Social Justice, Diversity, and Public Service/ Public Affairs Education: Creating Space for Constructive Dialogue

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Deans of graduate schools with missions in the public interest share a common annual experience. A group of students, usually early in the year, through an appointment or in informal conversation, will challenge the dean on the school’s commitment to diversity, racial awareness, and social justice. For us, and for most deans we know, the challenge is as difficult as it is familiar. On a personal level, we can often see our young, student selves in a dean’s or president’s office making a similar argument. As teachers, we have worked throughout our careers to include challenging readings and discussions on diversity and social justice in our courses. Indeed, a good track record on issues of diversity is, appropriately, an important criterion in recruiting and reviewing deans of schools like ours. At the same time, however, the student presence is a disturbing reminder that public service and public affairs education has not yet found an accepted, adequate means to address these issues, which infuse myriad public affairs programs.

1 The authors wish to thank Bill Parent, Associate Dean for Initiatives and Programs at the UCLA School of Public Affairs, for his assistance in writing this paper.
policy challenges in our curricula.

Last spring, we joined forces to hold and broadcast a series of student-faculty-administrator dialogues aimed at creating a space and framework for conversations of sensitive social justice issues in the context of graduate education in public affairs, public policy, public administration, public service, urban planning, and social welfare. With support from the Kellogg Foundation, we planned and held two such dialogues in the spring of 2009, one in New York and one in Los Angeles, with groups of students, faculty, and administrators who traveled between the two locations. In this paper, we will present the plan, activities, outcomes, and recommendations that emerged out of these sessions. Our aim is to inform peer institutions on the current state of dialogues on this issue, to share a “toolkit” consisting of the activities and adaptations that were most useful in generating productive conversation, and advance the discussion on diversity, race, and social justice in professional schools that serve the public interest. Rather than attempting to summarize the hundreds of observations, ideas, and recommendations that such a day-long exercise produces, we will note and reflect on our takeaways as public service and public affairs school deans; and what we found to be the most salient and original points made during the discussions.

As deans of our respective schools, we bring very different backgrounds and experiences to our leadership. One of us is a male African American political scientist who has spent his career in the academy, most recently creating and leading a program on community-university partnerships. The other is a female white American, trained as a lawyer, who worked as a manager in NYC government, most notably in juvenile detention, before coming to academia. Where we work, Los Angeles and New York City, are similar as large, diverse, global cities, but markedly different in the cultures, histories, and climates that define them.

Our schools have similarities as well. We share a broader, inclusive approach to policy education than many of our peer schools that are more exclusively focused on teaching policy analysis methods. NYU Wagner encompasses programs in Public Policy, Public Administration, Urban Planning, Health Policy and Management and Nonprofit Management. The UCLA School of Public Affairs houses departments of Public Policy, Social Welfare and Urban Planning with a
wide range of concentrations. Both schools have doctoral programs.

There are also two key perspectives we share, which certainly facilitated this collaboration. The first, which we came to by independent paths, is an appreciation of the value of the concept of frames and framing, both in the sense of a social science schema and as a simple metaphor. One of us is an established academic scholar on the use of framing to construct interpretations of race. The other uses the idea of framing to define and describe the mission of her institution and the goals of her leadership. As citizens, teachers, scholars, and administrators we consciously operate within a range of predetermined frames, and as academic leaders we have some authority to frame the missions of our institutions to meet contemporary challenges. The second perspective we share is a deep commitment to advancing social justice; it’s why we’ve done what we’ve done, and do what we do.

The Navigating Complex Conversations Toolkit

The title of the program at both UCLA and NYU was “Navigating Complex Conversations in the Era of Obama: New Ways to Address Race and Inequality in Policy and Practice” (Appendix A: Program). The title recognized, first, the difficulty of having a constructive classroom conversation about race and identity. For those who speak up, the tone is often assertive and rhetorical, generating more heat than light. In many situations, students and faculty retreat into a listening mode, “white silence,” as it has come to be known. Race and diversity concerns, as our student leaders tell us, are spoken of too rarely and not effectively in the classroom; there is no “safe space” for dialogue. Students and teachers are unsure of what to say, motives are misunderstood and mistrusted, and policy debates quickly break down along racial, partisan, and ideological lines.

The second element of the title, the Age of Obama, recognized the “newness” of discussions on race and diversity whenever they occur, and introduced a common narrative with which the participants are familiar. To borrow from the dean’s message on the NYU Wagner website: “our vision is not a still life snapshot but a fast moving reel-to-reel frame.”
Race and diversity are dynamic ideas informed by each day’s headlines. The Age of Obama captures a question many people were thinking about in the early months of the new administration but may have been hesitant to raise in a classroom setting: did the election of Obama signal that we are entering post-racial society? We could be confident, given the composition of the room, that everyone would have done some thinking on the racial aspects of the Obama campaign and presidency, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright controversy and Obama’s subsequent speech on race, and the focus of the media on the president’s racial background in the election and the inauguration.

In developing an agenda for the discussions, our goal was to use easily adaptable, tested models to orchestrate the discussion (Appendix B: Modules). Our “tool kit” consisted of seven major components: 1) dinners before each event to build community among members of the traveling teams; 2) a gallery walk; 3) an introduction to framing as way to think constructively about race; 4) a “fishbowl” exercise on race and framing that asked participants to reflect on their responsibilities and opportunities to engage in conversations across boundaries; 5) a “World Café” where participants rotated through discussions on a range of questions ranging from the Obama presidency, demographic change, the media, frames and the dynamics of classroom discussions; 6) a role analysis group exercise where students, administrators, and faculty first separately and then together examined their responsibilities to engage and influence conversations of race and diversity; and, 7) a debrief of the event and the takeaways and changes in thinking and practice that could result from the day.

**What Others Brought to the Table: Open Minds and Commitment**

“As a woman of color in higher education, I am constantly struggling to find a safe and real place to engage in conversations of race, gender, sexual orientation etc. I need guidance, mentors, and challenges in these spaces to elevate my thoughts.”

