

Social Work Students' Perspectives on Facilitating Intergroup Dialogues

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Background

The TRACKS Intergroup Dialogue program was established in 2014 and is housed within the School's Center for Human Rights and Social Justice at Barry University School of Social Work. Professor Mitchell Rosenwald was trained by the University of Michigan's National Intergroup Dialogue Institute and, in turn, trained Ms. Carolina Rios, Coordinator of the Center for Human Rights and Social Justice. Since then, the program has engaged primarily university students. In 2017, TRACKS began pilot interventions with one local high school in an underserved community in Miami Dade County; this pilot showed great anecdotal results.

The TRACKS curriculum incorporates an array of developmental activities that is based on evidence of the intergroup dialogue intervention. Select activities are used with permission from University of Michigan's National Intergroup Dialogue Institute. TRACKS is a closed group comprised of three, 90-minute sessions.

Initial Project Overview

Barry University's School of Social Work proposed to train and equip Social Work students to provide dedicated, race-focused, TRACKS intergroup dialogue training with high school students in the Miami area. The intent of the project was: 1) to reduce racist stereotypes among high school students and 2) provide social work students with the leadership skills to deliver such trainings. This funding was requested to further increase TRACKS capacity by providing dedicated program assistants (Social Work students) to assume leadership roles in the delivery of the intergroup dialogues.

GOALS	INTENDED OUTCOMES
1.Reduce race-based prejudice and increase intergroup understanding among area high school students.	High school students will reduce racist stereotypes and increase intergroup understanding Increased intergroup understanding about racism among high school students. The evaluation method of this outcome will be an IRB-approved one group, pre-test/post-test design with an immediate and one month that assesses students' level of prejudice and intergroup understanding.
2.Increase leadership capacity among Social Work students who serve as program assistants for this proposal.	Social work students who serve as program assistants will develop their leadership ability with increased knowledge and skills in delivery an intergroup dialogue program focused on prejudice reduction. The evaluation method of this outcome will be ongoing supervision and an exit interview with program assistants to assess their level of leadership.
3.Further position the Barry University School of Social Work, and by extension NADD, as a leader in anti-racist intervention in the community.	Barry University School of Social Work, and by extension NADD, will emerge as leaders in anti-racist interventions in the South Florida community. The evaluation method of this outcome will be the final report and presentation distributed to NADD.

Revised Project Overview due to COVID-19

Due to pandemic's implications on school openings, in-person programming, and the difficulties with logistics/timing to deliver the intervention virtually, the project had to be quickly revised regarding scope and delivery. Consequently, TRACKS was delivered virtually (for the first time ever) to Barry University students during the Summer, Fall and Spring 2020. The delivery of race-focused, intergroup dialogue training in a virtual format proved to be more important this year to our students, than ever before, and Barry University School of Social Work was honored to be able to step in and provide such a powerful training experience.

Completed Activities

Recruitment & Training

The Project Implementation began with recruiting and training two highly capable program assistants (BSW and MSW students) who committed to working during the duration of the project. The program assistants' duties for this proposal included: 1) participation in TRACKS training; 2) coordination of program implementation; 3) delivering of TRACKS dialogues; and 4) participation in supervision.

Dr. Rosenwald and Ms. Rios provided training to the program assistants on the TRACKS curriculum via the *TRACKS Peer Facilitators Training Manual* and provided ongoing supervision. The program assistants coordinated the planning and facilitated the delivery of four TRACKS series (1 in person- and 3 virtual)- starting in the Spring 2020.

