At the Cultural Crossroads: Intergroup Psychology Among Students in a Service-Learning Programme

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Abstract Through the lenses of contemporary social psychological perspectives this article explains how, by using service-learning and reflection as a vehicle to facilitate change, the conditions of optimal intergroup contact can be applied. An argument is made for how cultural immersion through service-learning transforms students through the change processes of (1) Resistance to take the first step, (2) Border crossing: Reacting to difference, (3) Becoming conscious of complexity, (4) Seeing similarity, (5) Intercultural comfort and competence, (6) Celebrating diversity, (7) Forming friendships, and (8) Paying it forward. It is proposed in this research that, in the South African context where diverse students do not have much opportunity to share social spaces, service-learning creates living and learning opportunities that balances challenge with support and diversity with connecting in similarity.

Keywords Diversity · Culture · Intergroup contact · Prejudice · Service-learning

> It will never happen again. This is the first and only generation of South Africans that would have lived through one of the most dramatic social transitions of the twentieth century. Nobody else would be able to tell this story with the direct experience of having lived on both sides of the 1990's, the decade in which everything changed. (Jansen 2009, p.1)

During the last few decades most countries have been confronted with the challenge of redefining themselves in the face of social change. In South Africa, these years coincided with the democratic transition into a post-apartheid zeitgeist and the restructuring and development of a society embedded in its own unique multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual context - a transformative experience of dramatic and deep significance.

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Inculcating a democratic ethos based on equity, justice, and a better life for all requires the education and socialisation of trained, enlightened, responsible citizens committed to the common good. Democracy depends on active citizens with the capacity to engage and participate in community life. The aim of citizenship education in South Africa is thus to teach individuals to be members of this diverse society (DoE 1997).

The South African Constitution's call for the healing of the divisions of the past and the establishment of a society based on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental human rights is echoed in various national educational policies (CHE 2004; CHET 2005; DoE 1996, 1997, 2001, 2002; HEQC 2001). However, in a recent report, the Committee on Progress Towards Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions (DoE 2008) concluded that the pace of transformation toward these ideas has been less than satisfactory and that discrimination and racism are still pervasive elements in higher education. The report continues to provide vivid examples of South African higher education institutions', staff's, and students' difficulties in facing change and their discomfort with diversity. In relation to this, Jansen (2009) asks some pivotal questions: "Why do post-apartheid children still mirror the beliefs and behaviours of an apartheid regime?"

Given the necessity for higher education institutions to respond, two aspects of this situation warrant further investigation: first, the dynamics of redefining ourselves in view of changing relationships and contexts, and, second, the facilitating role that higher education can play in preparing individuals who can act as responsible citizens in a diverse society. In the following sections these aspects will be discussed. Although there may be various ways of unpacking the phenomenon, these questions are approached from the perspective of social psychology, using an interpersonal level of analysis regarding the nature of social relationships, as well as an analysis of the reciprocal influence people have on one another when collectively engaged in something. The discussion commences by highlighting the merits of service-learning as a form of community engaged scholarship to respond to the call for transformation.

Social Psychological Explanations of the Nature of Diverse Social Relationships

To shed some light on the ideal of embracing change and diversity, in this section the flip side of the coin, namely the interrelated elements of prejudice (affective reactions towards people based on group membership), stereotyping (a set of beliefs, or a cognitive manifestation of prejudice) and discrimination (actions, behavioural manifestation of prejudice) (Jones 2002; Taylor et al. 2006) is investigated.

According to Taylor et al. (2006) old fashioned racism (strong overt expressions of prejudice among members of one group towards another) is less prominent today than before, but has been replaced by a new face. They refer to racism expressed through more implicit stereotypes dominated by well learned sets of associations that are activated automatically in spontaneous, uncontrollable, and unintentional ways. While racism was previously explicit and conscious, modern reactions are less outspoken and marked by ambivalence and conflict between egalitarian values and prejudiced beliefs (Jones 2002). Corcoran and Thompson (2004) refer to aversive

racism (as opposed to overt racism) as the dissonance between democratic norms and unavoidable internalised ideologies; rather than being expressed in hostility or hatred, aversive racism results in feelings of discomfort and anxiety. To understand the complexity of these various kinds of subtle biases that continue to prevail, Sritharan and Gawronski (2010) refer to the importance of an integrative framework that includes individuals' spontaneous affective reactions, their propositional evaluations, egalitarianism-related, nonprejudicial goals, and perceptions of discrimination. An integration of some of the major contemporary perspectives in social psychology can provide useful explications.

Socialisation, Learning and Cognitive Theories

Learning theorists offers an explanation for the development of templates of our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. They state that current behaviour is determined by prior experience (Taylor et al. 2006). Social learning theories, such as the theories of Bandura (1986) and Rotter (in Weiner 1992) focus on how individuals learn through observation and modelling of behaviour in the social sitiuations that they have and experience (socialisation). In the same paradigm, behaviourists such as Skinner view learning as a function of reinforcement of behaviour and state that behaviour can be explained by the patterns in which it was rewarded and reinforced. In this regard Jones (2002, p. 91) explains how stereotypes are embedded in the "cultural fabric of society" through, among others, parents and the media. Also Arhin and Thyer (2004), when discussing the causes of racial prejudice in America, refer to classical, operant and observational learning.

Motivational theorists warn, however, that learning theory underestimates the complexity of individual motives, and that the learning theories stating that behaviour that is rewarded will be repeated provide only a partial explanation of human behaviour (and do not account for the complexity of underlying motives). Thus, McDaniel (1998) points to the fact that reward often only motivates individuals to get rewarded and punishment only produces compliance in the short term. A controversial and often debated aspect of motivation is whether extrinsic motivation tends to erode intrinsic motivation. In a meta-analysis of the effect of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation Deci et al. (1999) found that all forms of external rewards undermine free-choice intrinsic motivation. In opposition to the behavioural learning theories that posit that positive consequences will reinforce behaviour, the motivational theories warn that external reward may have a negative influence on intrinsically motivated behaviour. Facilitating a process of true change thus requires a catalyst that will instigate internal motivation towards prosocial behaviour (and not just the superficial rewarding of doing good).

