

Using Art as Language in Large Group Dialogues: The TRECsm Model

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Abstract

In an effort to combat racism, antiracist activists often use the structure of dialogue groups for interracial and transcultural discussions. The assumption that spoken English is an equally accessible language can pose barriers to participation in such groups. The use of art processes in interracial dialogue groups can shift the power dynamics within the group by giving "voice" to members who are less able to utilize either verbal processes or the dominant verbal language. The author defines and describes Large Group Dialogue (LGD) as a specific type of group encounter, discusses the dynamics of language and oppression, and advocates for the use of artmaking in interracial LGD. TREC: Talking Race, Engaging Creativelysm is described and discussed as one art-based LGD model for interracial dialogues.

Introduction

Building bridges across social, cultural, racial, and political divides is increasingly necessary in our conflict-ridden world. Violence and oppression occur routinely, even among apparently similar people. Negotiations, leadership dialogues, and institutionally sanctioned peace efforts fail to reach coherence, much less solution, despite the tragic human cost to each side. Because art therapists can move between visual and verbal forms of expression, we are uniquely equipped to enter the domain of socially responsive and social action art arenas. As we extend our services into our communities, we must continue to develop models of group work and social interaction that address change and repair at macro social levels.

The purpose of this paper is to present the potential benefits and liabilities of using art processes in social-action group dialogues, with particular emphasis on interracial dialogues. First I will define *Large Group Dialogue* and argue that unequal access to communicative power in the verbal group unnecessarily slows down the group change process. I will show how creative and dialogue group processes are similar in nature and that the resonances and reflectivity of artmaking, alongside verbalization, create increased oppor-

tunity for inclusive and deepening dialogue encounters. I will describe the constructive impact of including artmaking in Large Group Dialogue and how visual methods can create the chaos necessary to move the group toward disruption of assumptions and deepening self-reflection and awareness. *TREC: Talking Race, Engaging Creativelysm* will be described and presented as a model for art-based Large Group Dialogue.

Defining Large Group Dialogue

The term *dialogue* is used here to describe a specific kind of process that takes place in groups of 20-40 participants. In general, formal dialogue is a disciplined practice that requires each member to have the intention from the outset to engage in specific forms of behavior in which the ability to suspend temporarily one's cherished beliefs is the hallmark. Dialogue occurs within an encounter framework where all individuals agree to be mindful of their body responses and the thoughts that stream through their consciousness, while also attending to their responses that arise as others present their ideas, beliefs, feelings, movements, and images. Revealing hidden assumptions and unconscious dynamics within the group is a priority of the dialogue process. To do this, dialogue groups examine the language being used and its interaction with thinking and thoughts, as well as the interpersonal process of encounter. Dialogue requires a significant commitment to self-awareness and self-discipline on the part of the participants.

I have drawn from the work of Bohm, Factor, and Garrett (1991) and de Maré, Piper, and Thompson (1991) to come to a synthesis described in this paper as Large Group Dialogue (LGD). Bohm et al.'s dialogue model is strikingly similar to de Maré's concept of median and large group processes. Each addresses similar dynamics, similar motivating factors, and similar process and outcome for engaging in the group. Each sees the large group as a microcosm of the larger culture, and each sees the necessity for the treatment of the larger culture through large group dialogue. There are also significant differences, especially regarding the use of a facilitator or conductor in the dialogue group.

LGD has the intent of open-ended exploration in order to uncover implicit assumptions and implicate order within the group through the use of suspension, reflection, encounter, and, in the case of the art-enhanced groups, art processes and materials. This encounter contains within it the conscious and unconscious embedded cultural imperatives of the group members, as well as their individual ex-

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periences. The inherent frustration of the open-ended LGD produces feelings of hatred competing with wishes for affiliation, which are experienced through the individual's internalized and socialized templates of experiences (de Maré et al., 1991). These competing feelings produce a felt sense of chaos among the members, thus offering an opportunity to dive below the explicit meanings to discover the tacit assumptions, motivations, and beliefs of the group and its members.