The students, faculty, and administrators who participated attended voluntarily. In Los Angeles, there were 34 students, 2 from NYU; 19 faculty, 2 from NYU; and 16 administrators, 6
from NYU. In New York, there were 18 students, 4 from UCLA; 17 faculty, 3 from UCLA; 18 administrators, 4 from UCLA; and 3 guests from local community organizations.

The UCLA students selected their representatives from across caucuses, organizations, and degree programs. NYU Wagner created an application process to select its student representatives. Faculty and administrators either volunteered or were encouraged by us because of their interest in issues of social justice and diversity.

In this first stage of creating a dialogue and a space for conversation, we sought a diverse group in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation. We did not, however seek a heterogeneous group in terms of political opinions and backgrounds. From the beginning we viewed this as a first step; we sought to test the usefulness of framing and the toolkit exercises among groups that shared concerns and frustrations over the lack of meaningful dialogue on social justice issues in the classroom. We sought participants who were, in action, committed to creating a safe space in the classroom, curriculum, and daily student lives of students to have hard conversations.

The Toolkit: Gallery Walk, Framing Presentation, Fishbowl, World Café, Role Groups, and Debrief

The Gallery Walk. The motivations of the participants were revealed in a request we made at the beginning of the day for participants to take role-based color post-its and answer two questions: “Why are you here?” and “What do you bring to the dialogue?” We posted the data on the walls and invited participants to scan the full set of information.

Most of the “why are you here” answers elicited responses having to do with self-improvement, particularly among the faculty. “I’m interested in getting ideas about how to communicate successfully about race with various audiences (students, policy makers, public activists),” wrote one faulty member. “To affirm dialogue, to learn more about productive conversations, and take skills back to students and staff,” wrote another.
Others were less lofty: “1. Frank asked me. 2. To learn something new—a not so easy thing to do.” A few faculty also came with academic improvement in mind: “need to rethink my understanding of and relationship between status and agency,” wrote one. “I’m interested in framing,” wrote another. A few faculty focused on teaching: “To learn how to better educate students to address and not hide behind these issues.” Others made connections to their research: “My research and teaching focus on working with low-income community groups; I hope to improve my listening skills in working with large groups.”

Among the students, there was more desire to effect institutional and social change. One student simply explained his/her presence with: “Three years of work at UCLA/SPA trying to make this happen.” Another student wrote: “I want to better address issues of power, privilege, and history in everyday interactions. I want to learn to be a better ally.” Some of the students were academically specific: “My dissertation focuses on social justice organizing, so I am here to hear the current social justice discourse, observe cultural interaction among justice advocates.” Others were more pointed in their purpose: “Frustration in courses that address diversity in Los Angeles yet never talk about differences,” and “concern that my classmates are not conscious of power and privilege dynamics, that they are only learning top-down social change” were emblematic of a number of entries. One student wrote: “As a white-anti-racist planner, I want to contribute to a process where urban planning can be a field that dismantles instead of perpetuates structural racism and white supremacy.”

The administrators, interestingly, had more detached motivations, with many responses echoing such thoughts as “to better understand the way students and faculty successfully navigate discussions of race and diversity.” And, poetically: “To learn. To listen. To grow. To engage and share.”

In answer to the question, “What do you bring?” the faculty tended to concentrate on their experience. “Research and practice for ethnic communities. Communing from an immigrant culture. 20 years of teaching.” And “multiple ways to conceptualize about American Politics. Political awareness spanning four decades plus.” Students and administrators were more likely to bring virtues, like tolerance, openness, curiosity, and a “willingness to be
challenged.”

In sum, the participants – students, administrators, and faculty – came willingly and enthusiastically with open minds and a shared perception that they and our schools can do better in more directly addressing issues of social justice and diversity.

**Frame Fluency.** For us, one of the distinguishing characteristics of schools that teach public problem-solving is the importance of learning how to frame conditions, analysis, and action in ways that have the potential to impact the public good. We introduced the day with a presentation by Dean Gilliam outlining a vocabulary and structure around framing that could be applied throughout the day in the exercises and conversations (Appendix C: Excerpt of Framing Presentation). Frames were defined as “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.” (Reese, Gundy, and Grant, 2001).

Framing is a powerful concept. It can be applied to the individual level, the organizational level, the school level, and across professional fields. Research has shown that people understand issues in terms of frames. They are mental shortcuts that help us make sense of the world. They are so pervasive in language and images, messengers and memes, attitudes and values that we are often unaware of the sorting mechanisms that are going on subconsciously in our minds. With reflection, however, frames are easily accessible and by being more aware of our own frames, by being more frame fluent, we can effectively inquire into and understand other people’s frames in ways that make it easier to move a policy agenda forward.

In the modern world, people get most of their information from the media, which, over time, creates “dominant frames” that evolve into habits of thought and expectation. These habits of thought can also be understood in a three-level hierarchy. The first level consists of big ideas like justice, family, equality and opportunity. The second level consists of specific but broad issues like the environment, gay and lesbian rights, or children’s issues. The third level
gets very specific: rainforests, gay marriage and daycare. These hierarchies direct our thinking. Higher level frames map their values on lower level frames. For example, as we write in the summer of 2009, there is a national debate over the Obama administration’s initiative to expand health care, which is in a vulnerable position. At the moment it appears that the Democrats have not succeeded in mapping back specific proposals – a government option, expansion of services, higher taxes on the wealthy – to big, level-one ideas, like fairness, equal access, and reducing human suffering. The opposition, by contrast, has recently been successful in raising doubt by introducing level two ideas like the role and scope of federal government, long-term high costs and even – and this may actually be a level one American idea – an aversion to fascist Nazism. The Obama administration at this writing is struggling to capture a dominant frame. In political science terms, “The failure of mass mobilization when structural conditions seem otherwise ripe may be accounted for by the absence of a resonant master frame.” (Snow and Benford, 1998).

In applying the idea of frames to a discussion of navigating complex conversations on race and diversity, we put forth that a discussion of framing would help white participants to talk about race without priming racism as a primary attribution of responsibility, and allow people of color to enter the conversation without starting with structural racism, two of the common level-two traps that often enflame or douse a conversation on race beyond usefulness. Research has shown that when it comes to race, Americans – white people in particular – hold to a three-part dominant frame. First is the belief that the country has made tremendous progress, largely attributed to anti-discrimination laws, and that where racism exists it resides in the hearts and minds of “bad” people. Second is that racial inequality is the result of the failure of people of color – African Americans in particular – to live up to core value of “self-makingness”. The third element is the white belief that blacks and whites have separate fates; whites see themselves as being under control of their own fates, while the destinies of people of color are seen as out of their control (Gilliam, 2008).