Spring 2020: 23 participants
(conducted in- person)
70% *Hispanic or Latino*
22% *Black or African American*
4% *Caucasian*
4% *Pacific Islander*

Fall 2020: 9 participants
(conducted virtually)
67% *Black or African American*
11% *Hispanic or Latino*
11% *Caucasian*
11% *Pacific Islander*

Summer 2020: 6 participants
(conducted virtually)
33% *Black or African American*
17% *Hispanic or Latino*
17% *Caucasian*
33% *Pacific Islander*

Spring 2021: 8 participants
(conducted virtually)
50% *Black or African American*
25% *Hispanic or Latino*
12.5% *Caucasian*
12.5% *Pacific Islander*

Evaluation

An IRB-approved study was initially intended to allow Dr. Rosenwald to evaluate the efficacy of the TRACKS intervention at pre-test, immediate post-test, and one-month after post-test with high school students. However, due to the change of goal one (1) of the project, the evaluation switched focus to exit surveys that gauged the two student facilitators' leadership capacity as a result of providing TRACKS training.

Barry University

Findings

Learning through Facilitation

Powerful way to learn about themselves: management, listening, how to show up, better at facilitating, flexibility, communication.

Impact on Racial Justice

TRACKS creates a space for dialogue and understanding - often lacking for some students - by shining a light on differences and perceptions.

Learned Skills to be used as a Social Worker

TRACKS reaffirmed their choice to become Social Workers. Skills learned: ability to listen, reflect, and create an inclusive environment, conflict management, clear communication, empathy, and group management

In Their Own Words

“TRACKS was a catalyst for furthering my self-awareness. I learned the power of managing and listening to the different aspects of myself to present myself in the way that each group needed. This is nuanced because no two groups are the same; therefore, I learned to attend to each group’s unique needs by showing up how they needed me the most.”

“TRACKS will directly influence my future career. This experience provided me with a strong foundation and prepared me in a practical sense for my career as a global social worker. Facilitating TRACKS also helped me to refine my career choice. My career choice and the population I choose to serve is a recent decision that was made. TRACKS brought into clarity the work that I vow to do in the future. In my future career, I will utilize my facilitation and organizational skills, ability to listen, reflect, and create an inclusive environment, conflict management, clear communication, empathy, and group management.”

“Students taught me the beauty of receiving the gifts of their sharing to shape my own beliefs and understanding of the human spirit. Once again, I was reminded many times and throughout different intervals of the importance of sharing within a group and how significant it is to speak up and be oneself. Though silence is important, speaking brings more clarity and opens up many doors for deepening throughout the experience.”

“I have always been a huge fan of any form of dialogue because I feel that the heart of the human experience tends to come out and be seen when there is a supportive atmosphere that welcomes its expression. TRACKS made very clear, how important a safe and supportive environment is for the developing of the human mind as dictated by the heart and the emotions.”

“I learned more about the beauty of the human resilience, my own and the students, and what a powerful tool it is in our daily living as we come across so many different and diverse cultures.”

Lessons Learned/ Implications for Practice

While the pandemic greatly altered this project's original plan, the project was still able to provide intergroup dialogues to students at the university level and engage two social work students in the facilitation of the dialogues. From the two student facilitators' perspectives, they found great benefit in providing TRACKS to university students. They cited the transformative nature of the dialogues both on their own growth as social workers as well as the students who received the intervention.

Discussing issues of race is never easy but these dialogues provided a platform that led to such insight. Moreover, it is noteworthy that social work skills were identified from these dialogues; this further suggest linkages between providing intergroup dialogue and social work skill development and leadership. Finally, that the majority of the dialogues were provided virtually – the first time that this occurred at Barry University – points to the flexibility of how intergroup dialogue can be delivered. This virtual platform makes us rethink geographic limitations in delivering the dialogues to many more participants in the future.

Transferability to other Social Work Programs

By virtue of both mission and accreditation standards, all social work programs focus on achieving social justice. Incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) continues to be an essential component in social work education. There is much potential for social work programs to provide intergroup dialogue programs that address racism as part of the implicit curriculum. Engaging social work students as trained facilitators to deliver this programming in a range of geographic and digital spaces holds great promise to cultivate students' social work skillset and set them on the paths as leaders in their own right.

The instrumentation and TRACKS Peer Facilitator Manual associated with this project are provided to NADD for social work programs' information. Thank you for this opportunity.