The technology for the LGD process is free-flowing verbal discussion, utilizing Bohm et al.'s (1991) concepts of proprioception and suspension. The emergence of hate, in the form of racist assumptions, projections, guilt, and so on, is identified and valued as an opening for exploration. The role of the facilitator, who can also be called the *conductor*, is a modification of Bohm's original concept of a leaderless group. Bohm advocated at first for an anarchist (leaderless) group; however, as he developed his concepts, he saw the need for predialogue training for group participants and a need for someone who would take the role of infrastructure organizer. Coming from an analytic group background, de Maré utilizes a conductor who will make direct interventions in the group. Believing that participants' strengths and leadership potentials are diverse and fluid, I have a philosophical preference for a leaderless group process. In practice, though, I have adopted a position in which the facilitator establishes a frame of time, location, duration, and procedures (dialogue principles) and then intervenes minimally in order to hold the frame and help the group move through impasses, usually by helping the group to identify when an impasse has been reached. In addition, in art-based dialogues, the leader may also take on the role of *provocateur* or *stimulator* by introducing an art task or provocative question to begin the dialogue.

A particular function of the facilitator is to model the concept of suspension during these eruptions of less defended material, so that the issues can be understood and transformed. Rather than confronting the racist remark, as is often done in antiracism training, the facilitator makes sure that the remark has been made visible as an assumption and encourages responses from the other participants. In this way, group process is activated within the dialogue group.

On Hearing and Being *Heard* in a Group Dialogue

Who comes to the large group dialogue, and how do we *know* them? It seems an obvious issue in large group dialogue: to know who is there is both an inherent goal (group coherence) and a developing process; that is, as one is known within the context of others, one also changes in response to the context. To know who is there requires a coming to *voice* of the individuals within the large group. Voice is the communicative self-reporting and dialogical expression of the individual. This is both an interactive and a narrative process. The individual story is a constructed narration of the self in context. How are these stories to be told, and how are they to be unpacked and reconstructed?

How are we to achieve awareness of our assumptions and clarity about each other?

Both Bohm and de Maré examine verbal language—its originations, its structural impact on the individual, and its tacit and emerging meaning within the group. Indeed, verbal language is the most highly promoted form of interpersonal, cultural transmission of information and meaning among dominant voices in Western culture. As the prevailing form of communication, verbal language categorizes, codifies, symbolizes, and organizes perceived experience into a meaningful constellation of belief.

However, de Maré (1991) addresses an inherent difficulty of language: “Language interposes itself between man and reality.... In dialogue tension arises between the discursive content and the non-discursive connotation of the intended meaning” (p. 56). He further emphasizes the importance of language, quoting Noam Chomsky, “Language both mirrors human mental process and shapes the flow and character of thought” (p. 56). Bohm, et al. (1991) address the difficulties of language as follows:

If we look carefully at what we generally take to be reality we begin to see that it includes a collection of concepts, memories and reflexes colored by our personal needs, fears, and desires, all of which are limited and distorted by the boundaries of language and the habits of our history, sex and culture. (para. 9)

The verbal language used in most dialogue groups creates an arbitrary linear structure for reporting internal, nonlinear experience—subject-verb-object. To leap from internalized image-based experience to verbal language may inadvertently miss rich sources of information that cannot readily be put into words.

Language, as I mean the term, is a structural means to externalize internal, interpersonal, and perceptual experience. It is not only the spoken or written word. Language is also image, gesture, and tone. These aspects of language are encoded deeply in the individual psyche even before words become symbols and verbal language begins to dominate as a means to express now-embedded and embodied concepts. Emphasis on the verbal may be unnecessarily confining and silencing nonverbal thought processes within the group. In addition, the dominant verbal language of the group may be relatively inaccessible to those for whom it is a second (verbal) language, so that the expanse and depth of self-reporting, not to mention the capacity to *hear* others' self-reports, is constricted. This is significant for both the creation of meaning and the impact on interpersonal power structures within the group.

