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Your Culture or Mine? Changes in Cultural Sensitivity in a Service-Learning Class

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This study investigated patterns of attitudinal change in students following a service-learning experience. The data for this study was collected from psychology students in their third and fourth years of study at the University of the Free State. All these students were involved in the *Study Buddy Service-Learning module*. The sample consisted of 75 students: 9 male and 66 female students; 37 black and 38 white students. Change in student attitude was measured by various multi-item scales such as the *Social Dominance* (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) and *Universal Orientation Scale* (Phillips & Ziller, 1997). Data were analysed using multiple analyses of variance. Results suggested differential racial effects: while the socially dominant attitudes of white students did not change, black students developed social dominance attitudes more congruent with those of the white students. For both black and white students, the collaborative nature of service-learning and interactive reflection enhanced a universal orientation to life.

Keywords: Reflection, Service-learning, Social psychological perspectives, Cultural sensitivity, Social dominance, Universal orientation

In South Africa today, there is a national call for the shaping of citizens that are culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts (Department of Education, 2002). In this milieu, educational transformation (including innovative pedagogies), community engagement, and an enhanced social contract with society are becoming increasingly crucial (CHE, 2004; Gibbons, 2005). Like Wiredu (2004), we must ask what it means to be an educated person in South Africa. Universities carry civic responsibility to cultivate democratic action by teaching students social justice (Waghid, 2004, 2008). Service-learning is an educational approach for social justice in which students (a) participate in contextualised, well-structured, and organised service activities aimed at addressing identified service needs in a community, and (b) reflect on the service experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of the linkage between curriculum content and community dynamics, as well as achieve personal growth and a sense of social responsibility (UFS, 2006, pp.9-10).

Orientations to Interpersonal Relationships

A universal orientation to inter-personal relations accentuates similarities rather than differences between the self and others. This is based on the perception of non-categorisation, a sense of oneness or relatedness with others, the development of empathy, and an acceptance of divergent views (Phillips & Ziller, 1997). Opposed to this, is a social dominance orientation, where in-group dominance is preferred and intergroup relations ordered along a superior–inferior dimension. With a social dominance orientation, people assume roles that enhance inequality and group dominance. This is opposed to a feeling of interdependence and equalitarian relationships that are supported by a more universal and culturally sensitive orientation to life (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Social dominance beliefs are constructed from privileging own group to others.

The development and portrayal of prosocial and altruistic behaviour (or the lack thereof) can be explained from different social psychological perspectives. According to learning theory, prejudice can be learned – from parents and the media, as well as through personal experience (such as realistic group conflict). Socialisation early in life is one of the strongest determinants of attitudes and resulting behaviours (Bernstein, Penner, Clarke-Stewart, & Roy, 2006; Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 2006). Social identity theory explains that self-concept is partly based on group membership. Prejudice may also enhance a person's sense of security and assist in meeting personal needs and self-interests (Bernstein et al., 2006; Erickson & O'Connor, 2000; Nadler, 2002; Taylor et al., 2006). In addition, the social dominance theory postulates that, in order to minimise group conflict, people find consensus on certain ideologies (such as hierarchy-legitimising myths) that promote in-group superiority (Nadler, 2002; Pratto et al., 1994). This, in conjunction with cognitive ideologies and legitimising myths that justify the inequalities, plays a role in forming and maintaining prejudiced behaviour (Bernstein et al., 2006; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000; Whitley & Kite, 2006).

Prejudice may be reduced and cultural sensitivity enhanced by challenging ignorant and misinformed ideas. Thus, according to the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), increased contact with diversity reduces prejudiced and stereotypical behaviour (Bernstein et al., 2006; Bringle, 2003; Taylor et al., 2006). But there are necessary conditions for positive group contact. Without careful consideration of these conditions, contact can also reinforce stereotypes and biases (Bringle, 2003; Skilton-Sylvester & Erwin, 2000). Contact theory postulates that certain contextual factors (i.e. common goals, long-term contact, equal status, and the type of contact that contradicts stereotypes) are needed to ensure that intergroup contact will facilitate understanding.

Various research studies have investigated racial identities, attitudes, and behaviour in post-apartheid South Africa. Many of these studies attest to the complexities of facing everyday realities in social worlds that are still largely defined by race. Reference is often made to the racialised nature of social self-segregation, the complex affective nature of intergroup relations, the racialisation of interests, as well as the challenges inherent in developing culturally sensitive attitudes (Keizan & Duncan, 2010; Pillay & Collings, 2004; Seekings, 2008).

Service-Learning and Reflective Practice

Drawing on educational practices such as constructivist, experiential, and situated learning, as well as participatory worldviews and feminist epistemologies, service-learning provides an education opportunity that expands learning and development beyond the typical outcomes of academic endeavours. Service-learning outcomes are primarily focused in three areas, namely, enhanced academic learning (increased understanding and application of curriculum content); personal growth (inter- and intra-personal learning); and a deeper appreciation of social responsibility (relevant and meaningful service with and to the community) (Howard, 2001; 2003; Rubin, 2001).