According to decision making theories, the decision to act in a certain way are usually based on what provides the greatest rewards and the least cost. For example, the expectancy-value theory of Edwards states that people thoughtfully assess the advantages and disadvantages of a situation and the value they place on the possible outcomes. In adopting a specific attitude individuals attempt to optimise their subjective gains in various expected outcomes (Taylor et al. 2006). Closely related to this, the equity theory postulates that fairness exists when the ratio of profits to

contributions is the same for everyone. Equity theory is based on the assumption that individuals in interaction will always attempt to maximise their own gains. In a group situation, collective rewards can be maximised by arrangements or norms that divide the rewards fairly. The experience of inequity in an interaction will result in distress and attempts to restore the equity (Bringle 2003; Taylor et al. 2006).

From a cognitive perspective : In relating and adapting to life, all human beings develop templates (which may become stereotypes) as this simplifies life, reduces complex information and eases our reaction to situations. Although development of such templates might initiate a constructive response in adapting to life, this can easily become counterproductive. Jones (2002) explains that once stereotypes have been activated, it influences what we focus on and what we remember. Once formed, it is easy to assimilate new experience into existing templates. This leads to the exaggeration of differences and the overestimation of the strength of relationship between certain aspects (illusory correlations arising from confirmation bias). This shades our interpretations of events and guides the nature of our social interactions and as such, through a self fulfilling prophecy, perpetuates stereotypes.

As a further explanation for prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination, various authors refer to attribution tendencies as a way of understanding individuals and the complexity of their cognitive interpretations of life (Brandenberger 1998; Bringle and Velo 1998; Sperling et al. 2003). Attribution theory, initially developed by Fritz Heider, explains how people answer the "Why?" questions of life (Bringle 2003; Taylor et al. 2006). Dispositional or internal attribution entails the perception that a person's actions stem from stable characteristics, such as personality traits. Situational or external attribution explains the causes of a person's actions as situational or contextual in nature. An attribution tendency called the self-serving bias occurs when people regard their own positive behaviours as internally caused, while attributing their own negative behaviours to external forces. In addition, due to this self-serving bias, people tend to overestimate the role of personal dispositions in others' actions (fundamental attribution error). This bias is worst when the other is a member of a stigmatised, socially identifiable group and when the other's actions perpetuate stereotypes (Sperling et al. 2003; Taylor et al. 2006). This is related to the ultimate attribution error, where individuals tend to make more complimentary attributions to members of the in-group, and less to the members of the out-group. This is often related to tendencies such as in-group favouritism and out-group homogeneity (tendency to see out-groups as more alike than in-groups – "they are all alike"). According to the cognitive dissonance theory proposed by Leon Festinger, individuals experience psychological discomfort, or dissonance, in the presence of two conflicting thoughts. When faced with dissonance, individuals will attempt to restore consistency (Taylor et al. 2006).

Intergroup Theories

The social exchange theory builds on both learning and decision making theory and analyses the benefits and costs of individuals' exchanges with one another (Taylor et al. 2006).

Focusing on the patterns of interaction, the social exchange theory investigates the interdependence of relationships, as well as different degrees and limitations of reciprocity (Chadwick-Jones 1976). It is here where in-group / out-group relations come into play.

The realistic conflict theory of social exchange initially proposed by Levine and Campbell (Jones 2002) explains that intergroup hostility and antagonism arise during competition for limited resources (hostility is aggravated in times of frustration and relative deprivation). However, if superordinate goals that require intergroup interaction and cooperation are created, this may reduce competition and hostility.

The core tenet of the intergroup theory is that perceptions and behaviours favour peoples' own groups relative to others. Ata et al. (2009) attest to the importance of contact to reduce social distance, thereby supporting the intergroup theory. According to Paluck and Green (2009) the contact hypothesis, which propose optimal conditions for exposure to out-groups, constitute one of the most frequently used theories to explain the reduction of prejudice. This hypothesis, initially proposed by Allport (1954), states that prejudice against a social group can be reduced through appropriate contact with the members of that group. Allport identified four conditions for positive intergroup contact. According to him, co-operative interdependence, entailing different individuals interacting and sharing outcomes, improves relationships. Equal status between individuals within the situation is also important. Furthermore, contact needs to have acquaintance potential: it must be sufficient, as well as frequent in duration and closeness, because brief, impersonal and occasional contact can enhance negative stereotyping. Lastly, institutional support from authority positions to endorse the contact is necessary (Bringle 2003; Pettigrew 1998; Taylor et al. 2006). Pettigrew (1998) adds to this a fifth condition, cross-group friendship, as an essential aspect: contact should be of such as nature as to create an opportunity to become friends. Maoz (2000) refers to the importance of recognising power relations in intergroup encounters.

From the above it is clear that contemporary social psychological perspectives related to socialisation, learning, cognitive, and intergroup theory can provide useful explications for why in-group out-group stereotypes exist.

Educational Imperatives

One of the greatest challenges that the newly formed democracy in South Africa has to face is the restructuring of the education system. Bawa (2003, p. 48) asserts that, in a radically changed society, higher education needs to deal with changed relationships, new learning partnerships and different "knowledges." Tatum (2003, p. 214) agrees that "… the challenge of educating a diverse student body that will be ready to live and work together in an increasingly complex and pluralistic society requires us to interrupt patterns of social isolation." Thus, to achieve an education system that is relevant to local, national, African and international spheres, the nature of higher education as it is now and its role in new contexts should be questioned (Bawa 2003).

It has become crucial for educators to examine the difficulties students experience in embracing diversity and to ask critical questions regarding the role of higher education as catalyst for radical change. In this regard educators should realise that no neutral education exists. We cannot ignore the importance of race and related

culturally constructed variables (Chesler and Scalera 2000). Jansen (2009, p.254) challenges educators in post-conflict societies to "enable an authentic encounter not only with the past but with the actors within it."

Erasmus (2005) and Favish (2003) call on courageous scholars and social change agents – champions – "to bolster a renaissance of higher education in support of the public good" (Favish 2003, p. 29). To achieve this, the continuous challenge of proactive transformation, creative interaction, and the importance of the African reality, consciousness, and identity are recognised (University of the Free State 2006).

