibility for our words and actions. The way society exists today is under a structure of socialization where we are confronted by messages and rules all the time without even realizing it. Unfortunately, the socialized messages we have been taught often follow the dominant narrative in perpetuating stereotypes and continuing oppressive behavior. Dialogue is important because it calls attention to—it names—the oppression that exists. Dialogue is also important (and appropriate) because of the complexity of the issues surrounding oppression, particularly when it comes to intersectionality and multiple identities. Hearing experiences from classmates about how they acknowledge their privilege and deal with their collusion for different identities helps ease agent guilt and further the target cause. Facilitating is important to me because I believe change has to start now and I see dialogue as an effective outlet to jumpstart it.

Goals/Objectives:

My goal for my facilitation experience was to have a better time than when I previously facilitated in my research race and ethnicity dialogue. I looked forward to having more freedom with the PCO and weekly sessions. I wanted to have a good time and have participants have a good time. Content-wise, I wanted participants to recognize how they may have privilege and how they may be colluding. After the first two sessions, my personal goal was to improve the social justice understanding of one of our agent participants who I felt needed it the most:

Charlie. From early on, I marked him as the “problem child.” We have a similar background and I felt like I knew how to reach out to him. Personally, I wanted to explore and expand my own knowledge of gender oppression. I knew I had areas to work on, and I hoped the facilitation experience would help highlight those for me. I was very interested in the topic of gender after coming off a semester with two classes focusing on it and after planning to write a book on the value in rejecting stereotypical gender roles in empowering daughters to be independent.

Tasks Completed:

In terms of dialogue content, I think one of the most effective (and important) tasks that Keith and I did was our opening “followup” and “housekeeping” sections. Each week, we made sure to address remaining areas of confusion from the previous session (usually surrounding concepts/terms), concerns from journals, and climate logistics (acknowledging absences, pointing out what stage we were in).

We were also very upfront about the drawbacks to the structure of dialogue. We acknowledged how most issues/questions did not have a clear answer; rather, issues are complex and most understanding is ambiguous and left to interpretation by the audience. Time constraints often demanded that we move on to the next activity without flushing out all the ideas that were put on the table. I know this was a big area of distress from my last facilitation, so I made sure we were very transparent about these drawbacks.

Another good thing we did was tailor certain activities to students and include student input. I think they really appreciated the opportunity to fill out a note card with a lingering question and interesting topic idea (in addition to the Hot Topics assignment), express ongoing concerns in a caucus group setting, and pose further questions in our closing go-arounds. In acknowledging group dynamics, we made sure to incorporate silent personal reflection time and

writing activities which encouraged more participation from some regularly quieter participants. We also had small group and pair sharing activities in addition to large group ones. This helped the dialogue process because it acknowledged that people have different learning styles and preferences. I was also able to accomplish my goals through open communication with my co.

Another way my goals were met were through the time and care that Keith and I put into prepping for every session. We both did all the readings all the time (not all facilitators do). We both read all the journals every week (last time I only read half). We met with students who missed class outside of class (and Office Hours) to catch them up on what they missed and even hosted a “Makeup Dialogue.” Participants could tell that we were committed so they wanted to be as well. Giving our all every week provided the ability to continually push their learning edges—which is what developed final understanding, after all.

It helped tremendously that we have extremely similar personalities and facilitation styles, but the ability to openly express concern, constructive criticism, and discomfort was crucial to our facilitation success (and something that had been lacking in my previous co-facilitation experiences). We were comfortable with each other, and the class could sense it. It resulted in us being ourselves and thereby creating the safe environment for participants to be themselves as well.

