

Boston Busing Desegregation Project
Friday, April 20, 2012 at UMN
2-5pm Discussion with Beth Roy and Meeting to reflect on the Thurs, April 19th event,
“Listening for Race and Class: An Evening with Beth Roy”

Meeting Goals:

- To debrief about the April 19th event with Beth Roy
 - To address important questions that come up during this meeting and the questions that came up about the project from the event forms on the 19th
 - To prepare for Phase II of the project---Listening to each other’s stories
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Participants: (15)

- Steering Committee, Outreach Committee, Learning Committee, and Facilitators
 - **Guest:** Beth Roy
 - **Facilitators:** Donna Bivens (Project Director), Meghan Doran (Project Organizer)
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Agenda:

I. Introductions -Individual Intros -Why we are here?
II. Thoughts from last night’s event -What went well -What we can do better
III. Discussion and Overview of the Project -More questions and insights -Where we are in the project?
IV. Small Groups Address the questions from the participant forms and new questions that came up during this meeting
V. Report back Small groups report back to entire group and discussion with Beth Roy

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Detailed Notes:

I. Introductions

Individual Introductions

All participants introduced themselves

Why we are here?

We invited the Steering Committee, Outreach and Learning Committee, and Facilitators. Since we have Beth here as a resource it would be a good opportunity to talk about last night.

II. Thoughts from the event last night

What went well

- Attendance

85 plus people were in attendance

-Feedback from Attendees

We got an overwhelming positive response from last night. People were really happy to talk about race and class. I don't think anyone said they weren't.

-Partner exercise and statement of principles

The principles set the tone. The partner exercise worked really well because it seemed to ground people in the principles of this project. I've heard these principles before but last night in the exercise the principles emerged. People might not be able to state what they learned but you feel that something shifted

Incredibly powerful. We thought we knew each other. She started talking and it brought on tears. I reached out and held her hand. How powerful it is to be listened to

-Participants speaking out about their own busing experience

What struck me were the people who spoke out about their own experiences with busing. It brought people to tears. The honesty and depth of feeling in which people expressed themselves

This speaks to the space being perceived as a safe space

I've done versions of this. But I could feel the atmosphere of openness with this crowd. People spoke about various things much to their surprise

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Conversations that people shared came from an intimate place. People thought about their own experiences with their teachers, themselves, and then their relationships

What captured me was the idea of doing power instead of having power. I think because of the social political realities it is hard to be peers to each other. There are so many barriers to being peers and I see it in every conversation. How do we do power in a way that increases other people's power instead of shutting them down?

-Emotions, Feelings, and Competiveness

We should add to agenda how competitiveness intersects

I liked how you spoke about feelings. People started to show emotions. Everyone was noting and agreeing. Even if we discuss things differently we all seem to be on same page as far as our feelings.

People stuck with it because we were instructed to do so.

Emotions often interfere---what became clear is that emotions can facilitate rather than disrupt across race and class lines

One more component about class--- at the end when you talked about class, I wrote in my notes that it was the flip side of the coin. The kids at elementary school level loved same music and liked the same things. The parochial schools were packed and independent schools opened to escape integration but class and race go hand in hand. Class informs our conversation even more.

-Comparing to other cases (Little Rock)

I didn't think how much Little Rock mirrored what happened in Boston. I would like to learn more about other places where the experience was similar. Also, we are paving our own way.

What could we have done better

-Attendance

Any idea of the number of people who were there that not been there before?

-Location and getting lost

People had a hard time finding the place and a lot of people left.

I was outside the building a quarter to 6 but didn't get in until after six.

We need to include a cell phone number on the event flyer.

-Parking

There is no parking at many of the more centrally located event spaces. But the room was excellent because acoustics.

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If we can find some language to say that unfortunately that parking is difficult you may want to leave early.

-Introduction Improvements

We were so rushed at the beginning. We need to make better use of volunteers. Maybe I should have done a little more overview of the project.

I thought the introduction was too long and messy.

-Agenda clarification

People didn't know what the game plan was. It wasn't clear towards the end what was going on. Clarity around what was happening.