Beilke (2005) is of the opinion that community engagement can be a powerful catalyst in the development of multicultural consciousness. She also refers to the importance of dialogue, problem posing, and exploring issues of race and class. Service-learning is an educational approach that integrates / balances learning experiences with service (addressing goals identified by a specific community) through active and reflective learning. The aim of these learning experiences is 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 (Bringle and Hatcher 1996; UFS 2006). Service-learning provides students with a tangible opportunity to challenge theoretical arguments and attitudes regarding prejudice and stereotyping (Carlebach and Singer 1998). Various studies have claimed a relationship between service-learning practice and cultural awareness and sensitivity (Eyler et al. 2001).

Setting

The leadership at the University of the Free State (UFS) prioritises the responsibility of the university to provide a space where students can learn to appreciate and respect diversity. Operating in a truly African reality and reflecting an African consciousness and identity, the UFS Community Engagement Policy (2006) recognises the continuous challenge toward pro-active transformation and contributing to the development of its province, South Africa and Africa. With a scholarship of engagement, integrating robust teaching, learning, research, and community engagement the UFS aims to be responsive, to enhance cooperation between the university and its surrounding community, and to act as a staging ground for continued and creative interaction.

Although the UFS is a multiracial institution, its language policy supports parallel medium education which entails conducting separate classes in Afrikaans and English. Due to the demographic profile at the UFS, this results in mostly black English and mostly white Afrikaans classes. Students thus have little opportunity to engage in scholarly activities across the racial divide and, as with many other campuses all over the world (Jones 2002), the UFS community is divided along racial and language lines. Multiracial, interactive group orientated service-learning programmes provides one of few opportunities for UFS members to openly and safely immerse in culturally diverse communities.

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. As also observed in the research done by

Weber et al. (2009), after nearly two decades of democracy, the majority of South African schools are still segregated. Most schools that provided for black African learners during the racially-based apartheid education system have not become integrated. Schools and universities in South Africa are "legally desegregated but socially segregated spaces" (Jansen 2009, p. 137)

The schools involved are under-resourced and under-serviced secondary schools with learners ranging from grade 8 to 12. Learners in this area speak mostly seSotho and siTswana, and are educated in English (their second or often third language). Many learners are confronted with social problems such as broken families, various forms of neglect, poor health and abuse. A disproportionally large amount of the learners are exposed to alcohol and drug abuse, unhealthy sexual practices and conflict with the law. Learners in these schools thus face various personal, social, and economic challenges in the journey towards becoming adults. This situation places an onus on institutions and society to address the structural lag and inequality by providing opportunity for the development of human and social capital (Hamilton and Hamilton 2009)

Every year, over the course of about 28 weeks (an academic year), postgraduate psychology students are organised into small groups. Each group are partnered with a specific school. The composition of the student groups is diverse in terms of sex, race, and mother tongue. 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.

Method

The aim of this article is to describe how students from various cultural groups respond to the service-learning experience and create meaning from these cross-cultural experiences. In this research, the emerging patterns of change cutting across, as well as distinct to cultural groups, with the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of the dynamics and processes of change, are described.

Following a constructivist-phenomenological approach, the meaning-making processes of the participants is emphasised. Due to an interest in understanding the dynamics relating to this particular setting and context, a case study approach was followed (Creswell 2007).

Participants and Sampling

Every year, approximately 25 students enrolled in postgraduate studies in psychology participate in this school engagement programme. Students volunteer for the programme and are thus, to a certain extent self selected. Because only a limited number of students can be accommodated, students are selected based on their academic performance in previous years. Mostly female students participated in the

programme, congruent with the tendency in general postgraduate studies in psychology in South Africa. With few exceptions, students (in postgraduate studies in psychology, as well as in the programme) are white Afrikaans and black Sotho-language females.

Students recognised as motivated participants in the 2010 service-learning programme were approached to participate in focus groups. Using purposeful stratified sampling techniques, participants regarded as rich sources of information were identified. To maximise heterogeneity in terms of race, stratified sampling was used; approaching students that present typical examples of both the cultural groups (Patton 2002). The focus group participants consisted of six white Afrikaans and six black Sotho females. All students studied full time, nine were South African citizens, one student was from Ghana and two students from Lesotho. Their ages ranged between 20 and 24.

Data Collection

The focus groups were conducted in a semi-structured way. Separate focus groups were conducted in Afrikaans and English to accommodate the language preferences of the students. This also entailed that the white students (who prefer to speak Afrikaans) and black students (preferring English) were interviewed separately. It was expected that students would be more open to talk honestly about sensitive topics in more homogeneous groups.

With ethical considerations in mind, students were approached a week before the focus group meetings, the rationale and aim of the research were explained, and informed consent was obtained. Participants were reminded again of the voluntary nature of their participation at the onset of the focus groups.

To stimulate a discussion that would elicit information regarding cross-cultural experiences and diversity, open-ended prompting questions were asked, e.g. "Referring specifically to the multi-cultural and multi-racial/ethnic aspects of the programme, what have you learnt from other students participating in the programme?" and "How do you think was your experience different from that of students from other racial/ethnic groups?."

Each focus group session was concluded when it seemed clear that no new themes emerged from the discussion, while recurring thoughts and regularities were evident.

To ensure trustworthiness and authenticity, quality criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability were considered (Kiely and Hartman 2011; Patton 2002). To keep an audit trail, the sessions were recorded, transcribed, and saved. No names were transcribed and students were thus assured of their anonymity. During the implementation of the project, weekly reflective discussion sessions were conducted with the students. In these sessions a democratic ethos were demonstrated through respecting and legitimising students' voices and opinions. By the time the focus groups were conducted (at the end of the academic year) a relationship of trust and rapport had thus been established and students were comfortable to raise their honest opinions.

As the coordinator and participant observer in the programme over the past decade, the researcher had the opportunity to observe students while engaging with the community and to gain a sensitivity for the context. The researcher also conversed with the students during the weekly reflection session where there was ample

opportunity for various observations and the corroboration of inferences. Information from focus groups was complemented and triangulated with observations from personal engagement in the field, as well as from documents (such as continuous reflection reports and summative assessments portfolios).