So what does this tell us about why navigating complex conversations on race and inequality in our classrooms can be so hard? In short, the answer lies in the different frames
that different groups of students and faculty bring to the discussion, whether or not they are
aware of it. In any particular issue — the summer 2009 story of the arrest of Henry Louis Gates
is a good example — many white students and faculty are likely to start from a dominant frame
that matters of race have long been settled, while students of color are likely to start from a
belief that institutional and structural racism and white privilege are the dominant frames of
the story.

In terms of the day’s dialogue then, we wanted the participants to understand framing
as a tool for fostering more productive conversations about race. We were not explicit in terms
of guidelines for this first discussion based on framing, as we wanted to see where the groups
would or would not take framing. However, four principles were presented to help guide the
discussion (Gilliam, 2008):

1. Frame the discussion where you can in terms of larger American values
   rather than the dominant frames, such as opportunity, interdependence,
   and ingenuity.

2. Understand the distinction between the analysis of social equality and
   how we talk about social equality.

3. Order matters; where in the hierarchy you start the discussion will
   influence the quality of the discussion.

4. Avoid assertions, staking positions, and defending world views.

The Fishbowl. After the presentation on framing, we arranged two 15-minute Fishbowl
exercises (Appendix D: Fishbowl). We placed seven chairs in an inner circle, leaving one open.
The rest of the participants sat outside the circle as listeners and observers, and if one was so
moved he or she could take the open seat to ask a question or raise a point. With input from
students and administrators we chose a representative group of students, faculty and
administrators to sit in the center of the room in advance. Our choices were subjective and
intuitive; we looked for a mix of participants who were skilled at group conversation. Dean
Schall facilitated with an opening question and an occasional touch in moving the discussion along if needed. The question we gave the group was: *How might the idea of frames that we just heard help us advance the public conversation about race and inequality across multiple dimensions?*

Three key points emerged for us in those first discussions. First, the idea of framing, a discussion of dominant frames of race and justice, was a valuable starting point. The conversations moved easily among students, faculty and administrators from framing to the importance and differences in narratives and stories that students and faculty bring to policy discussions. Second, there was an awareness from the beginning that we were a small like-minded subgroup that wanted to effect change in our larger institutions. Many of the students made faculty more aware that they take these challenges very seriously, that they in fact operate from a developed academic frame outside of the mainstream policy-related curricula. The students from both schools spoke in a vernacular largely influenced by the emerging field of Critical Race Theory (CRT); they spoke in terms of the fluidity and racialization of public policy issues, white privilege and advantage, and intersectionality. They were very much aware of their views coming “from the bottom-up” in conflict with policy curricula and faculty perspectives coming at them “from the top down,” which was also their perspective of the policy-making process in the larger world.

Faculty and administrators, for their part in these discussions, took the opportunity to make students more aware of the difficulty of shifting the norms in any academic field. The faculty and administrators presented themselves as allies who shared the same frustrations, if not the same vocabulary, in desiring greater attention and awareness of issues of diversity. As one faculty member said: “There is a slice of faculty (not present) that are hostile towards the question, would not come to an event like this, and will not subject themselves to any kind of workshop on how they can improve their pedagogy... There may be nothing that we can do about it, but they are at the table and they do influence education broadly.” The need to develop more effective means of persuasion and influence came back to the idea of students and faculty reframing classroom conversations in ways that bring value, in terms of the tools
World Café. The World Café exercise was built around nine related questions on the theme of the day (Appendix E: World Café). We had nine tables, one for each question, with a facilitator at each. People could sit where they wanted and, when the time came, rotate to any table/question of their choosing. The tables were covered in white paper and multi-color markers were available so the facilitators and participants could keep notes. There were three rounds of twenty minutes each. Participants were asked to try to apply points made in their previous tables to the new question, as well as discuss the question at hand. The questions, which were only slightly modified between the two sessions were:

1. Is the Obama Presidency changing the way Americans frame race?

2. How are changing demographics in the US affecting the frames we hold about race?

3. How does the media inform how we think and talk about race and other social identities (e.g. gender, class, LGBT issues)?

4. How are our frames about race affected by frames about other social identities, like class, sexual orientation and gender?

5. What makes navigating conversations about race in the classroom so complex?

6. What frames and skills help us create constructive conversations about race?

7. How do power dynamics (student/faculty; student/administrators; community/academic, etc.) affect conversations about race and other social identities like gender and class?

8. What three changes would you recommend your school make so it could address issues of race more effectively?

9. How does your race or other social identities (gender, class sexual orientation)
A good World Café session produces a high-energy cacophony of ideas and discussions, not to mention leaving behind a graffiti of points and observations on the table cloths. In this session, ideas, ideologies, frustrations underlying the first two sessions all seemed to come to surface, albeit momentarily before there were new ideas and questions to take their place. For us, among the insightful and even poignant carries away and left behind on the tables:

- **Whiteness isn’t seen as race.**
- **Our investment in a Black/white paradigm while others are wanting to move beyond. Indigenous darker skin still at the bottom of the hierarchy.**
- **Immigrants arrive not knowing dominant narratives histories. But they bring their own stereotypes.**
- **Demographics changing faster than politics and policies.**
- **How to juggle multiple identities.**
- **Authority is frame.**
- **This is a LONG process.**
- **Classes and faculty looking at People of Color for the answers on People of Color questions.**
- **Whites need to understand what race does for them.**
- **Student/student dynamics; do caucuses perpetuate segregation?**
- **Conflict should be encouraged.**
- **Prioritizing our identities.**
- **Validate experiential learning-without putting students of color in position of having to educate white colleagues.**
- **Reflect on white privilege.**
- **There are only three African American students in my whole Social Welfare class.**
- **Post-racial thing is nuts.**
• The “white” elephant in the room is race.
• Overwhelmed. Frustrated too many question. Where do we go from here?
• This presidential election just confirmed the dominant frame.