-Structure of Participation

I was thinking whether it would be better for participants if we had gone into smaller groups
I wish I had invited you to facilitated my time as you did at the end (instead of lecturing at podium). To have someone do this, is really helpful

-Participant Engagement

The people who registered were people who had been here before. And maybe half of them showed up. It was larger than expected. We are trying to figure out how to get continuity with the people who have stayed—to get them to move forward while continuing to bring in other people.
The Learning Network is working on this.

-Consistency of Statement of Principles

I don't know if there has been a statement of principles at each major event.
For the films we used to state more principles and we bowled it down to five.
The learning network is working on what the key qualities are for learning experiences.

III. Discussion and Overview of the project

More questions and insights

-How do we mediate people's stories?

That strikes me as something to be done at the end. This also includes the aspect of the work that has to do with making art as a way to communicate stories. The questions of authenticity and appropriateness and language are essential things to consider

I think that we have to be responsible given the active listening model and the power of it. We need to recognize when something is getting deep because if we are going to have people be there for couple of hours and listen to them then we have to be responsible with what they express.

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For me it comes under risk---when we jump in and we don't want it to be harmful in anyway.

When it was expressed (by Beth) that we are going off into uncharted territory. That's scary! Talking about race and class is really difficult.

-How to handle potential risk when listening

I think you should think about what are lessons are to be learned from making mistakes? I hope to be a part of is support from outside when you need it. Do you have an advisory committee outside of the project?

If you are interviewing people--- ask yourself who are the people that you are listening to? How are they going to be used? I can tell you a couple of things that influenced my interviews.

Where we are in the project?

We are gathering questions and prioritizing them.
We are screening the film.

Using the image of garden--- there are so many different people with different needs and starting places. For this reason and like a garden the project is scattered. Question: How do we collectively think of ways to tend to the garden given the complexity of it?

June 23rd: citywide report back---unlike a traditional truth process, we are doing this at a time when things have intensified rather than declined. The nature of the problem is more subtle and more complicated to address.

Phase II of the project, Listening---For the workshop with Beth, we wanted to focus on individual and interpersonal capacity building dimensions in the context of the cultural and institutional. We wanted to better understand how to help people listen and listen to themselves while being heard. It is hard to reconcile and envision something else when you still feel traumatized. We are moving from awareness to context setting where we need to uncover stories, history, and content...especially for the learning network. Last night was an attempt and we will continue to explore and pilot models for dialogue which will be the tasks of facilitators and other leadership. And how do we do this for the general public?

Robbie: I would like to teach story circles. Once you participate in one, you can lead one. Story circles include 3 to 15 people making up concentric circles.

IV. Small Group Discussions

Split up into 4 groups to discuss the questions written down by participants who attended the event the night before.

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V. Report Back and Discussion with Beth Roy

Dealing with emotions

- How do we recognize the feelings that are getting in the way of listening?*
- What is the internal work to listening? How do we move past road blocks?*
- How will emotion be framed and allowed in dialogues?*

Group Report Back:

- It is important to put emotions in a social context
- Let people know that it is perfectly understandable if emotions come up
- It can be helpful to let people know that they can couch their emotions in context of stories
- One on one listening is powerful.
- It is important to be able to be both a listener as well as story-teller.

Discussion with Beth:

Don't just try to manage emotion, NAME and CONTEXTUALIZE it!

1. Contextualize

- a. Acknowledge and define the range of relationships in the room
- b. Determine how many people are speaking in a dialogue
- c. Keep in mind that we have so few words in English for emotion. Be aware and acknowledge the range of cultural diversity ---different people express emotion differently.

2. Create the structure

- a. Frame and normalize emotions
- b. Provide guidelines so people can speak truthfully and be respected when they do
- c. Give people permission to feel how they feel
- d. Depending on what it is, define the difference between emotion, feeling, judgment, and opinion. People often say “I feel that....” but what follows is an opinion.

3. Ways to set the Tone (use actively as a facilitator)

- a. Avoid judgment ---“that’s not right” /“you’re a ___ for saying that” /“you are ignorant.”
- b. Think about where in the body the emotion lies
- c. Speak for ourselves
- d. Speak concretely
- e. Avoid certain language---don’t use words and phrases such as “you’re racist” because it shuts down the conversation
- f. Think in terms of “ both/and” rather than “either/or”

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4. Remember...