Perhaps, to paraphrase Einstein, we cannot solve the problem with the same mindset that created the problem. Perhaps, the study of our tacit assumptions, embedded as they are in language and using the language that created the *form* of those assumptions, is an example of Einstein's conundrum. Something else is needed to understand the impact of our verbally coded concepts on our thinking. Sustained dialogue requires a level of commitment that must be supported by some perceived sense of gaining un-

derstanding, self-awareness, or some other reward for the necessary frustration that must be encountered. A major reward is the sense of inclusion or affiliation that coming to some kind of voice within a group produces. Unnecessary silence (i.e., silence caused not by internal-dynamic experiencing but by lack of access to language) deprives both the silent group member and the group itself of vital interpersonal experience.

The language of art can offer additional, and often discordant, information that is not word dependent but that can be made available for verbal translation. For example, kinesthetic work with art materials resulting in the formation of an external concrete image creates multiple feedback potentials for group participants. Visual and kinesthetic languages provide equal or additional access to narrative discourse while increasing perceived power tensions in the group. The ability to “speak,” with the parallel perception of personal power, is reorganized according to the participants’ ability to generate externalized imagery. Voice, then, is encouraged on multiple levels within the group.

Oppression in LGD is a reflection of cultural assumptions and social context, including the expectation that verbal language must be the dominant language of discourse. Indeed, oppression arises out of the privileged position of power that makes assumptions unconsciously from that position. In LGD, culture, socialization, and individual endowments interlock to create a sociometry of access to power. This power is fueled by the ability to quickly access verbal language with which to state one’s position. If one goal in dialogue or median-large groups is to gain clarity and coherence among group members and to develop a sort of *group mind* (Bohm et al., 1991) or *Koinonia* (de Maré et al., 1991), which includes both experience and a sustainable process, we must acknowledge and encompass all forms of thinking and mind available to us.

Both Bohm and de Maré describe the power of metaphor, symbol, and nonlinear processes in human communication and meaning-making. Although “[verbal] language may be the most immediate record of unconscious fantasies of preconsciousness and of collective motives” (de Maré et al., 1991, p. 57), there are other languages that provide immediate records as well. Our society simply does not utilize those languages with the same zeal with which we utilize verbal language. I propose that we add the dimensions of another language in which to dialogue—the language of art, both image and process. I suggest that the inclusion of art in dialogue is to honor difference and to enlarge our potential for group vision.

Images “speak” in a multidimensional way; our bodies and perceptions become more fully alert and engaged, and *whole-brain* activation occurs so that we remember in both body and mind. We are literally visible in a very rich and emotionally charged way. Words can be attached to the images, but the images encompass much more than words. “While language is a socially constructed and conventionalized mode of expression, no corresponding single visual language exists.... The absence of a single visual language may assist in the discovery process” (John-Steiner, 1987, p. 85). Although de Maré, et al. (1991) say, “Dialogue trans-

lates visual images into words” (p. 70), we could find that giving these images visual form can expose the embedded assumptions that verbal discourse may not be able to unpack using words alone.

Dialogue groups have many correlates in artmaking. A major process feature in each is the necessity for chaos, which also contains that which drives hatred, frustration, despair, and love. Chaos in a dialogue group is the potential but unclarified moment when participants suspend old beliefs and assumptions in order to hear more clearly the beliefs and assumptions of others. Chaos allows us to relinquish our cherished beliefs as we consider alternative or additional information.

Chaos in the creative process of artmaking is marked by the moment when the artist faces the blank canvas or the empty potter’s wheel and agrees to drop old conceptions and ideas to let imagination collide with paint and clay. While making art, we suspend our old structures long enough to create something new. Perhaps this new image isn’t exactly *it*, but represents a viable option that we can change, embrace, or eliminate. Creating tangible form allows us the opportunity to make variation after variation on the themes that we grapple with, each time coming closer to what we believe, know, think, feel, or desire. At the moment of bringing a new image into view, we may suddenly realize that a new thought has come as well.