Through a process of reflexive inquiry it is acknowledged that personal philosophical, theoretical and value stances might have filtered and framed the interpretation (Kiely and Hartman 2011). The lenses that might have influenced the process and shaped the results are, amongst others, the researcher's predisposition, background as a white Afrikaans female, and position as lecturer.

Data Analysis

The transcribed focus group records were analysed by making use of constant comparative analysis, a method introduced by Glaser (1965). Although initially intended as a method used during grounded theory approaches, it has been implemented in various contexts since then (Patton 2002).

Since the interest was in conceptual frameworks that grew organically from the interpretations of the participants, no *a priori* codes were used. Working with student voice, the approach was thus mostly inductive in nature. As proposed by Glaser (1965), the process commenced through spirals of coding for categories while constantly keeping previous codes in mind and making comparisons. This was done to find the different dimensions on the continuum and range of the category. In the process, ideas were recorded as they emerged. Through constant comparison, pieces of knowledge were accumulated and integrated into more relational categories. This was repeated until categories became focused and saturated, finally solidifying into an outline of major themes. Through an iterative approach of systematically coding and clustering, data was thus reduced into themes and categories and identified meaningful conceptual patterns. This resulted in a move away from bits of data towards patterns of information, a process which Dye et al. (2000) describe with the metaphor of a kaleidoscope.

Results

Note: In the following section the term "student" will be used to describe the university graduates registered for the service-learning programme. The term "learner" refers to the youth of the various local community high schools (grade 8 to 12).

Note: It is recognised that aspects of race, culture, and ethnicity is infinitely complex. In the following discussion distinction between groups will often be made along the crude racial lines of black and white. In concurrence with Coutant et al. (2011) it was found that the more salient and prominent a trait (in this situation the colour of our skin), the more it will be used as an attribute factor when defining in- and out-groups.

Resistance to Take the First Step

Tatum (2003, p.113) uses the term "borderland" to refer to black areas unfamiliar to many whites in still quite segregated societies. From the onset of this service-learning

endeavour, it was clear that, especially for the white students, this experience entailed entering a borderland. However, probably through socialisation sources of information such as the media, white students have formed certain perceptions about this world less known to them. The following statement from a white student is illustrative:

> Look, we also hear all the stories of what happens in the townships and we know their circumstances are much different from what we are used to. We don't want to think too much about it, because it is too bad to think about it. You do not want to think there are people that live like that and want to turn a blind eye....

The second part of this statement is consonant with the ideas proposed by Corcoran and Thompson (2004) that the dissonance between egalitarian norms and internalised beliefs causes discomfort which often leads to avoidance.

From students' initial statements, it was evident how they attempted to divide a complex world into easily categorised in-groups and out-groups (in this situation along racial lines) and how they tend to conform with familiar groups:

> It is comfortable for us to just go on because we know: "I come from a white primary school, white secondary school and I have always been schooled with white Afrikaans people." If you are not forced to have contact with other people, you will not.

Jansen (2009, p. 87–88; 109) used the term "locked into these white spaces" to refer to the situation in South Africa where students "come from insular and closed white environments where family, church, school, and peer group reinforce their sense of white exclusiveness." Also Corcoran and Thompson (2004) is of the opinion that in situations such as these it is impossible to avoid negative beliefs about out-groups and not to internalise some degree of the ideology on a psychological level (e.g. the cognitive predisposition to categorise people into in- and out-groups) and a sociological level (e.g. social stratification systems).

It is thus clear that, without a facilitated boundary crossing, students might prefer to stay in their comfort zones, which might result in perpetuated stereotypes, shaded interpretations of social interactions, and the exaggeration of differences between groups. The UFS institutional decision to implement service-learning as a compulsory element to every curriculum on campus provides students with an opportunity for intergroup contact. Ata et al. (2009) attest specifically to the importance of Allport's contact condition of social sanction and influential others' support. Many students mentioned this service-learning experience, as well as previous service-learning modules as the only opportunity for multicultural interaction: "I think, apart from Study Buddy, we do not really get the opportunity to mix with the black students of the English class." However, all referrals made to service-learning experiences, mentioned "We were forced to." This goes against the grain of the motivation theory that external rewards undermine free-choice intrinsic motivation (Deci et al. 1999). A fine balance is thus necessary between internal and external motivators for engaging with border crossings.

Border Crossing: Reacting to Difference

For all the students, this endeavour entailed novel aspects, and they were thus, to a certain extent, united in their anticipation of the challenges inherent in the new experience. Different themes emerged between the racial groups.

With language such as "culture shock," "getting lost," and "feeling like an outsider," as well as strong reference to crime and danger, white students expressed their initial discomfort and fears: "The teachers they said that some of the learners have been to prison and they're dangerous … and then the police are also standing outside."

And:

> They have to keep the doors [of the school] closed with stones / rocks, otherwise there is constant walking, in and out, and, I mean, if you get there, you don't know about that. So that was a bit of a scare, but it was for the unknown… the strangeness....

Although most of the white students have never been to Mangaung before, for many black students this was an opportunity to "go back home" (in many cases, to what had been their own schools). Interestingly, various black students used the old apartheid term "location" for Mangaung, which might be their association with their previous school experiences. Whereas safety issues were foregrounded by the white students, for black students the challenges regarding the skills they needed for the service-learning programme were more prominent.

This concurs with the findings of Hamel et al. (2010) who observed similarities in the kinds of dissonance experienced by different cultural groups (in their case Japanese and U.S. students), but also difference in what the groups focused on.

This border crossing along racial lines was not only a novel experience to the students, but also to the learners – a reciprocal border crossing thus. In the reaction of the learners, both white and black students noticed a wariness to cross racial boundaries and trust the out-group. Initially, white students were very aware of the fact that various community members were amazed to see them (white students) there – evidence of the fact that by entering this community, they portrayed behaviour not congruent with the community members' stereotypes.

A white student stated:

> … in the beginning it felt to me as if everyone was amazed to see me there. Everyone is really amazed that I, a girl, am driving here and am here and if you stop next to the road and ask people for directions (and one day we had to ask a lot of direction) then the people can nearly not believe what they are seeing....