For us, a number of key observation points came from the World Café experience. First, using the Obama Presidency in terms of how he fits ours and other people’s dominant frames in terms of race and leadership is an excellent case in point for people to express, explore and challenge the way we frame race and diversity discussions. A number of the conversations, in fact, landed on the difficulty of being in Obama’s shoes and navigating competing dominant frames on race. Second, the World Café, ironically because of the brevity and volume of ideas it raises, made us all better appreciate the depth and complexity, as well as the wide range of perspectives even among like-minded people when it comes to issues of diversity and social justice. And third, even when a group of people sets out to cast such a conversation across a range of factors, including race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, the dominant issue is race.

**Role Analysis Group.** For our final substantive session, we organized around our “roles” at our institutions: three student groups, one faculty group, and one administrator group to discuss among themselves how they could help advance conversations of race and inequality in our respective schools. Each group was asked:

- Given what we learned today, how can we as students/faculty/administrators advance conversations across boundaries of difference?
- How can we engage others in our role group outside of this room?
- What do we think people in the other role groups expect of us?
- What might we ask of those in other role groups?

Overall, what emerged in these conversations was a commitment on the part of students to speak up more; on the faculty to create better opportunities in class and in courses for the discussion of these topics; and from administrators to be more active in creating extra-
curricular opportunities, and more participation and transparency in such administrative tasks as faculty and student recruitment.

**Debrief.** As a group, the participants debriefed the day’s activities. Three months after the dialogue, an electronic survey was sent to the individuals soliciting feedback on whether or not the dialogues changed the way they think and act in the classroom and in the field.

**Concluding Observations**

From our perspective as deans, there were five major learnings and outcomes. The first, which also emerged in the conversations with faculty, is that for many students there is a genuine disconnect, wider than we had thought, between what we offer in our curriculums and what they seek in building careers dedicated to advancing social justice and reducing inequalities through public policy, management, and urban planning. There was also a wider range of opinions and viewpoints than we anticipated, even despite the selection bias we mentioned earlier. As one faculty member put it, “I know it is important to bring up conversations in class, but I don’t think I realized how important that was until I sat with this group of students, who told me that unless we have a faculty member willing to lead, we are too scared to bring them up.” Another said “We came away with a feeling that we needed more, we wanted more. It was really just opening up the opportunity for dialogue.” Related to that is an observation that students, faculty, and administrators had a lot to teach each other about their respective roles, powers, constraints, and perspectives. We had not anticipated the high amount of simple explanation on each group’s part throughout the dialogues. Also helpful in this regard were the dinners we had with the planning team the evenings before the programs. The chance to break bread, have a glass or two of wine, and develop some personal connections before the sessions was a valuable part of the overall program.

A second observation is that we need to play close attention to and support students in their attraction to the application of Critical Race Theory to public problem-solving. It was interesting to us that in our two schools, almost 3000 miles apart, students have taken it on
themselves to organize classes and speakers on critical race theory and to seek out faculty to support them. They have created bridges to law and ethnic studies departments, and they have worked to incorporate it into their research and Capstone projects. They have started the discussion, and we should join them.

A third observation is that tweaking the program and the content as we went along and between the two sessions was important. The program and content were not as concrete or methodical as this paper might imply. We huddled between sessions and modified the questions, made sure to carry some of the vernacular of one discussion into the next, and included a participant briefing on the Los Angeles session when we started in New York.

A fourth observation is that including some doctoral students was very helpful. With one foot in their student roles and the other in their preparation to be faculty in their fields, they served as connectors across the groups. Between not being daunted and not yet daunting, these dialogues may have been most valuable to them as their professional and academic portfolios are still in a formative stage.

And a fifth and final observation is that we need to find ways to continue this discussion among ourselves, to create incentives to expand the circle of dialogue to include more students, faculty, and administrators both within our own schools and across national networks of graduate schools dedicated to public problem-solving. We are planning to branch out and collaborate with other peer institutions interested in similar goals and open to an adaptation of the toolkit. We are also planning to develop dialogues with wider circles in our own institutions. A recurring theme in the evaluation and a fitting conclusion to this paper are captured by the comment: “A great beginning, more to do.”
present:

Navigating Complex Conversations in the Era of Obama:
New Ways to Address Race and Inequality in Policy and Practice

Los Angeles – Friday, March 20
UCLA De Neve, Plaza Room
8:30 am – 3:00 pm

New York City – Tuesday, March 24
NYU Wagner, The Puck Building
8:30 am – 3:00 pm

PROGRAM

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<td>10:00 am</td>
<td>Break/Gallery Walk</td>
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PURPOSE

Two programs, one in Los Angeles followed by one in New York, will bring together students, faculty, and administrators, to engage in day-long dialogues aimed at creating a space and a framework for conversations of sensitive social justice issues in the context of graduate education in public affairs, public policy, and public service. Graduate schools that serve public professions encourage research and teaching that calls attention to populations that are vulnerable, underrepresented, urban, and comprised of immigrants. Many of our schools seek to provide intellectual space for faculty and students to engage in productive conversations about ethnicity, gender, LGBT issues, human rights, and inequality. However, too many students report that our schools need to do more, even in the era of Obama, to prepare them with the necessary fluency on issues of race and inequality vital for their real world work on policy issues that affect these communities.