Dialogue and artmaking processes parallel each other in the following ways. Each relies on the willingness and capacity for the participant to suspend old beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors while attending to new stimuli and remaining open to the chaos of engagement with others or with materials. Each requires a commitment to sustain the process until clarity or form has been acquired. When entered in the spirit of openness and awareness, each has the potential to transform the participant and the society encompassing the dialogue or art.

TRECsm: A Pilot Program for Art-Based LGD

TREC: Talking Race, Engaging Creativelysm is a visual-art-based interracial dialogue program with three goals: (a) to provide community-wide interracial dialogue workshops, (b) to train teams of artists and community leaders to use visual art as a means to facilitate and sustain interracial dialogues, and (c) to hold periodic community-wide art exhibitions that encourage further verbal and art-based interracial dialogue. The TRECsm aesthetic model is derived from this author’s experiences with and study of the Mother Tongue project, begun by Mary Bernstein and Terry Rumble in Massachusetts (Bernstein, 2000). Mother Tongue is an ongoing social-visual dialogue that takes the form of 1’ x 4’ horizontal modular panels made by artists and community participants. When exhibited, the panels portray free-flowing thematic streams of dialogue that invite the viewer to make an art panel in response, which then can become incorporated into the exhibit.

The TRECsm adaptation utilizes the panels in a 4” x 12” format. The smaller size is economical, easily trans-



Figure 1

TRECsm wall displaying panels in a public dialogue

portable, and much less artistically intimidating than the larger Mother Tongue panels. An additional benefit is the reduction in the time it takes to create the art. TRECsm panels can be created for either horizontal or vertical display, unlike Mother Tongue, which was a linear, horizontal format. This change creates fewer design constraints and reduces the implicit verbal linguistic bias in the original format. The panels can be moved easily when dialogue streams change focus or direction. This decreases the installation limitations of the Mother Tongue project, allowing increased mobility in the dialogue.

The panels are made of cardboard or mat board with heavy-duty craft magnets attached on the reverse side. They are placed on larger (4' x 5') steel panels that are hinged to form a long accordion-style wall on tabletops (Figure 1). A variety of two- and three-dimensional art media are used including oil pastels, chalk pastels, markers, watercolor, fabric, wire, feathers, string, raffia, shells, magazine images, and other found imagery and materials. Materials and magazines are selected to provide a range of ethnically sensitive choices.

Prior to making the panels, a TRECsm workshop includes a brief introduction to the principles of Bohm dialogue and a warm-up for using art materials. Several rounds of self-introductions ("I am...") or sociometric exercises are also used to sensitize the participants to issues of racism and to get a sense of the cultural and social variables in the group. For example, the participants are asked to show their hands in response to qualifiers that describe them such as, "Who has daily interactions with people of a race different from their own?" "Have you ever been turned down for a job or admission to school based on your race?" and so on.

The participants then are asked to create an artistic response to an evocative question such as, "What was your experience of racism growing up?" After the panels are created, each person shows his or her panel, makes a verbal statement about it, and then places it on the steel walls in a position that seems to make sense relative to the emerging dialogue. This is done in a silent witnessing mode, which creates a climate of suspension and sometimes evokes some chaos among participants as they face a sud-

den awareness of differences or an emotional response to someone else's experience. Instead of becoming verbal, the group is encouraged to reflect on this internalized chaos and to create a second panel to enlarge on or respond to what they have experienced so far in the group. When this is completed, these panels are placed in relation to the others, and the group is opened up to verbal dialogue.

TRECsm was developed in 1999 and 2000 in collaboration with FOCUS St. Louis' Bridges Across Racial Polarization[®] program. The TRECsm pilot program years were July 1, 2000 to June 30, 2002. During its 2-year pilot program phase, TRECsm provided five public, two agency-based, and two university-based LGD, two sessions of facilitator training, and a culminating public art exhibit with onsite artmaking opportunities to sustain the resulting visual dialogue. Interracial pairs of facilitators served as conductors, whose functions were to encourage and guide participants in the free use of art materials as a form of self-expression within a structured dialogue workshop.