With service-learning, reflection is a process where service learners get the opportunity to critically think about their community experiences to learn about larger societal issues (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999). Thoughtful consideration of expectations facilitates the internalisation of knowledge, challenges preconceived notions and changes future behaviour. When structured correctly, reflection will challenge and guide scholars to derive new meaning from experience. Reflection may involve many intentional activities such as observation; the questioning of beliefs, opinions and values; the examining of experiences and critical issues related to those experiences; the analysis and synthesis of facts, ideas, concepts and theories; and the connecting of concrete experiences to abstract knowledge and information (Eyler, 2001; 2002; Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthiah, 2004).

This study investigated patterns of attitudinal change in students following a service-learning experience module. This study furthermore investigated the effect of different kinds of reflective activities on the development of students enrolled in a service-learning module. The amount of the changes observed were expected to differ depending on the kind of reflective activities to which students were exposed. Furthermore, it was envisaged that differences may exist in the pre-scores, as well as patterns (amount, extent, and direction) of change for the different race groups (black and white).

The research questions were as follows:

- Do students exposed to both group and individual reflective opportunities show more change with regard to civic responsibility, universal orientation, social dominance, social competence, and self-esteem than students exposed to only individual reflective opportunities and students exposed to no reflective opportunities?
- Do students exposed to both group and individual reflective opportunities report a higher average number of hours spent in the community than students exposed to only individual reflective opportunities and students exposed to no reflective opportunities?
- Is there a difference between white and black students regarding the pre-test scores with regard to civic responsibility,

universal orientation, social dominance, social competence, and self-esteem?

- Is there a difference in the patterns of change between white and black students with regard to civic responsibility, universal orientation, social dominance, social competence, self-esteem, and hours spent in the community?

Method

A pre-post test experimental design was used, as this was considered to be a suitable (and rigorous) research design for investigating changes in groups of people exposed to a specific experimental intervention (in this study, kind of reflection) compared with a control group.

Participants and Setting

The data for this study was collected from black and white psychology students in their third and fourth years of study, respectively in the Human and Societal Dynamics, BPsych, and Psychology Honours programmes at the University of the Free State. All these students were involved in the *Study Buddy Service-Learning module*. Although it is recognised that categorisation according to race, culture, and ethnicity is infinitely complex, for the purpose of this study the two racial groups were defined as black (mostly Sotho speaking) and white (mostly Afrikaans speaking) students.

The total population of registered students in the programmes mentioned consists of 335 students. The final sample of 75 students comprised 22.4% of the total population of students. With regard to gender and racial distribution, the total population had a male-female ratio of 24.78% : 75.22% (83 male students to 252 female students) and a black-white ratio of 45.37% : 54.63% (152 black students to 183 white students). For this specific sample, the respective ratios are 12% : 88% (9 male students to 66 female students) and 49.3% : 50.7% (37 black students to 38 white students). This implies that the sample is relatively representative with regard to the racial distribution of the total population. With regard to gender, however, it would seem that proportionally more women than men volunteered to be part of the service-learning module. This corresponds with the findings of Gray, Ondaatje, and Zakaras (1999), to the effect that service-learning modules differ from traditional modules in that they have a higher percentage enrolment of women.

Procedure

The service-learning experience related to the research reported here, the *Study Buddy project*, entails a school engagement programme focussing on life-skills development in a predominantly black community called Mangaung, just outside the city of Bloemfontein, South Africa. The schools involved are under-resourced and under-served secondary schools with learners ranging from grade 8 to 12. Learners in these schools face various personal, social, and economic challenges in the journey towards becoming adults. Every year, over the course of about 28 weeks (an academic year), student groups develop and present workshops, interactive discussions, and individual counselling sessions addressing the social-psychological priorities identified in consultation with each of the schools. Through community based learning and reflective practice, classroom-based knowledge is thus enriched and students are motivated towards the development of nationally required generic outcomes such as working effectively with others, participating

as responsible citizens and being culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts.

The 75 service-learning students in this sample were randomly assigned to three groups (to control for the distribution of race between the three groups matched random assignment was done). Group 1 received opportunities for structured group reflection, as well as individual reflection. Group 2 only received opportunities for individual reflection. Group 3, the control group, was not exposed to any structured reflective activities.

Data Collection

Change in student attitude was measured by a battery consisting of various multi-item scales completed before and after the service-learning experience, such as the *Social Dominance Scale* (Pratto et al., 1994) and the *Universal Orientation Scale* (Phillips & Ziller, 1997). The researcher was personally involved in the collection of the data. The pre-tests were administered at the beginning of February, just before the onset of the service-learning activities. From February to October, participants were exposed to the service-learning activities, as well as reflection opportunities (for the two experimental groups). At the end of October and beginning of November the post-tests were administered. The time span of the intervention (and the time span between the two test occasions) was thus nine months.

Data Analysis

Mean and standard deviation scores of the dependent variables (civic responsibility, universal orientation, social dominance, social competence, self-esteem, and hours spent in the community) with regard to pre- and post-test scores were determined for the black and white student groups. Multiple analyses of variance (MANOVA) were conducted to examine the significance of differences in pre- and post-data means with regard to

these dependent variables for a) race; and b) the interaction between race and group.