Impact:

This was a very rewarding experience for me. I was able to witness the progression of social justice understanding—through the weekly written reflection journals, through class participation, and through conversations with participants outside of class. I have read some of the participants’ final papers and the ones that I read were heartwarming. While I am cynical (as a result of my personality type) as to the full genuineness of all of their statements (were they

just saying what IGR wanted to hear?), I truly believe they learned a lot and felt the class to be worthwhile. I know that the future action plan for most was simply to affect their inner spheres of influence (self, family, friends), but I think that is positive. They acknowledge that they still have a lot of work to do on their own first. I think they are being realistic about how they can affect change—and I think this realism makes the change that much more tangible.

Lessons Learned:

I was able to draw from my personal experience to help my participants further develop their own level of social justice understanding. I became more aware of little ways I collude in regards to gender in everyday life. I became more conscious of my everyday language and how terms I use can be offensive and hurting the cause of target members. I became more aware of what I do when I am triggered. I became more aware of my remaining weaknesses in facilitation style (usually in regards to when I am triggered). I became more conscious of how my body language is perceived.

Summary of Practicum Experience

What was most effective in Practicum?

I think the most effective aspect of our practicum class was the group brainstorming process in being able to bounce ideas off each other for how we should adapt our weekly P3's. Our class benefited from our closeness because we were able to talk openly with each other. I enjoyed hearing my peers' perspectives on issues. I look at a problem one way (usually in a strict logical, practical sense) while they look at the same problem in a much different context yet we all present workable solutions. I think our dialogue class benefited from Keith's and my incorporation of different ideas as a result of the different personality styles posing the suggestions.

Did you experience yourself as both a teacher and a learner in Practicum? When? When not?

I most definitely experienced myself as both a teacher and a learner in Practicum. My participants gave me content ideas for my book as well as process observations I had not noticed before. I learned in Practicum through observation of different facilitation techniques, through the content-specific sessions (Ariel's pinching, Lea's and Dreyson's collusion, zebra and water activity), in addition to the specific suggestions of my fellow facilitations (already noted above). I was a teacher in the obvious sense in how I taught social justice concepts and conducted weekly facilitation tasks for my class dialogue, but I also believe I was a teacher in our practicum class. When a peer's statements were misunderstood, I believe I was often able to paraphrase the meaning in a way that brought new understanding. I was not a learner when the conversation turned off-topic from the intended issue in Practicum because I became frustrated and checked out. I was not a teacher (for the most part) during the ICP's because there the participants developed the ideas for themselves.

The most salient Practicum sessions were the ones where Lea dominated the conversation and the week after where we spent time debriefing it. I think it was a pretty uncomfortable time for everyone, but I also think it is one in which we were all teachers and learners. I know I learned a lot when I compared the process elements of our own frustration with dialogue to how participants might be feeling about the process.

What could instructors do better or change in order to improve the experiences of facilitators?

I think instructors could examine the assigned readings. I found a lot of problems with the terminology used (especially in relation to gender) including binary, sexism v gender oppression, sex terms v gender terms, minority v target. This became problematic when Keith and I would

try to teach against the readings yet still incorporate the message of the readings at the same time. Some of the readings reference Peggy McIntosh's original piece (her list of privileges) yet the McIntosh piece was never assigned (until I included it in our Hot Topics session). The pieces I assigned for our Interpersonal Hot Topic session (from Bartky and Connell) played out to be very important in participants' later understanding. Besides the actual articles chosen, I think the order in which the readings are assigned should be re-examined. One example is how "there is no hierarchy of oppression" seemed to come too early.

The binary way in which the PCO is designed, topics are assigned, and the program is set up also needs to be examined. I think this is in the workings, but it is important to note because Keith and I always acknowledge how identities play out on a spectrum yet participants were bothered by how a lot of the way social justice is taught is through a binary paradigm.

I think something instructors could also do is constantly encourage facilitators to encourage discussions of process elements in their classes. The "Dialogue About the Dialogue" piece should never be cut out of the P3. Looking at process is something that Keith and I hammered in, and in the end, it helped create some of the participants' biggest learnings. I think participants learn best when they discover ideas for themselves. They will act how they will, but when attention is called to their actions, they become more aware of the structural oppression underlying how their identities play out. This was particularly salient with gender, at least.