The pilot project phase of TRECsm workshops took place in a variety of settings with a diversity of motives among the participants. The most successful dialogues occurred when the participants were evenly divided along racial lines and there weren't institutional constraints to verbal expression. By success, I mean that participants were able to express themselves relatively openly, with feeling, and were able to speak about difficult issues that usually are considered impolite or inflammatory. Three public dialogues and the facilitator dialogue experience are discussed below.

Representative TRECsm Group Experiences

First Public Workshop

The first public workshop was held for a racially diverse group of predominantly female participants. They had been invited because they were already familiar with interracial dialogue and had participated in the Bridges Across Racial Polarization[®] program. About 35 people attended, the largest group we ever had during the life of the program. The group responded as expected to the introduction of art—curious, shy, scared, embarrassed about artistic skill levels, excited, and willing. The stimulus question, "What was your experience of racism growing up?" yielded very diverse responses, ranging from a claim of nonracist experiences to very vulnerable disclosures of feelings about prejudice concerning skin-color variations within the family, the absence of pride in nonwhite role models, family messages about difference, and lost (interracial) loves (Figure 2). The panels were placed on the steel walls, and the group gathered at the walls, listening intently to the stories in close physical contact. Proprioceptive awareness streamed through the group. There were many tears of sorrow, recognition, and shame.

The second round of panels was processed in small groups first. We then came together for large group closure. The majority reported they appreciated being in the small-

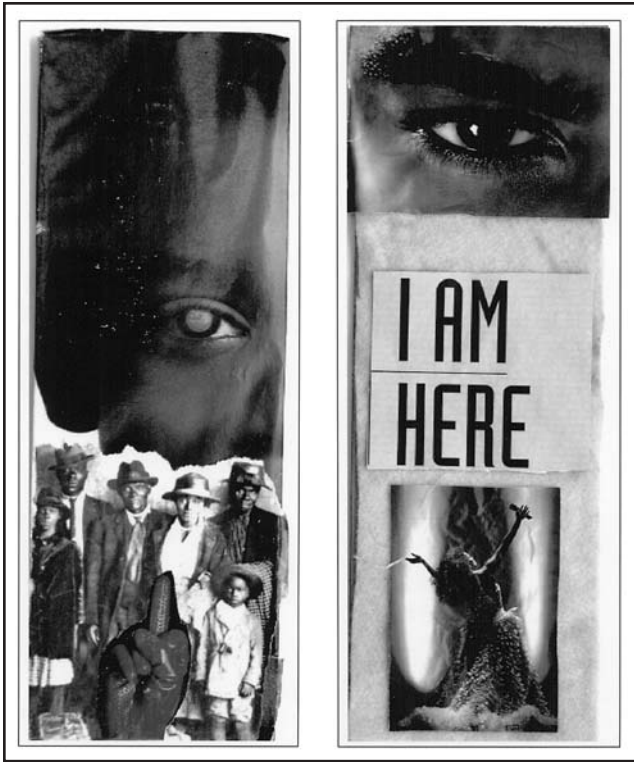


Figure 2

The participant was hesitant to place the red finger on her collage. After some encouragement, she did. "This is what the world told me growing up." The second collage showed her triumphant visibility in the group. "I am here!"

er groups where they could process their stories in more detail. However, a few reported feeling a lessening of interpersonal interaction. Whereas the second set of panels deepened the disclosures for some, they tightened up a resolution to *do something* about racism for most. Because of this, the second panels seemed to prematurely close the dialogue begun in the first round.