* The UCLA School of Public Affairs wishes to thank the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for its generous support of the Los Angeles-based program.
## Appendix B: Modules

**“Navigating Complex Conversations in the Era of Obama: New Ways to Address Race and Inequality in Policy and Practice”**

*Purple = NYU; Gold = UCLA*

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| 8:30-9:00am| Breakfast                                   |                    | - Filmmaker will interview participants.  
- UCLA and NYU staff will take detailed notes from both sessions.                                                                                                                                       |
<p>| 9:00-9:15am| One: Introductions                          | 1. UCLA Dean       |                                                                                                                                            |
| 9:15-9:35am| Two: Opening Activity                       | 1. NYU Dean        | Participants will write answers on 12” X 12” sticky notes.                                                                                                                                          |
| 9:35-10:00am| Three: Framing (This is the “content” module to teach that frames matter.) | 1. UCLA Dean       | UCLA/NYU staff will post notes from opening activity on the walls for the gallery walk, which will demonstrate an asset map of the room.                                                          |
| 10:00-10:15am| Break/Gallery Walk                          |                    | - Filmmaker will interview participants.                                                                                                                                                              |
| 10:15-10:30 (I)| Four: Fishbowl Conversation (Note that we will further test this module by having two fishbowl conversations in L.A. – one for students and a second for faculty/staff – and one integrated fishbowl conversation – faculty, students, and staff all together – in NYC.) | 1. NYU Dean       | How might the idea of frames that we just heard help us advance the public conversation about race and inequality across multiple dimensions?                                                             |
| 10:30-10:45 (II)| Fishbowl 1: ALL students                    | Fishbowl 2: ALL faculty/admin |
| 10:45-11:00| Big Group Discussion                        | NYU student        | NYU faculty                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|            |                                             | NYU student        | NYU administrator                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|            |                                             | NYU student        | NYU administrator                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|            |                                             | UCLA student       | UCLA faculty                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|            |                                             | UCLA student       | UCLA faculty                                                                                                                                                                                          |</p>
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<td>11:00am-12:30pm</td>
<td><strong>Five: World Café</strong></td>
<td>- 6 or 7 tables of 6 to 8 people, depending on how many people attend</td>
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<td>- 3 roundtable sessions – 15 minutes each</td>
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<td>5. Table D Facilitator: UCLA faculty</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. Table E Facilitator: UCLA administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. Table F Facilitator: UCLA student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Decide on 6-8 questions ahead of time, but if new, more pertinent questions arise from the dinner and/or the morning exercises, swap out the questions. Consult with moderators and table facilitators during the break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30-1:15pm</td>
<td><strong>Lunch/Gallery Walk of World Café Tablecloths</strong></td>
<td>- Filmmaker will interview participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- UCLA/NYU staff will post tablecloths on wall for gallery walk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:15-1:45pm</td>
<td><strong>Six: Role Analysis Group</strong></td>
<td>- Participants break off into groups:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- 2 student groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- 1 faculty group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- 1 administrator group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Session Moderators:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- UCLA faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Student Group A Facilitator: UCLA student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Student Group B Facilitator: NYU student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Faculty Group Facilitator: UCLA student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Administrator Group Facilitator: NYU administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:45-2:45pm</td>
<td><strong>Seven: Debrief of Mechanisms</strong></td>
<td>- 7 groups of 7 or 8 (depending on attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Debrief +/- of the day (as a whole or by module)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- ask:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- How to enhance the event at NYU?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- How to disseminate the mechanisms to a wider audience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Moderators:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- NYU Faculty/Admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- UCLA Faculty/Admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moderators and UCLA staff will make sure the groups are mixed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45-3:00pm</td>
<td><strong>Closing</strong></td>
<td>1. UCLA Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. NYU Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00-3:45pm</td>
<td><strong>Internal Debrief</strong></td>
<td>1. NYU Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. UCLA Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In L.A., with an eye toward improvements for NYC. In NYC, with an eye toward next steps for distribution.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why Does Communications Matter?

- It shapes the culture
- It directs the thoughts and actions of policymakers and influentials
- It determines (or at least influences) the public agenda
- It defines issues as public or private
- It primes people for action or disperses accountability
- It propels social movements

Communications Is Storytelling

- “Finding some familiar element causes us to activate the story that is labeled by that familiar element, and we understand the new story as if it were an exemplar of that old element.”
- “Understanding means finding a story you already know and saying, 'Oh yeah, that one.'”
- “Once we have found (the) story, we stop processing.”


What is a Frame?

The way a story is told - its selective use of values, symbols, metaphors and messengers - that triggers the conceptual cultural models that people use to make sense of their world. Once evoked, these models allow people to reason about an issue, to fill in the blanks for missing information by referring to the robustness of the model, not the sketchy frame.
Frames are...

"Organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world."


See also:

The Power of Frames

- Tell us what this communications is ABOUT
- Signal what counts, what can be ignored
- “Fill in” or infer missing information
- Influence decision outcomes
- Utilize a variety of communications elements

Framing Matters

“Movements are engaged in ‘meaning-work’ ...the struggle over the production of ideas of meaning...The failure of mass mobilization when structural conditions seem otherwise ripe may be accounted for by the absence of a resonant master frame.”

Snow and Benford (1998)

Elements of the Frame

- Context/Stories
- Values
- Metaphors and Models
- Numbers/Social Math
- Visuals
- Tone
- Messengers
Appendix C: Excerpt from Framing Presentation

**The Cognitive Perspective**

Our understanding of the world is structured hierarchically

- We make inferences about *specific* examples given more abstracted *general* categories (remember those schemata!)
  - e.g., I see a Great Dane (specific), and although ridiculously large, it has enough schema-consistent attributes (4-legs, waggy tail, floppy ears, it’s on a leash!) for me to know quite immediately that it belongs to the category of “dog” (general).
- In other words, we map our general understanding of “dog” onto this specific instance of “Great Dane.”
- In *social* cognition, the process is similar - we make inferences and judgments about specific social issues (e.g., child care) by using general, more abstracted conceptual models (e.g., safety, nurturance, early education)

**What Research Suggests About How People Process Information**

- People are not blank slates
- People use mental shortcuts to make sense of the world
- Incoming information provides cues that connect to the existing pictures in our heads
- People get most information about public affairs from the news media, which creates a framework of expectation, or dominant frame
- Over time, we develop habits of thought and expectation that configure incoming information to conform to this frame

**Framing and Reframing**

- When communications is inadequate, people **default** to the “pictures in their heads”
- When communications is effective, people **can see** an issue from a **different perspective**

**Reversing Framing Effects: What is Reframing?**

“When a movement wishes to put forward a radically new set of ideas, it must engage in **frame transformation**: new values may have to be planted and nurtured, old meanings or understandings jettisoned, and **erroneous beliefs or ‘misframings’ reframed.**”