Ethical Considerations

Permission for the study was granted by the University of the Free State. Student participants provided individual written consent.

Results and Discussion

Changes Observed Regarding the Black and White Student Groups

Table 1 summarises the mean and standard deviation scores of the dependent variables, civic responsibility, universal orientation, social dominance, social competence, self-esteem, and hours spent in the community with regard to pre- and post-test scores as indication of the changes observed for the black and white student groups.

As expected (from maturation or the possible effect of service-learning) Table 1 indicates a tendency towards higher average scores in the post-tests. Although it was hypothesised that racial variations might exist between the black and white students, this table does not indicate much differences with regard to pre-scores or amount, extent, and direction of change. A possible exception might be the results with regard to social dominance (which was investigated further).

Investigating Between-Group-Differences in Pre- and Post-Means

Multiple analyses of variance (MANOVA), examining the significance of differences in pre- and post-data means with regard to the dependent variables civic responsibility, universal orientation, social dominance, social competence, self-esteem,

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the scores for the Total Sample with Regard to Pre- and Post-Test Scores on the Dependent Variables

Variables		Pre-test		Post-test	
		M	SD	M	SD
Civic responsibility	Black	97.38	6.56	104.65	4.45
Highest possible score 116	White	98.00	7.08	104.03	6.71
Lowest possible score 29					
Universal orientation	Black	65.57	6.47	70.95	9.48
Highest possible score 100	White	66.71	7.71	70.13	8.86
Lowest possible score 20					
Social dominance	Black	32.68	11.30	34.49	11.82
Highest possible score 112	White	36.63	13.80	36.58	12.64
Lowest possible score 16					
Social competence	Black	63.68	7.21	68.49	6.27
Highest possible score 80	White	63.05	8.80	66.29	8.13
Lowest possible score 16					
Self-esteem	Black	36.11	2.89	37.24	2.70
Highest possible score 40	White	34.68	4.09	36.16	3.44
Lowest possible score 10					
Hours spent in the community	Black	-	-	56.76	26.22
	White	-	-	50.95	25.82

Table 2

MANOVA *F*-Values for Testing Main Effects and Interactions

Independent variable	<i>F</i> -value	<i>v</i>	<i>p</i>
Race	0.54	6; 66	0.7773
Race*Group (1,2,3)	3.25**	30; 160	0.0001

Note. ** $p \leq 0.01$

and hours spent in the community for a) race; and b) the interaction between race and group, is summarised in Table 2.

No significant results (differences) were found for race independently (as a main effect). However, the MANOVA (Table 2) indicated a significant *F*-value for the interaction between group (three groups, namely Experimental group 1, Experimental group 2, and the control group) and race (two groups, namely black and white). This implies that the racial groups were affected in different ways by the intervention (exposure to reflection). Summarising the results of the ANOVA completed for the six groups (interaction of group and race), Table 3 portrays significant differences (at the 1% level of significance) for three variables, namely universal orientation, social dominance, and hours spent in the community.

The relatively lower scores on the *Social Dominance Scale* (see Table 1) indicated that all participants tended to be less prone to socially dominant attitudes. Black students who were exposed to both group and individual reflective opportunities changed significantly more than white students (with the same exposure) towards a more socially dominant orientation.

Discussion

Black students developed social dominance attitudes more congruent with those of the white students. The differences were only significant between the white and black groups participating in group reflection. In research done by Boyle-Baise (2000), Green (2006), and Myers-Lipton (1996), service-learning prompted in students a move from stereotypical ideas towards being more considerate and multiculturally sensitive. King (2004) found that through caring and sharing with others, students learn to identify with the community and extend their perspectives beyond the personal to the social, political, and economic. Furthermore, they re-evaluate the validity of their previous beliefs, elements of their own lifestyle, and privilege.

King (2004, p.134) calls this the “border crossing”. The findings also concur with Wiredu’s (2004) idea that the willingness to enter into discourse goes hand in hand with the acknowledgement of the possibility that, together, a new truth or understanding can be reached. The collaborative nature of service-learning and interactive reflection enhances a universal orientation to life.

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Table 3

Results of the ANOVAs for the Interaction Between Group and Race

Dependent variable	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	<i>F</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>
Civic responsibility	6.63	7.13	4.08	6.93	5.00	9.38	1.21	5	0.3157	-
Universal orientation	11.45	0.13	0.17	12.43	1.50	0.77	6.91**	5	0.0001	0.70
Social dominance	-6.36	1.67	3.58	8.57	-3.10	-1.69	4.71**	5	0.0009	0.58
Social competence	3.27	4.07	2.17	6.14	4.10	3.92	0.80	5	0.5562	-
Self-esteem	2.36	0.87	1.41	0.36	2.00	1.30	0.91	5	0.4777	-
Hours	67.36	46.73	41.17	76.57	39.90	48.38	5.50**	5	0.0003	0.63

Note. Group 1 = White Experimental 1, Group 2 = White Experimental 2, Group 3 = White Control, Group 4 = Black Experimental 1, Group 5 = Black Experimental 2, Group 6 = Black Control ; ** $p \leq 0.01$

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