- a. You want people to leave the dialogue and know a little more about themselves
- b. It is not going to happen in one sitting.
- c. It is not about expression, you want them to feel it. They don't have to say it.
- d. Be Flexible--Sometimes people speak out in a way that forces us to change our structure or process. Sometimes you'll have to attend to an immediate need

4. Strong Facilitation

- a. Express to people in a variety of ways (through your manner) you can handle it.
- b. No matter who is in the room you can talk about race and class
- c. Sometimes it means calling on people---say to people that if they need follow-up support, we will be in touch.
- e. Remember that people don't generally go beyond what they can handle. People will monitor themselves. So push the edge of envelope. Be safe but take the challenge. Sometimes there will be people in the room who you observe have something to say but aren't saying it. Let them know that--when you are ready I'll help you and make that space for you to come forward.

5. Support for Facilitators

-What level of training around emotions that we need to do?

-How do we keep the group of facilitators taking care of?

- a. Training is crucial for self-care. Support and debrief with each other as facilitators.
- b. Think of training and the experience as ongoing learning. You'll make mistakes. People get pissed off.
- c. Also work on issues of competitiveness and power within your own group.

6. What are we listening for?

-What is the point?

-Are we listening for openness in the face of triggers?

-Are the goals and purpose different for race and class or are they the same?

-What kind of guidelines should we create for a safe container?

-How do we learn about compassion and developing the capacity for it? Relates to the issue of purpose—is it one of our purposes?

-How do we listen and engage on equal ground? —clarification of equal ground--listening when there are different experiences in a group, listening without creating hierarchies in our mind? Inclusive listening.

We shouldn't listen with the intent to change people. We should be listening for them to change themselves. Also, it helps to create a political structure to support this work.

Having more/better conversations

-What would it take to have intra-group conversation and feel safe doing so?

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-How to glean knowledge from people who have had these conversations?

-Have you participated in meaningful cross-race coalitions?

-What sustains and monitors this work?

- a. Know the context in which you want to enter and ask appropriate questions---there are leading, loaded, and informational questions. People will know who you are if you come into the room asking informational questions rather than leading and loaded questions.
- b. Larger spaces---people tend to dump and align with familiar stances
Smaller spaces---there needs to be a space for people to talk.
- c. Encourage analysis---So people are not blaming others personally. Analysis is very nurturing. It helps people to see that there is a reason why you are saying what you are saying. This can give individuals the power to change. It is also a way to help people see themselves a part of history.

-How can we help whites open up to us, grow, and change? If people have fear and resentment, how can we help people say what they are truly thinking even if it is thrown back at them?

White Supremacy has done emotional damage to white people. Issues like class are so important for this reason. Whites tend to believe that the U.S. is a meritocracy. This has created a culture of individualism. We are oppressed by our own system and because we don't challenge that, we oppress others.

-How to decide who to talk to/ And what not to do with people's stories

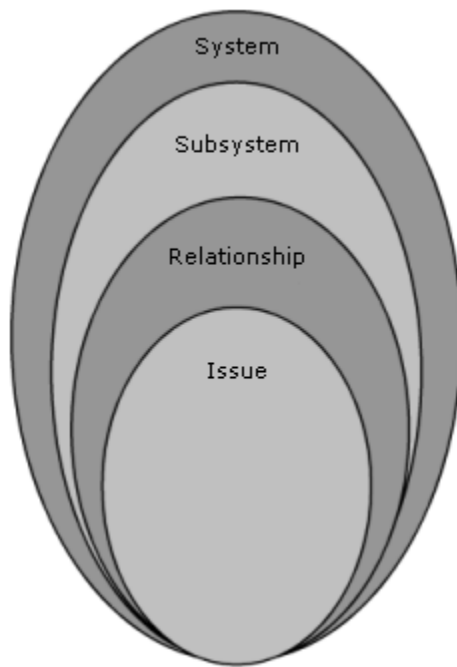
- a. In order to be able to enter these conversations we have to enter them personally. There has to be somebody who has reason enough to talk to you. Example, Beth Roy's book on white women and their (working class/poor women's) feelings of victimization when their HS was forced to integrate in Little Rock [as a school for wealthier whites was being built farther away].
- b. Choosing who to speak with----snow-ball approach. For example, once I (Beth Roy) did an interview, the word spread and people made suggestions for others to speak with. For "Bitters in the Honey" Beth did 50 interviews over a 3 year period. I followed people according to where I was traveling during that time.
- c. FOOD is a great equalizer----The power of food and breaking bread in general.
- d. Deal breakers--- Don't use the word racist. Few are intentionally racist. There is a difference between speaking to behavior and then labeling the person. If you're trying to engage people don't ever use it.
- e. Permission to intervene--- You can't say to people tell me your story and then try to change that story. Make sure that people have given you the authority to do what you want to do.

