2-19-11

Intergroup Dialogue, Recap

Yesterday we thought about what it means to be in this class. We started by saying that humans do not grow up in vacuums. Each person we meet is a product of his or her own unique circumstances. While this may be obvious, not understanding this concept fully can lead to stereotyping, otherizing, misunderstanding, and in extreme cases, the breakdown of communities, conflict, and war. The worst times in human history started with negative otherizing and then they morphed into violence and chaos.

We reflected on the concept of Ubuntu, the idea that, “I need you in order to be me and you need me in order to be you.” Everyone has their own unique lens, but the better we are at recognizing the legitimacy of other perspectives, the more wholesome and strong our communities will be.

We talked about how we can use the tool of dialogue to develop our ability to see beyond our own perspective. Dialogue can help us get to know people from groups we may have stereotyped or simply don’t know much about. In our class we are going to share our experiences related to our diverse backgrounds. In the end, we will be proud “I don’t know it alls.”

We decided that before we would get into our dialogue groups, we would need to agree on some ground rules. Most important is the idea that our classroom would be a “safe space,” a place free of judgment and that is open and accepting. The object of dialogue is the opposite of debate:

In dialogue we establish a level of trust with the people around us. In debate, we are always on the defensive, not trusting the opposing side. The goal of dialogue is learning and understanding. The goal of debate is to win—at the heart of debate is disagreement. When we leave debates, we are more entrenched in our old beliefs. When we leave dialogue, we are enlightened and have formed new bonds with others.

Similarities? There are clubs used to improve debate skills. Just like debate, the ability to have dialogue is a **skill**.

After setting the stage for dialogue, we can begin asking each other questions like: what issues deeply concern you? Or what were some of your defining life experiences? In the end we will find that our differences have not melted away. Instead, we will find that the point of dialogue is to increase our knowledge of others and dispel any stereotypes that may have previously been held.

Other things we did in class:

1. We went over the materials we would need for class each week: a folder to store handouts, some blank pieces of paper, a pencil/pen, and most importantly, a willingness to participate!
2. We had an ice breaker: everyone went around and said one fact about ourselves that nobody would guess if you didn’t tell them.
3. We got into dialogue groups and got to know each other a little better.

We read, “How it Feels to be Colored Me” by Zora Neale Hurston. We noted how Hurston began her essay by dispelling sort of funny/general stereotype, but later went on to dispel more serious stereotypes. We then related this to our own lives, and thought about the stereotypes that might have been pinned to us. We did not, however, have the chance to go over Zora’s “bag” analogy, which is where we will start next week.