Overall, the group reported feeling understood, grateful, roused to feeling and action, and surprised by what they had discovered about themselves and others. They reported feeling more vulnerable and, at the same time, felt their strength within the container of the group. This was a seasoned group of antiracism activists and interracial dialogue participants. The imagery and the process of telling personal stories had moved them emotionally in ways they had not experienced before in interracial dialogues. Although many of them wanted to jump from this group experience into action and problem solving, they also expressed regret they could not continue the art-based process for a while longer.

Second Public Workshop

Our second public TRECsm workshop drew about 13 participants from the general community, with a subgroup of 7 from a consulting firm whose human resources director wanted to initiate interracial dialogue among her employees. She participated with the employees in the workshop. This subgroup was somewhat racially diverse and very motivated to combat racism. Overall, the group was predominantly white and female. The visible racial homogeneity placed additional pressure on the nonwhite members to be representatives of their race or culture.

The presence of their supervisor and the knowledge they would continue to interact with each other appeared to be somewhat inhibiting to the consulting firm subgroup. Several made eye contact with their supervisor more frequently than with other members of the group or with the two facilitators. Many of the panels in both rounds were low in self-disclosure and high in invocations to combat racism. Despite these constraints, some were able to address their personal experiences more forthrightly (Figure 3).

I acted as both facilitator and group participant and took the role of provocateur by creating a second panel that addressed shame issues about being white in response to an African-American's panel. It was difficult to tell whether



Figure 3

Is this a home? Am I racist? Was I born knowing about racism? Did I learn how to be racist? What walls are you building in your home? (Participant grew up in a mixed African-American/Hispanic home.)



Figure 4 Panel 1: Being a white boy in a white world didn't leave much room for people who were different than me. Panel 2: "Harmony in Nature"

the group's muteness was due to the content of what I said or the shift in my authority position from hierarchical to egalitarian. Unfortunately, there was little verbal response to me or to these undercurrents.

Overall, the group appeared quite constrained, despite ample opportunities to speak and the presence of emotionally charged images. Most of the white participants were determined to be *good, antiracist whites* without really examining the tensions between these ideals and what had become evident in the artwork. The panels in Figure 4 are representative of the behavior of many of the participants. The first panel presents a personal offering of information to the group in fairly guarded terms. The second reflects the overtly soothing agreements that blocked further communication about racism. The inclusion of a work group within the larger group was not a choice I would have made had I known about it in advance. The subgroup hierarchy and power dynamics affected its members and had an impact on the group as a whole without being addressed in a meaningful way.

Last Public Workshop

One TRECsm group actually achieved open discussion of hatred and subsequent transformation of belief and feeling in a single 2-1/2-hour session. The small group of around 8 participants was evenly divided racially and also had a quite broad age range from early adolescence to over 65. The three facilitators were a white woman, an Asian woman, and an African-American man, all in their 30s. The location was a small, mixed-race Christian church in a lower-income city neighborhood.

From the outset, the group reacted to an angry participant who challenged assumptions about racism. The facilitators took an inactive role in the group, discarding the

usual structured protocols and simply following the flow of the dialogue as participants. The catalytic, over-50 African-American man, who had been explicit about the intractability of racial divisions, reported he had his implicit beliefs challenged by the younger participants and that he had begun to change his mind somewhat about his position. Each facilitator and the participants reported that the workshop had energized, challenged, and enlarged them in significant ways.

TRECsm Facilitator Dialogue Groups

The TRECsm model has stimulated the imagination of many artists, therapists, educators, and social action workers, mostly white, in the St. Louis metropolitan area. Facilitators came from each of these disciplines and were trained to implement the TRECsm workshop model. Because time was limited, training focused on the aesthetic aspects of the model and less on the dynamics of facilitation. To have a grounded understanding of TRECsm, including their own attitudes towards race and racism, the facilitators engaged in mock TRECsm workshops. During the second year, we provided bimonthly meetings in an attempt to sustain a dialogue among the facilitators. These were poorly attended most of the time, primarily because of scheduling difficulties.