Themes related to the pervasiveness of white superiority were prominent in their statements: "… the moment you arrive at the school you are elevated because you are now the white person that came…" and "… They see you, they put you at times on a little throne...." Also, in the learners' resistance to engage with the white students, a theme of distrust of white people was evident:

I think if someone stands in front of you and they present a class for the first time, then you can identify with them more [if they are black], rather than having to think: "OK this is now a white student… I am not so sure." And what I also think is that there is so much stereotyping that they are initially careful and want to check out the situation carefully before they will just allow us.

Not only the white students, but also the black students, were struck by the reaction of the learners and the community. They remarked the following:

I learned that colour (skin) is still much visible. I am the only black person in my group. Everywhere we went around the school, we got the attention from everyone, including the staff members. In my experience, I am very much sure that it would be different if we were all black.

Another black student mentioned:

I have learned about the social distance between the white community and the black community and the influence it can have on the helping process [the community engagement]. For example, it is difficult for most [black] students to approach our white fellows but they always wait for us to go out and call on me and ask some few questions and others just decide to remain quiet, which raises a lot of concern to our society in all spheres of life.

In accordance to the core tenet of the intergroup theory, it was clear that people favour their own groups relative to others: "I think they are more accessible toward the black students because they can identify with them," "the black students can get through to them quicker, because they trust them," and "they see the black students as people they get along with every day."

The statement "I had to get used to the fact that these students don't mix interracially very often – and didn't really know what to expect from me" captures the fact that exposure across different ethnic groups and cultures is, especially in this community, still the exception rather that the norm.

As mentioned earlier, lack of contact might perpetuate stereotypes and lead to an exaggerated perception of difference. In this regard Jansen (2009, p. 70) mentions how a closed circle of interaction and "cultural cohesiveness" can lead to a very narrow transmission of knowledge, with the potential to reinforce set beliefs. He continues to mention the dangers of received knowledge that is not challenged. When exposed to reality, many students realised that their perceptions were exaggerated: "I think I expected a bit worse from Mangaung. The houses are not as bad as I thought it would be. It was OK for me. But you can see it is a different world." Another student stated: "It was nerve-wracking but wasn't as bad as I had imagined."

Becoming Conscious of Complexity

Paluck and Green (2009) refer to the body of research demonstrating that prejudice can be prominent in a person's belief system without them being aware of it. Stories "uninterrupted by counternarratives" (Jansen 2009, p. 88) are often not considered on a conscious level. One important aspect in prejudice reduction is consciousness-raising. In this experience, inevitably, students were confronted with new information

that challenged their understanding of the world and created cognitive dissonance. With remarks such as "I asked questions about lasagne and rugby and realised they don't know what I talked about," "I had to explain who Lance Armstrong [the cyclist] is," and "I would only bring magazines from my own house for activities and it would contain no relevant pictures for who the children are" students realised how life experiences are culture bound. One student was shocked by her uninformed perceptions regarding the prominence of HIV / Aids: "We went prepared with this whole prevention message and half way through realised it is too late. In the class, there is a whole lot that are HIV positive."

Many realised the complexity of cross-cultural experiences and the importance of understanding how nuanced our cultural experiences are:

> I came back to earth. I thought that it would be easy: "I am good with young people, I will do it, it will be easy." And I really thought people exaggerate a bit if they say it is difficult in different contexts… but then I had to realise that what I say, does not resonate with them....

And:

> One very particular lesson I learned about myself this year was that I am not at all culturally relevant or sensitive enough. Even though I was always aware of the different setting these children grew up in, I still made horrible mistakes that really influenced my relationship with them, especially right at the beginning....

There was also appreciation for the importance of a more Africanised and contextualised psychology, since it was evident that the theory was not universally appropriate:

> "The relationship theories we discussed with them seemed more appropriate for a western type of culture and didn't seem entirely appropriate for their African culture."

Many students were honest to admit to their own stereotypical attitudes and referred to the necessity of broadening their frame of reference:

> I became more aware of how I accept certain perceptions/beliefs as being a standard, when there are many different perceptions/beliefs contrary to my own. Acceptance is crucial and attempting to have a clear understanding of other perceptions/beliefs, allows for a more fulfilled and holistic approach to life.... It is important to show students that acceptance is possible and necessary in diversity and that we can learn from each other's cultures.

Another statement in this regard:

> I learned that stereotyping is bad, I should just drop it. I learned that social inhibition can be created – carried out by your own thoughts and that social facilitation (presence of others) can boost your ego to outweigh social inhibition....

However, it was also clear that some students don't change and that condescending and patronising attitudes can persist: "So yes, I am sometimes scared when it is break

time and I see my car stand there and they gather around my car. Then I wonder if my GPS will still be there."
    And:

Time! Beforehand I had to send a sms [text message] to them [the black fellow students] for a session that was indicated on their schedule - otherwise they did not show up. I have to sms because we get each other every Monday at half past nine. I cannot say 10 o'clock because then they only show up at half past 10. So I say half past 9, then I am sure that we can leave a 10.

    Tausch and Hewstone (2010) propose that individual differences in ideological orientation influence the process of stereotype change. They examined the effect of social dominance orientation (hierarchy-enhancing legitimising myths that promote the superiority of one group over others, justify status differences and discriminatory policies) on the malleability of stereotypes and found that a social-dominance orientation predisposes social perceivers toward maintaining stereotypes. Although the service-learning experiences reported here, might have impacted students' frames of reference, it did not challenge deeply ingrained ideological stereotypes in all the students.
    Jansen (2009, p. 265) regards "disruptive knowledge" as the start of a process of critical dialogue. In this process of becoming conscious of greater complexity, many students were challenged to consider themes which, although not familiar to them, they have not critically engaged with before: apartheid and poverty, privilege, sex (gender) and language issues, collectivist values, and identity.