Tarrow, Snow and Benford
Appendix C: Excerpt from Framing Presentation

**Elements of the Dominant Race Frame:**
Cognitive Elicitations, Media Content Analysis, and Focus Groups

- Historical Progress and Personal Racism
- Self Making Person
- Separate Fates

**Historical Progress**

**Americans believe:**
- Racial matters have improved dramatically in America over the last half a century
- The improvement is the direct result of changes in anti-discrimination laws and policies
- Little more can be done, because racist attitudes are no longer socially accepted and discriminatory practices have been banned

**Personal Racism**

**Americans believe:**
- Racism is embedded in individuals, not institutions
- Some racism will always exist because racist people pass on beliefs to their children
- Racism comes in all colors -- because racism exists at the level of the individual, it has the capacity to go "both ways"; whites are biased against blacks, blacks are biased against whites
- When skin color does matter, it disadvantages whites

**Self Making Person**

**Americans believe:**
- A person’s ultimate success depends, more than anything else, on the person themselves
- Racial inequality is thus a function of minorities’ (especially blacks’) failure to take on core values associated with the Self Making Person
- Individual responsibility, not discrimination, is the driving value
Separate Fates

**Americans believe:**

- Minority concerns are disconnected from the shared concerns and aspirations of the broader society
- Different races live in parallel universes
- Minorities are often the "Other" and, by definition, out of the system
- There are few clear causal connections between minority life chances and structural arrangements

Consistent Problems in Framing Social Policies for Public Consideration

- No frame, no mental short-cut or organizing principle, or ineffective one.
- Focusing first or exclusively on individuals.
- Presenting problems as calamitous and unsolvable.
- Over-reliance on numbers as tools of persuasion, especially as uninterpreted descriptors, downplaying trends.
- Under-reliance on values to prime perspective or limited set of values (sympathy, charity, disparity, crisis).
- Insufficient emphasis on problem-solving and solutions, or too little too late.

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Appendix D: Fishbowl

Briefing Notes:
Observer/Fishbowl Techniques for Organizational and Team Development

Work in teams always intertwines both content and process in ways that are challenging for actively engaged participants to see clearly the dynamics. A technique for deepening insights either about the substance, the process or both is the use of fishbowl techniques defined as follows (Merry and Allerhand, 1977 p. 393):

A method of group process in which two or more group members work together while being observed and listened to by the rest of the group who sit around them in a circle of chairs, so that there is an inner and an outer circle. The procedure aids in focusing on an issue of a subgroup that is of interest to the total group.

This technique, in addition to the learnings about the substantive topic or process, also builds the key leadership skill that Heifetz (1994) calls “going to the balcony”—the ability to both be on the dance floor and observing yourself at the same time.

Below are variants on the fishbowl process.

Fishbowl Groups or Panels

A fishbowl has a group sitting in a circle facing each other, taking up work or a conversation, with an outer circle observing. In the panel format, they might be in a semicircle, facing the rest of the group, but as above, instructed to converse with each other rather than talk at/to the audience. In both cases, it creates an opportunity for sharply differentiating the roles of active, engaged participant, and observer. There are variations in how this work can unfold.

Often there is an empty chair in the circle or panel and anyone from the observing group can take the seat to make a contribution or observation and then must leave the group.

Alternatively, after a period of listening, the inner group can be asked to be quiet and the facilitator can invite those listening to reflect on the conversation. For example, if the inner group is a leadership team at a retreat and the observers are other participants, the initial conversation might be on what were the major themes in the advice the leaders were given. Then the outer
Appendix D: Fishbowl

group can be given the chance to correct misperceptions, or note issues that were not heard. There can be a few process reflections or some questions that the outer group wants the inner group to take up, and then the facilitator has the original group resume their conversation with guidance from the outer group.

Another option is, after the first group has taken up their work, the outer group can be asked to exchange places and build on the themes from the first group. The facilitator can invite the second group also to reflect on what they thought members of the first group might be thinking or feeling, but not saying. That deepens the conversation and surprises people by how much what is unspoken is visible to observers. By making it explicit, there can also be opportunities for correcting when the perceptions are wrong. It builds the skill of observing and perception checking. This can go through several rounds with the original group invited back in to the center.

These processes are powerful in building better working alliances across functions or levels of an organization, for example a top leadership team and the rest of the organization, central office and field, a staff function and its customers, an ad hoc task force and the wider group affected by their recommendations, etc. It models transparency and dampens some of the fantasies about what goes on behind closed doors.

Enactments

Using the fishbowl format, the inner circle can be asked to take up a real piece of work such as framing an issue, developing the implementation plan or identifying the next steps after an organizational retreat. Sometimes it can be framed as a meeting that is happening in the future, perhaps when the leadership team next will be together, now looking back at the off site and pooling their reflections and deciding on the follow-up strategy. This lets the organization see their leaders in action: who leads, who follows, how they build on each others’ thinking, their tolerance for disagreement, etc. Obviously, it is artificial, as they are in the proverbial ‘goldfish bowl’ but it can create energy by risking working transparently in front of others and especially when reflections or comments are invited after a period of the work.

One powerful real use of this method was a new school superintendent who set up his financial briefings in a fishbowl format, with him and the key staff (principals, chief financial officer) in the middle being briefed on the financial situation for the major components of the school system. Around the edges were invited faculty, board members, community members, union members, students, and their parents. The ground rule was just listening, until the briefing was concluded. Then the superintendent invited some comments from the observers. This enabled key stakeholders to learn along with the superintendent (appropriately for an educational enterprise), as well as glean information on the style and values (openness, risk taking, etc.) of the new leader (May, 1999).

Consultations on a Challenging Situation
Appendix D: Fishbowl

A small group is invited to peer consult on a challenging case or situation that a colleague is willing to put forward. It can be a review of a past situation that they want to learn from, or an upcoming encounter they wish to explore. The case presenter is given five to eight minutes to frame the situation. The rest of the group has three to five minutes to ask clarifying questions. Then the case presenter pulls his or her chair back from the circle and can only listen for 15-20 minutes while the others discuss their hunches about the case and their recommendations. Then the case writer rejoins the group and reflects on what he or she has heard. This is a powerful method of peer consultation. Case presenters are often surprised by how much outsiders can infer that was not directly presented by the case writer. The inability to participate in the discussion by the case presenter deepens listening and the diversity of views as interaction with the presenter often steer the conversation in a more focused direction or take on a more defensive tone.

