

Freshman Seminar (Spring 2001) 76-134

Talking Across Difference: The Design of Intercultural Dialogue

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What happens at the borders of racial, ethnic, class and cultural difference when people try to “read” each other or “read” the world? We know that these cultural differences help shape the discourses we use, that is, in our ways of talking and writing, of building what we see as “reasonable” interpretations or “good” arguments. So how do we take the next step? How do we enter into an intercultural dialogue and inquiry *with* others and actually talk *across* difference?

In this course we will explore how culturally charged issues—such as work, identity, and respect—are represented within different discourses (from the writing of poets to policy researchers). We will ask how such experiences and ideas are interpreted from different perspectives—by inner city teenagers and college students, by blacks and whites, by waitresses, busboys and managers. At the same time you will be developing some intellectual tools for reading the world across differences and engaging in intercultural interpretation with others. This is a course about reading, writing, thinking and doing where you get to put ideas into practice. We will explore a variety of strategies for talking across difference as a way to initiate intercultural dialogues on campus and in urban Pittsburgh, and to help build a web site that tells a more collaborative story of work and identity from culturally different points of view.