Toward the end of the second year, we used less structured artmaking, mixing the panel format with any format the facilitators preferred. We didn't ask them to directly address racism but to simply express something they felt passionately about in artwork of some kind. This opened our dialogue up greatly to other social-cultural issues and to more discoveries about the individuals within the group. I slid into a more active facilitation role, offering some challenging comments, staying with the immediacy of the

group moment, and providing some bridging comments. These groups began to feel more alive to me and also, I believe, to the participants. The last two workshops drew almost all the trainees.

As a group, the facilitators were as likely to want to solve the racism problem—before fully discovering their own experiences of racism—as the workshop participants were. They were very motivated to implement the TRECsm structure in their workplaces even though they did not always understand the full potential of the group dialogue process. As an example of this potential, following the World Trade Center attack in 2001, a large installation of TRECsm-style panels was created in a community college setting. A second installation was done the following Fall. These were a successful form of visible social witness.

Discussion

TRECsm has provided this author with the longest running direct experience with art-supported LGD. TRECsm has taught me about the importance of the sustained dialogue process and the judicious use of facilitation. I have become thoroughly convinced that we art therapists have a special location and role within art-based LGD, in part because we have skills in group process and facilitation combined with aesthetic sensibilities and ease with art materials. But this role requires further examination of what it means to be a therapist in the social context and what the contract is between the art therapist and the participants; these are subjects for another paper.

Strengths

In general, the TRECsm groups achieved the dialogue characteristics of proprioceptive awareness, suspension, reflection, increased awareness of some tacit beliefs and assumptions, and, occasionally, median-group characteristics of hatred manifested as frustration, explicit formation of micro cultures (that also fell apart within a single session), and increased awareness of the self in a larger social-cultural context.

Participants have been enthusiastic about the incorporation of artmaking in the dialogue. For the most part, they reported feeling more visible, more understood and understanding, and more aware of some of their hidden assumptions about other participants and the larger society. For many, it was a first opportunity to speak about their experiences of racism in an environment they perceived to be supportive and reasonably safe. The use of visible imagery encouraged participants to drop some of the conventions of mutual indignation that characterize some interracial dialogues.

The opportunity to play was an often-stated value of the artmaking. For some, struggling with the materials and then discovering they could create something meaningful and understandable was a major awakening of confidence. The artmaking process and the resulting images, no matter how crudely constructed, enhanced self-awareness within the group and evoked emotional responses quickly as par-

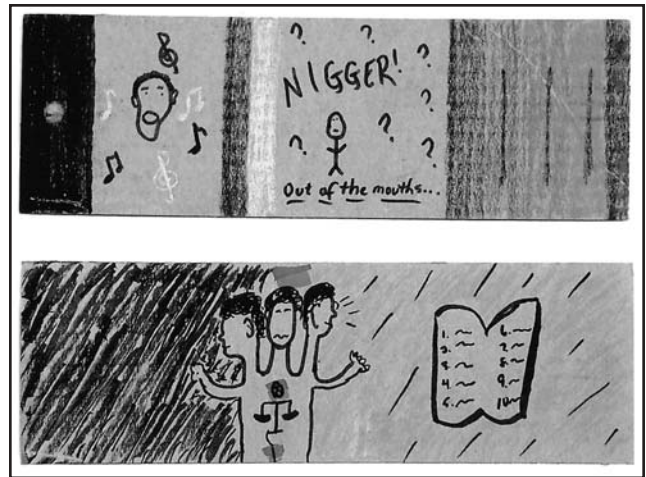


Figure 5

Panel 1: This panel illustrates the “stages” of my identity and of my relationship (and appreciation) of those who are culturally different.
Panel 2: This illustrates the struggle of balancing what is known as “right” and negative experiences.



Figure 6

ticipants witnessed each other’s work. Each person’s work then built upon the work of others and served to cue and encourage more open expression.

The illustration in Figure 5 shows the central identity-development dilemma for an African-American man in his 50s and his tripartite experience of being in the world, which he elaborated on verbally. His first panel, by putting the forbidden word nigger out in the group, gave support to others who were struggling to be politically correct in describing their own experiences. Having a common task (creating images on a panel) and sharing affect-laden images with each other provided a structure that supported open encounters among group members.