Apartheid and Poverty Although these are not new concepts to anyone in South Africa, the service-learning experiences provided students with real-life examples, which made it possible for them to personalise these abstract and cold terms, by being able to see how it affects the day to day lives of the learners: "Apartheid in SA played an immense role in the psychology of this community." Regarding poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth the following was said: "I understood the meaning of poverty when I saw that the windows had no glass in them, in the freezing cold weather" and "I did however realise how separated Bloemfontein is in terms of socio economic circumstances." Another student mentioned: "One is so greatly disadvantaged by poverty and a disrupted family life, that it really does put a person at risk of falling prey to the cycle of hopelessness."

Privilege Regarding the importance of facing privilege Johnson (2006, p. 37) remarked: "It's like living in a rainy climate and somehow avoiding being rained on yourself. It is still a rainy place to be, and getting wet is something most people have to deal with." The prominence of privilege was highlighted and many white students experienced discomfort when being confronted with this issue: "I felt a little out of place when E* referred to the difficult circumstances they have and that they should rise from it, because it was obvious that I don't face the same kind of survival problems they do."
    Related to this, many white students felt that, due to their privileged situations they still have not earned the right to address certain issues. Many felt that it would be

disrespectful and that it would be easier to confront once they have earned greater legitimacy:

> I felt when our black student presented and she spoke about when you feel that nobody notices you, as you rise above your circumstances and strive to reach your potential. And I realised that it is really crucial that it was her that spoke about that and not us. Because if she says to them: "Yes, people say, hey, that one is just like her father" I realised if I said it, it would not have had the same impact. They would have thought that I am judging them. And because they are somewhat from the same type of circumstances and she knows: "Yes, sometimes I go to school hungry, yes my father drinks the whole time," they could feel that if she could rise above, if she comes from the same circumstances as them and she is a fourth year at university, then they can too.

Sex (Gender) Issues Students had to grapple with the persistence of sex (gender) stereotypes in this community and its impact:

> I am always a bit frustrated whenever women are subservient to men, so I really enjoy the female-only sessions, where we allow the girls to give voice to their opinions and concerns. …. I am very aware of how women are treated as inferior citizens in certain instances – such as health care education. It is shocking that girls who are sexually active and in matric do not know what their rights are … and that their gender-specific health issues are so poorly addressed.

Language The importance of language to facilitate interaction was realised "At first they were shy to ask me questions and preferred to talk to C* in Tswana…," as well as respect for acknowledging multilingualism "I just realised how important it is to also make sure that you speak the people's language." Not only understanding the language itself, but also the intricacies of interacting with people in a second language (which is something the black students do daily) became clear, demonstrated by this remark from a black student regarding her fellow white student:

> At first they didn't identify with her and every time she spoke, like every time she give out a task, I had to repeat with the simple English like "guys you are supposed to do this and this and this."

Interconnectedness/Collectivism While being more aware of individualistic values, white students were intrigued by collectivistic mindsets more prominent in the black students: "She said 'my dad has passed away, I have only a mother' and I said 'every father is a father as long as he loves you'" and remarked on the value of interconnectedness:

> … we go in there and we come from a western society, very individualistic.... So it feels to me they are much more group orientated and care for each other and I think that is why their resilience is so high – because there is always someone looking out for you.

Identity In time, students realised that identity is much more complex and nuanced than easily identified categories such as skin colour or language. They were challenged to think beyond this more prominent categorisation when a student from Ghana who did not speak the local African language stated:

> I'm not Sotho-speaking. So the language was a problem. When I got there they automatically thought I'm from Bloemfontein; I'm from around. So they made comments and speak in their language and I'm only saying "What?." They were surprised and said "What are you? Are you black?." I always used English like my language and they were surprised.

When the dominant dialogue emphasises individualism, often the structural and systemic advantages and disadvantages that individuals experience are not taken into account (Tatum 2003). Research done by Bringle and Velo (1998) has shown that observers of misery tend to be biased and to blame victims for their circumstances by making internal attributions (probably in order to comfort themselves that they won't be confronted with the same fate). In a culture of individualism such internal attributions are even more prominent. Internal attributions can be tempered when an individual becomes aware of plausible situation factors (Bringle and Velo 1998).

In experiencing cognitive dissonance and in alignment with the attribution theory, students tended towards more complex explanations of reality as their experience progressed. Moving away from dispositional or internal attributions (e.g. peoples' actions stem from personality traits), they favoured situational or external attributions (e.g. recognising contextual factors). They moved towards more encompassing and multi-dimensional explanations. Many of the statements showing this related to attributions regarding crime. In contrast to the initial reactions of fear, later explanations portrayed a stronger sense of empathy:

> I hear about the newspapers and then I read, "Yes OK, the education standards are now dropping" and I see on campus how many people fail and I hear of people that steal and so forth. And then I think: "O really, why do you do it? It is a choice that you make." And now, when I see how those children sit in that school, then I have so much more understanding.

And:

> And the principal told us at the beginning that it is the biggest criminal school in South Africa.... There is crime and if it is what happens around you, then you are to a large extent the result of what is happening around you. With that I do not exclude free will, but they just have such a greater struggle to achieve something in life as what I have.

This resonates with the work of Pettigrew (1998) who referred to the importance of moving from fear to empathy. Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) found that affective factors, such as anxiety reduction and empathy, have a greater mediating role in prejudice reduction than cognitive factors such as knowledge.

Other student statements related to the importance of recognising context were: " I applied Bronfenbrenner's psycho bio-ecological model. The students at K* are

individuals but also individuals within a larger context. There are systems influencing their everyday lives in indirect ways."

Seeing Similarity

Jansen (2009, p. 267) states: "When human beings from opposite sides of a divided community begin to honestly engage with one another, they are often drawn toward the core of each other's humanity." Evidence of this was seen in student statements such as:

> Even though we live in different contexts, cultures, or even towns … in the end we are all just humans, with the same basic needs… for food, for skin care, for a God, for warm clothes. We all want to study, earn some money and find someone to love. We always have common ground.

With time and contact, also the learners started to develop trust and move beyond seeing race as a line of differentiation:

> It was interesting to see how the learners finally opened up to my partner E*. They were listening to what she had to say and also responded to her questions. It was great to take a step back and let her take over.

Evidence of the tenets of recategorisation models that encourage the integration of people from different groups into a superordinate group were seen in statements such as: "They see us as the group of students and not the black and white students."