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For example: Here is my experience of where that idea comes from. Your intention maybe really good but impact is something else. It doesn't accuse people of being mean, hateful, or bad people. Be specific about what you are speaking about. Quote back to them what they are saying. It is good to intellectualize it a little bit. But then go back into the feeling space and check in to see how people feel and let's talk about it. (look up Mary Trujillo, communications professor). And go to the group and ask if other people feel that way. Use a bag full of approaches.

Steps of mediation and the question of Sustainability

Nested Conflict



WE WORK IN THE SECOND TIER –Relationships

But if the other tiers don't change then it is not sustainable. We have to move from addressing the relationships that express the issue to addressing issues of race and class on the subsystem and systems level.

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Steps of Mediation:

1. **Establishing a Contract:** Why are we doing this together? What do we need?
2. **Telling a Story:** Sheds light on the difference between paranoia and hyper awareness. All sorts of representation and different ways to express the story. People are being changed by speaking it in a public arena. The importance of a witness makes a difference.
3. **Analysis/ Feedback:** We want to tell community what we have learned and what it looks to us. We want to develop a new story about what is going on in Boston. For example, in neighborhood mediation, it was story of gentrification, people were coming in but they came in with entitlement and the others just moved in and wanted standing. Entitlement and standing are key things to look out for. While listening to stories also hone your analysis. What are major dynamics going on here? Where is gender in this? Where is woman in this?
4. **Now that we have a common understanding, how do we make change.** What are the structural changes and how we are going to do that? This is a policy question

Concluding Comments

How do you we gather people's stories?

The idea that you can be intentional about the kind of listening you can do? Think about ways we listen when suspending participation. To get a story we ask questions that keep the conversation open-ended and have a list of the questions we want to know (semi-structured interviews). Ask people to tell us about themselves and their experiences. People have a way of detaching themselves as well. And then allow them to speak and wait and see if they bring up the questions without specifically being asked.

How do we represent people's stories?

There is no way that we will not shape the material. It may cause people grief because some people won't agree with how you tell their stories. Be very clear and upfront to mediate dispute and change relationships in the larger community. We need to be clear about confidentiality.

Criticism of the film

People didn't want us to use the film or didn't like the way it framed the city. People have stated that there aren't enough people from S. Boston and that the film doesn't point out good parts from desegregation. But we say that the first film is prelude, it is not the entire story. Some people who had been filmed were upset when parts of their interview were cut. So [in future films etc] we need to make a point of saying that we are filming you but you may not appear the film and even though you may not appear in the film, your story informs the work.

It is helpful for people to see themselves reflected back. For example, the Art piece in Milltown, Pittsburgh. People seeing themselves on the wall had a huge impact. They think that they don't have much to say but then they start to speak and to see themselves reflected back in some form. People said that they didn't know they were so important and that their history was so important.

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What is our role as educators? (if at all)

Look for opportunities to interject history. People don't know their own history. There is a whole generation that don't know about busing or desegregation. The story you tell is the historical facts. The “why people did it” ---is the story to tell later. What people did is the story to tell now.

Difference between telling a story and telling a shared story

I think we should also distinguish between telling a story and telling a shared story. We are not trying to tell a story, we are trying to recreate a shared story. We have to be open to challenging the history we carry. There are times when we will have to say—that this is the story or how we articulate the story as we understand it right now.