Participants of all races experienced shame, though for very different reasons. How shame was handled by individuals and by the group provided some openings for deeper explorations of the meaning of privilege and oppression. The top panel in Figure 6 was contributed during the same first round of dialogue as the “nigger” panel in Figure 5.

This panel exposed the secret that a white participant's grandfather belonged to the Ku Klux Klan. She tearfully presented this panel as she struggled with her shame and sense of exposure in the group. She created the second panel to depict her realistic understanding that there is no "get out of racism free" card even as she moves forward in interracial dialogues.

Weaknesses

It is unclear what motivated most of the TRECsm encounters to strive for premature agreements at the second stage of artmaking. I believe it was a combination of the following factors: (a) Resistance may have developed to the sustained chaos experienced in both the artmaking and the awareness of individual differences in an emotionally charged setting focused on a highly charged topic (racism), and (b) the drive for form is an intrinsic outcome of artmaking that may have encouraged participants to achieve premature closure in the verbal dialogue.

Perhaps the work ethic of our society impels people to want to take action quickly once a problem is identified. TRECsm groups appeared to strive for a basic agreement that racism is bad without fully exploring what racism and oppression actually are beyond an initial impression. Rather than stay with the discomfort of this phase of participation, most groups wanted an agreement that "we should have another dialogue group where we discuss how we're going to solve the problems of racism."

The tendency toward a premature affiliation was difficult to address in the short time span of a single session. As the facilitators became aware of this implicit pattern in most groups, they began to challenge group members to be more specific and to connect their images to their personal experiences. This helped thwart premature closure resulting from superficial political agreement—although it was, perhaps, a dubious move as there was no opportunity to do significant working through within the timeframe of the group. However, group members did feel increased authenticity in the encounter and discovered that it was safe enough, at least in the TRECsm environment, to test out some frightening self-exposure.

Another possibility for the drive for closure is that it is embedded in the act of making a piece of art. Even though the TRECsm artmaking was considered to be process-rather than product-oriented, the completed panels were finished pieces *in the moment*. It is human for a creator to become attached to the outcome of his or her creative efforts, at least for a little while. Depending on the group's ability to defer solving the problem (of racism) for a little longer, suggesting a second panel did help participants break this attachment and reenter chaos so that the dialogue could be sustained and even deepened.

Premature closure, prior to conflict, is also a major drive in the larger society where LGD, no matter how well grounded in the original concepts, cannot seem to transcend the reluctance of those authorizing the dialogue to engage in the inherent anarchic processes. Thus, much dialogue serves as a vehicle for problem solving rather than an end in itself. This deprives participants of the full, rich, and often frustrating experience of dialogue and heightens the assumption that we all agree on what racism is. This prevents deeper understanding of the complex experiences and contexts that drive social and cultural behavior. TRECsm has inadvertently contributed to this state of affairs. Because of this, the TRECsm founders have agreed on a moratorium on public workshops until these issues are addressed within the structure of TRECsm itself.

Conclusion

Creating and witnessing imagery is a powerful emotional experience that enlivens group encounters of all kinds, in particular interracial dialogues. Although making art can also be distracting and support an individual or group avoidance of interpersonal encounter, the tensions between personal self-interest and altruistic or social-group interest, which are present in any large group encounter, are then made visible in the process.

The complementary languages and methods of artmaking and verbal encounter increase individual awareness, understanding, and coherence in LGD. Shifting between artmaking and verbalization creates shifts in power dynamics, requiring a reexamination of the group's sociometry. This is particularly important for cross-cultural and interracial encounters. Art as language in LGD has the potential to anchor and infuse group process, to invite less verbal members to participate, to provide witness to the chaos and coherence of the group, to expose underlying dynamics and cognitions, and to promote the flexibility necessary to be open to change.

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