However, the statement "… now that divide is not there anymore, because I think the more you go and the more they realise, 'oh we are all just the same, we think just the same', the more it has influence." reminds us that optimal intergroup contact requires time (Pettigrew 1998).

Intercultural Comfort and Competence

According to Patron (2007) exposure to an unaccustomed socio-cultural milieu instigates the adaptation of new competencies – the development of new cognitive, affective, and conative skills.

Students used descriptors such as "opens up your eyes," "see things out of the box," "make this mind shift," and "be open to find out how life is for them" to capture the perspective changes they experienced. Using soccer as an example instead of rugby (soccer being the predominant sport among South Africa's blacks, and rugby being popular among most whites) and changing their HIV prevention message to learning how to live with HIV are examples of these changes. Furthermore students were of the opinion that they "hold more realistic and mature views" and became more comfortable with incorporating different value systems:

> I never thought I had the ability to stand in front of a class of adolescents and address them about such an explicit topic [sex education], because in my culture it's still not something that is being talked about openly.

And:

> I learned that people have different perspectives in life and that it is all influenced by the context they live in. We should therefore treat others with respect and not be judgmental if their practices and beliefs are different from ours.

Often the fear of showing one's ignorance, naiveté, and limited experience or the fear of making offensive remarks prevents us from entering cross-cultural dialogues. Questions that are silenced do not disappear, however, they just stay unasked. The price we pay for this silence is that it inhibits development, clouds vision, distorts perception, and alienates us from others (Tatum 2003). During the course of this service-learning experience students developed a comfort to ask questions to each other and speak openly:

> We one day starting talking about weddings and they were not at all, how can I say, feeling that we are intruding in their personal space. They were really enthusiastic to talk about it and told us more about their traditions. So we laughed and so on … I must say I was amazed about how everybody got along. I see things here that I do not see on other campuses.

Celebrating Diversity

"Color blindness" (Corcoran and Thompson 2004, p. 168) is not the aim: Not to let difference disappear, but an understanding of the complexity of difference, leads to better cooperation (Tatum 2003). Instead of denying difference, students realised the value of working in diverse groups: "great experience working with people from other backgrounds," "they welcomed and respected us," "they also got a chance to learn from me and I got a chance to learn from them," and "different backgrounds and racial groups, actually lead to a very creative approach."

Van Vuuren et al. (2010) concur that diversity should be balanced with its counter-pole, universality. They warn against the over-emphasis of the one to the detriment of the other. In realising sameness, students also felt more comfortable to celebrate difference:

> With Study Buddy we were forced to be in a multicultural group and in the beginning it was half OK. I really think we would not have had such a rich group if it were not like that. It is important to have different perspectives. It is necessary too.... Especially because I think this is a very creative project. It asks of us to not be rigid in our thoughts, to throw as many as possible ideas together. In that respect we have just learned so much: how to make space for each others' different viewpoints and how to accommodate each other. Not only accommodate, but appreciate.

An interesting finding was that students reported little conflict in working together in this service-learning experience. They remarked that they had experienced mostly positive interaction, in contrast to the friction mentioned regarding the formal class

situation. This confirms the importance of the correct conditions of engagement as proposed by the contact theory (Allport 1954 ; Pettigrew 1998). It is possible that the lack of a common goal and the lack of equal status in a classroom situation dominated by intellectual pursuits and academic competition are counterproductive. The co-operative interdependence, sharing of outcomes, acquaintance potential provided by the service-learning experiences (and endorsed by the lecturer) provided more fertile ground for intergroup collaboration.

Forming Friendships

It is important to note that border crossings are deeply emotional, affective experiences. The behaviour changes and the new attributions and cognitive explanations reported above are already evidence of change. Affective changes is however also important. Paluck and Green (2009) review research studies that attest to the fact that the demonstration of prejudice is influenced by emotional states. Also (Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008) emphasise the central and critical role of affect during intergroup processes.

Students provided evidence of their deeply emotional experiences in statements such as:

> "felt honoured," "come home after each and every session energised and inspired," "the most rewarding things any human could ever ask for," "really excited about my next session," "moving experience," "I truly have a passion for these kids," " the session pleased my heart very much," "I stand in awe of their courage and determination," and "Like always I'm humbled."

For Pettigrew (1998) cross-group friendships is the pinnacle of optimal intergroup contact. Statements such as the following provided evidence of personal connections formed: "It was really sad to say goodbye and lots of them came to give us hugs," "I also learnt that I am actually fond of the learners and I didn't know how much I missed them until I stepped in the class and saw their faces,;" "I really enjoyed seeing how the kids learn. I love making jokes with them, to greet them and to chat with them…. The whole experience this week was awesome for me."

And:

> If I go back to the beginning of the year and do the whole year over, I would have learned their names - even if they are 120. Because I learned from them how special it is if someone remembers your name.

Taking photo's, singing songs, exchanging telephone numbers, invitations to farewell parties, goodbye celebrations, and planting a tree of remembrance are further signs of the bonds that were formed.

Paying it Forward

According to Johnson (2006, p. 22) we cannot live in "the luxury of obliviousness;" awareness requires us to be committed toward future effort. Also Corcoran and Thompson (2004) challenge that recognising oppression should result in educating

oneself and others (interact, learn and value diversity) and then initiate actions, speak up and fight against oppression. Thus, a critical question to ask is whether the emotions reported here are only a "honeymoon phase" or whether students have reached a stage of true commitment to future engagement. In the absence of longitudinal evidence the following serve as evidence of intention: "It takes one to run an extra mile in order to take responsibility and be the voice." and "… the experience seemed to have sparked up some enthusiasm in working with the community."

Another student stated:

> People in our communities are afraid and ashamed to raise their voices and talk about their problems. These students have a lot to say to the world out there, but they are just disadvantaged and not exposed to some of the resources that can maybe help and motivate them to do what they feel they want to do and is important in their lives.

To find the courage for social change, we need a community of support: "We need to speak up against racism and other forms of oppression, but we do not have to speak alone." Tatum (2003, p. 205). It is thus encouraging to hear how the learners in the school are also inspired to continue supporting the values of the Study Buddy project:

> I learnt that they are willing to take responsibility and play their roles as good students in the school. I was also very excited to see them form study buddy partners as they seemed keen on encouraging one another.