What could you and other facilitators do better or change to improve the experience?

I should have acknowledged at the beginning of class when I knew participants were not going to be there and why. I did this later on but forgot to during the fishbowl session and it ended up creating discomfort. I should have also stressed from the start that social justice involves justice for non-friends *and* whose interests compete with mine. I think this is something

Roger said in training, and it stuck with me. I implicitly acknowledged it throughout the term, but I think it is something that all facilitators should explicitly come back to.

I think facilitators should put a considerable amount of time into stage one planning. One of the ways in which Keith and I were able to create a successful space for dialogue is through our inclusive “Ground Rule” list and our constant attention to logistical details. Being aware of the little things early on sends a message of professionalism that participants pick up on. When they see we’re serious, they will put in more effort and take the class seriously too. I think a lot of time in Practicum early on should be devoted to discussing ways Cos plan to set up classroom standards like these (including journal grading, assigning readings, holding participants responsible for readings, handling attendance, etc).

Another thing I think other facilitators could do is expand their own personal knowledge of the topic area. I drew SO much from my Sociology of Gender class last semester, and my background knowledge (and Keith’s) is what helped our participants develop deeper understanding. It allowed me to articulate how transgender is different from transsexual and why gender is socially constructed, beyond giving me great articles to assign. Our participants saw us (and trusted us) as experts. We were able to include thinking outside the binary as one of our main themes because we understood the complexity involved. Our participants would have received a much less enriching experience (curriculum) otherwise. We obviously don’t want to severely limit who can be a facilitator, but at least in regards to gender, I feel that some background course is necessary to have an adequate foundational level of understanding in order to teach gender oppression. This comes from more than the facilitation retreats and regularly assigned readings. I feel additional training (topic specific) should be given as far as background to the topic and controversial/contemporary “current events.”

Final Thoughts:

One of the biggest benefits of our co-facilitation style ended up being one of the biggest drawbacks as well, though I did predict that. A big benefit is how our personalities and facilitation styles are so similar. It became a drawback when we perhaps assumed too much that the other was always on the same page. We misread each other's communication cues during an important definitions discussion early on, that created an (arguably) unsafe space. We could have been even more transparent about every little concern (rather than leaving it to assumption that the other was on the exact same page). Yet, I still think the benefits outweighed the drawbacks.

My biggest facilitation weakness is not being able to separate the different issues that are brought up together, in the moment. While I can list different points of discussion, a lot of confusion that arose (particularly concerning terms) came from different starting conceptions. As a facilitator, I could better recognize that not everyone is on the same page and try to say more clarifying concepts. I need to work more on acknowledging my weaknesses as well.

This semester gave me a lot of ideas of what I want/need to further explore. While it highlighted a lot of actions of collusion, most of them I have to continually work toward improving, and I also know that there are a lot that I haven't identified yet.

It was also really interesting for me to experience the caucus group/fishbowls as a target member after having done them as an agent member. The feelings of ease and camaraderie were so much different than my feelings of discomfort and guilt of before.

One of the salient class moments for me is when a participant pulled me aside after class expressing frustration with Keith calling him out. I saw it as agent resistance and encouraged him

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to reflect on his feelings. His journal the next week fully acknowledged his privilege and how his reaction had been problematic, and it made me very proud.

My most memorable moments, however, have been in the conversations I've had with participants outside class. I regularly spoke to two agent members, further flushing out ideas and challenging them, and it was very rewarding to see their growth in recognition of their privilege by the end. It meant a lot to me that dialogue was always on their minds and that they had continued conversations about it with many people outside class (beyond just me).

I am always reminded of now I need to further recognize my privilege in regards to my agent identities. Our practicum class showed me a few times that I still overlook my racial privilege, and yet I don't even think about many of my other agent identities ever. Like always, there is still more work to be done.