Rotating an Observer Role To Develop an Ongoing Team

A simple technique is to have a team member pull his or her chair back for 15-20 minutes of a group meeting, with the ground rule that he or she cannot participate for that stretch of time but can only observe. The role can rotate during the meeting or from one meeting to the next. The observer often has much greater clarity about the process because they are barred from getting caught up the dynamic of thinking of what they want to say and competing for air time. They can observe who interrupts whom (often a sign of hierarchy), eye contact, in groups and out groups, identity group (gender, race, age, organizational affiliation, etc.) dynamics, etc. For participants, just having someone explicitly designated as an observer allows members to imagine “how does this looks to the observer.” Sometimes as a transition back into being a participating member, the individual can be asked to comment or can just transition the role to someone else and use whatever insights the individual may have had in taking up the work of the group. If there is a discipline of brief reflection at the end of the meeting, often the several people who have been in the observer role for part of the meeting can take the lead in the reflective conversation.
Bibliography


Using World Café in Complex Conversations:
Connecting the Parts to the Whole

The Experience …

In June 2008 RCLA hosted an academic symposium bringing together prominent thinkers and scholars to discuss the topic of race and leadership. This conversation was inspired by seven years of research under the flagship Leadership for a Changing World program, through which we found that issues of social identity, particularly race and ethnicity, are central to the work of leadership in social change organizations.

In the symposium we discussed participants’ own approaches to the connection between race and leadership. We also presented our findings on how social change organizations use race as an activator of collective leadership potential. As expected with such a complex topic, conversations were rich, varied and highly nuanced, illuminating many elements of the topic. At the culmination of the two-day symposium we wanted to create an opportunity for the group to explore together how the “parts” connected with the “whole.” World Café helped us do just that.
World Café at a Glance

World Café itself was born out of a rich two-day dialogue in 1995 among a global, interdisciplinary group known as the Intellectual Capital Pioneers. Reflecting on the quality and innovativeness of their work over the two days, they asked, “What happened here that supported such great conversation and breakthrough thinking?” Reflection on the then-largely improvised process, followed by research and experimentation, resulted in the creation of the World Café method.

World Café is a method for aiding group discussion that draws on the metaphor of “systems.” Just as systems are “wholes” comprised of “parts,” so too are group conversations. World Café enables a group of 12 or more to have the benefit of a whole group conversation in the intimate setting of small groups.

Four to six people sit at a table or in a cluster to explore a question or issue. Other participants sitting at nearby tables or in clusters explore the same or similar questions at the same time. After a 20-minute or so “round of conversation,” participants are invited to change tables, carrying key ideas and insights from their previous conversation into a newly formed small group. A “host” remaining at each table shares with the newly arriving members key insights from the previous discussion.

This process is repeated for several rounds. Participants begin to experience each conversation at their table as linked and connected to the unfolding conversation in the room as a whole. So, the parts and whole metaphor extends to the substance of the conversation, as well as to the group itself.

At the end of several rounds facilitators bring together the group in a conversation to which everyone contributes. Participants are invited to explore emergent patterns and address how small table conversations contributed to a broader understanding of the issues.

Key Decisions for a Successful World Café

Clarify the Purpose

World Café is an excellent tool for cross-pollinating ideas and perspectives. Yet facilitators need to pay attention to why they are bringing people together in this mode. This includes how it fits within the overall activity, whether it would add variety to the dialogue, and what to expect out of it. Once all this is clarified, it helps to share the reasoning with participants in introducing the method.
World Café is designed for complex conversations with many “parts.” At our Race and Leadership Symposium we had organized a couple of Fishbowls\(^1\) with participating scholars to share their work on the topic, and had presented findings from our own research. Our conversations, which thus far had been in a large group setting, had covered an array of nuanced points. We wanted to create the opportunity to delve deeper in smaller group discussions through the World Café. What had before felt like overwhelmingly diverse ideas began to coalesce through World Café. What happened as people moved from table to table is that ideas no longer seemed random or disconnected. As ideas circulated, they began to form a coherent pattern without facilitators having imposed direction.

In our Symposium the conversation had many parts even within the same space, since participants had been engaging in one large group dialogue up until the World Café session. A conversation can also have many parts when an event is designed to have separate workshops or panels that participants can choose to attend. We have found World Café to work well as a sharing exercise in those types of convenings because participants catch a glimpse of what happened in the workshops they did not attend. In this case, it helps to hold a World Café immediately after the separate parallel workshops have taken place and when ideas are still fresh on people’s minds.

**Invite Exploration through Pertinent Questions**

Formulating appropriate questions is essential to a successful World Café. Questions that are appreciative and open-ended will invite participants to explore more. Questions that are clear, connected to purpose, and meaningful to participants will also generate creativity and insight. Here are some tips for selecting questions:

- Does the question honor the collective intelligence of the group by being dynamic but not daunting?
- Is the question relevant to the issues that participants are grappling with?
- What assumptions are embedded in the way this question is formed?
- Is the question likely to spark imagination and inspire hope rather than dwell on problems or technicalities?
- Is the question worthy of the group (i.e., is it a question that can not just as easily be explored by the conveners alone)?

Rather than predetermining the question, facilitators should be attentive to the kinds of discussions arising, topics that participants seek to explore more and the general energy level of the convening and base the question on this context. Our advice is that unless an entire event is organized in World Café mode, it is best to choose the question as the event transpires and after facilitators have a better feel for the conversation.

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\(^1\) Fishbowl is a dialogue method that allows anyone from the audience to participate in a conversation with the guest speakers or panelists. The setup typically consists of a small circle of chairs for the panelists in the middle with an empty chair for audience members to join. The remaining participants sit in concentric circles around the group in the middle.
When World Café is one segment in an event, the question needs to be relevant to and build on ensuing discussions yet leave room for new and different questions to take place. We designed the Race and Leadership symposium to have World Café toward the end of the event. Therefore, the question we posed sought to both capture some common threads in conversations from the previous day and a half and to trigger questions for further research. Our World Café question was: “In light of our discussions, what are the different ways in which race and leadership intersect in our scholarship?”