Discussion

Process of Change

Various researchers in the field of perspective change related to culture have attempted to provide descriptions of the processes individual go through. Pettigrew (1998) proposes four processes: (1) learning about the out-group, (2) changed behavior, (3) affective ties, and (4) in-group reappraisal. Closely related to this Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) describes a process of (1) enhancing knowledge about the out-group, (2) reducing anxiety about intergroup contact, and (3) increasing empathy and perspective taking. Hammer et al. (2003) suggest the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity consisting of three ethnocentric orientations (denial, defense, minimisation), and three ethnorelative orientations, (acceptance, adaptation, integration). Patron (2007) summarise a four stage transition during culture: (1) shock which is the incubation or honeymoon phase, (2) difficult adjustment, (3) then recovery and (4) complete recovery / adjustment. In examining early aspects of intercultural learning Hamel et al. (2010) identified eight strategic responses to disequilibrium (1) reframing, (2) managing emotions, (3) taking initiative, (4) experimentation/adaptation, (5) openness to new things, (6) observing and mimicking, (7) defensive walls, and (8) affirming one's own beliefs and practices. Focusing more on transformative learning theory Kiely (2005) make reference to (1) contextual border crossing, (2) dissonance, (3) personalising the other, (4) processing, and (5) connecting.

What seems to be overarching aspects to all these processes are: the experience of initial dissonance and difference, various cognitive, affective and behavioural attempts to restore balance (to adjust), and reaching a new commitment. By also focussing on the processes that initiate and ensure continuity to the process, in this article change was described through the processes of (1) Resistance to take the first step, (2) Border crossing: Reacting to difference, (3) Becoming conscious of complexity, (4) Seeing similarity, (5) Intercultural comfort and competence, (6) Celebrating diversity, (7) Forming friendships, and (8) Paying it forward.

Service-Learning

Service-learning was used as a vehicle to facilitate change in this research study. Service-learning provides an opportunity to apply the conditions of the contact hypothesis. Service-learning, especially situations where students are confronted with diversity, gives students the opportunity to interact and communicate with people who are culturally different, and therefore provides an environment conducive to the development of intercultural skills and reduced stereotypes (Koulish 2000; Morgan and Streb 2001; Pusch 2005; Rosner-Salazar 2003). Furthermore, it enhances the communication between students, prompting them to work together, disregarding cultural and language barriers (Brandenberger 1998).

Although Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) question the necessity of Allport's conditions, and propose that mere exposure can have the needed results, this research highlights the importance of the contact hypothesis conditions. Gonsalkorale et al. (2010) are of the opinion that, in a society with ingrained racial biases, more than only contact is necessary to extinguish stereotypes. Research conducted by Sperling et al. (2003) indicated that exposure to social difference does not in itself lead to change. These writers are critical of the idea that culture shock inspires multicultural awareness. They warn other scholars against the partial use of the contact hypotheses to explain differences and changes due to service-learning experiences. It is reiterated that the conditions of contact to stimulate cognitive transformation (as proposed by Allport) should not be neglected.

Certain contextual and structural factors are needed to ensure that intergroup contact will facilitate understanding (Bringle 2003). In order to prevent the replication of power imbalances and injustices, it is essential that the service-learning experiences include opportunities to discuss issues of race, class and service (Green 2001). Bringle and Hatcher (1999) advise that reflection and assessment activities should challenge existing beliefs and stereotypes and push students towards enhanced ways of thinking. King (2004) and Welch (1999) also caution against the recycling of students' prior knowledge, which may result in perpetuated negative stereotyping and reiterates the importance of critically examining assumptions of the self and society (e.g. issues of privilege, power, and inequality) while involved in service-learning. The various benefits of service-learning on a personal and communal level (as claimed by many advocates of service-learning) are enhanced when reflection is done purposefully.

In conclusion, change is iterative. It should be acknowledged that students move through various spirals of learning. For these spirals of learning to continue, but also

to develop into deeper forms of understanding, both reflection and time in a safe but challenging learning environment is important.

Future Research

As suggested by Paluck and Green (2009), by doing work in the field, real world situations can stimulate theoretical thinking to be richer, appropriately complex and multidimensional. Although this qualitative study did not aim to demonstrate the impact of a programme, it can be the instigator for generating research hypotheses related to the refinement of the intergroup theory. This can be achieved by focusing more carefully on individual difference variables that may impact stereotype maintenance, longitudinal impacts, and different components of prejudice-related belief systems.

In line with the research of Tausch and Hewstone (2010) who proposed that differences predispose individuals toward the maintenance of prejudiced beliefs, future research should examine additional individual difference variables that may impact stereotype maintenance. Also Pettigrew (2008) suggest that future researchers focus on mediators and moderators during the processes of intergroup contact.

This article only described students' immediate experiences, but not longitudinal effects. Paluck and Green (2009) are of the opinion that cooperative learning (of which service-learning can be an example) is an effective measure to reduce prejudice. They suggest the extension of research in this field, especially including longitudinal impacts. Also Bosak and Diekman (2010) points to the importance of not only understanding the malleability of stereotypes (how and under what the conditions change emerges), but also stability (whether stereotypes persist in the face of change).

Sritharan and Gawronski (2010) believe that prejudice reduction strategies should be cognisant of the various components of prejudice-related belief systems and how these components differ in sensitivity. Coutant et al. (2011) refers to the importance of recognising stereotype is a complex and multi-component cognitive structure. Also Gonsalkorale et al. (2010) refer to the necessity of a multinomial model that can contribute to our understanding of the multiple but qualitatively distinct processes involved in implicit bias. This article cannot claim that all aspects of stereotypical behaviour have been addressed. Future studies can add value to our understanding by including a deliberate focus on the different components of prejudice-related belief systems.

Conclusion

Jansen (2007, p. 107) asks: "How… do you teach about difference in a country that has never had a national conversation about sameness?"

It is proposed in this research that, in a South African context where diverse students do not have much opportunity to share social spaces, service-learning provides students with opportunities to share safe living and learning spaces - to not only start this very important conversation, but also continue it and put it into action.

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