Foster Continuity in Conversations through the Hosts

Ideally in a World Café setting, there needs to be a ‘host’ for each table or conversational cluster. Unlike other participants who rotate to different tables, the hosts remain at the same table. Their role is to relay to each newly arriving group highlights from the previous conversation. After this brief summary, the host then takes part in the new conversation like the other participants.

The hosts’ role is essential in connecting the ‘parts’ to the ‘whole.’ The host captures the essence of the previous discussion and invites newcomers to note any commonalities of discussions held at their previous tables. In addition to maintaining some continuity with the previous dialogue on the table, the host’s summary acts as a trigger for the newcomers’ conversation. If conveners want to learn as much as possible from the conversations as well as maintain some consistency in capturing the dialogue, we recommend that the hosts are members of the convener’s team.

After a couple or more rounds patterns begin to emerge as similar ideas float around the room. World Café helps to foster collective ownership by the group of the knowledge percolating. Issues or ideas are less associated with individual members and become part of the larger conversation in the room.

Work Out the Math – Number of Rounds, Time, and Size of Each Table

Each table should have ideally four to five members plus the host. Three rounds is generally a good number; however, if you have more than six tables (i.e. a group larger than 30), a fourth conversation round may be needed to allow more people to interact with each other. A round is typically 20 – 25 minutes, if the same question is being explored.

Although more complicated, a World Café can explore different questions by assigning a question to each table. This is useful when the same issue needs to be explored from different angles or through different lenses. Some more time should be allowed for the rounds in this case, making them 30-35 minutes. In this case the host plays a more pertinent role as she/he holds the integrity of the conversation around the particular question being explored. The host summarizes key points from the previous discussion and invites new members to react and/or explore the question on the table. In this case, it is better to invite some processing around commonalities or differences from questions explored at other tables toward the end of the round and after new members at the table have had a chance to explore the question at hand.
Make sure to allow for some time between rounds so people can move to different tables. Also let people know a few minutes before the switch to allow conversations to end smoothly in each round.

Create a Hospitable Space through the Set-up

World Café can be set up around tables or by asking groups to sit in a round cluster of chairs. Tables are preferable since they make it easier for people to take notes. In fact, conceivers of the World Café encourage covering tables with paper, like with a tablecloth, and encouraging people to doodle, draw, or write notes directly on the table. Visual representations and writings on the table also help maintain continuity of the conversation as different groups come to the table.

You may also think about using recording devices at each table, so that the organizing team can listen more systematically for patterns. We used a recorder for each table at the Race and Leadership Symposium after getting the permission of all present. Sound quality will be compromised if tables are too close together. In fact, whether recording or not, it is advisable not to place tables too close together to minimize interference with nearby tables.

Invite Dialogue to Connect the Parts to the Whole

After the World Café rounds it is best to invite participants to a large group discussion to reflect on what happened. The purpose of this dialogue is to nurture coherence and harvest collective insights. Group dialogue can be stimulated by asking questions such as: What are some key ideas that kept coming up at the different tables? What were the common threads? Where there any key differences felt as you moved from table to table?

We recommend making the connections visible through visual exercises such as creating a tapestry or using Visual Explorer. Here is where the paper sheets used by participants to doodle and make notes are very valuable. These sheets provide an excellent record of the continuation of thought that happens as new groups join each table since no image belongs to a single group. Encouraging participants to share and explain each table sheet fosters creativity and is a great way to illuminate connections. Given availability of resources, graphic professionals, also called graphic facilitators or visual practitioners, add a layer of richness to the interpretation process. These facilitators map the Café conversation as it happens in an event by catching glimpses of conversations that happen at each table and by being present in the plenary. They create images that reflect key ideas, map nascent connections and illuminate relationships between different perspectives.
KEEP IN MIND

- **Don't rush the World Café process:** Engaging in a World Café conversation is a highly creative act that does not flourish if rushed. If you're planning on having three rounds, make sure to allow at least two hours including a group reflection at the end.

- **Transitions may be messy:** Don't fret if the rounds don't end exactly on time or if there is some awkwardness in kick-starting the conversation among newcomers to the table. It takes a few minutes for people to rotate and settle into new discussions.

- **Debrief with the organizing team and table hosts:** World Café is not the simplest method to use so make some time to reflect on what worked and what didn’t to improve future use of the method. Address the different elements discussed above by asking questions such as: Was the question(s) clear yet open enough to engage exploration? How did the hosts feel about the conversations at their table?

**MORE REFERENCES ON WORLD CAFÉ**


**WWW.THEWORLDCAFE.COM**

**MORE ON RCLA’s SYMPOSIUM ON RACE AND LEADERSHIP**

http://wagner.nyu.edu/leadership/news/raceleadership.php

**RELEVANT RCLA RESOURCES**

Practice Note: Visual Tools - May 2008
This Practice Note shows how to use Graffiti Wall, Visual Explorer, and murals/tapestries to bring clarity to an issue or problem that otherwise seems murky or intractable. These tools can be used to facilitate difficult conversations, build connections among diverse groups and help leaders problem-solve.
http://www.wagner.nyu.edu/leadership/practice_notes/Practice%20Note_Visual%20Tools.pdf

Practice Note: Story Circle- June 2008
This Practice Note shows how to facilitate storytelling as a powerful tool for bringing people together to build relationships, identify common threads of experience and generate insight from personal and professional experience.
http://www.wagner.nyu.edu/leadership/practice_notes/Practice%20Note_Story%20Circle.pdf
The Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) at New York University’s Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service supports leadership that listens to many voices and serves as a resource for making systems and organizations effective, transparent, inclusive and fair. RCLA supports change agents tackling critical public challenges through rigorous, practice-grounded research and reflective processes that strengthen the theory and practice of leadership.

As part of this work, RCLA crafts and runs customized, experiential leadership programs that both expand individuals' skills and strengthen the organizations in which they work. RCLA develops structured convenings where leaders explore the complexity of the challenges they face and together advance their efforts to make change possible. As an academic center, RCLA conducts rigorous social science research, employing a variety of innovative and participatory methodologies to the issues of contemporary leadership.

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