Intercultural Competence Within Focused Diversity Courses: The Role of Cultural Identification & Experiential Learning Activities

Preston Osborn[1] and Elizabeth Sandell[2]
[1] The Ohio State University; [2] Minnesota State University

INTRODUCTION

o Professional competence to engage in anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice (i.e., Competency 2) is essential to ethical professional practice and foundational to other social work competencies (CSWE, 2022)

o Skills within CSWE Competency 2 (i.e., critical self-reflexivity, cultural humility, and anti-racism) are challenging to assess on the part of both students and the social work education programs for which they are enrolled

o Accredited social work programs across the United States depend on focused diversity courses to meet learning objectives related to CSWE Competency 2

o Experiential learning activities have been shown to the potential to advance development of skills related to cultural humility and competence, but few that have conducted comparative analysis between such activities

o Lack of research to examine differences in experiences and learning outcomes for students that do not identify with dominant cultural groups within focused diversity course settings

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BACKGROUND

o Curricular efforts to promote intercultural competence within higher education settings include diversity infusion across programs and specific courses dedicated to issues of diversity (Ukpokodu, 2010). Educational strategies demonstrated to foster development of abilities to interact across cultural differences include reflective writing, individual coaching, cultural exchange, and service-learning (Sandell, 2020).

o Racial group membership can play an influential role in student perceptions in a focused diversity course in terms of:
  (1) classroom diversity,
  (2) pressure to represent one's racial group,
  (3) intense emotional experiences,
  (4) safety issues, and
  (5) impact on growth (Pieterse et al., 2016)

o Microaggressions can take place in both formal and informal forms within in institutions (Harwood et al., 2012); These experiences are detrimental to academic achievement and mental health for students of color (Keels & Durkee, 2017)

OBJECTIVES

1. Compare development of student subgroups after participation in a dedicated diversity course along with three different additional pedagogical activities:

(a) service-learning
(b) cultural partnership
(c) individualized coaching

2. Explore potential differential impacts of various pedagogical enhancement activities between students identifying with dominant or non-dominant cultures

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METHODS

DATA & SAMPLE

- Secondary data from project (2011 to 2020) to evaluate education student outcomes after the course, Human Rights in a Multicultural Society

- Multiple cohorts (N = 17) varying in quantity that have all participated in a version of the multicultural course

- 1007 unique cases each representing a student that both participated in the multicultural education course and completed both the pre- and post-assessments

MEASURES

1. Demographic Survey:
Major, semester, service-learning site and hours, cultural partnership type and hours, gender, age, education-level, region of origin, ethnicity, and citizenship

2. The Intercultural Development Inventory:
   - 50-item psychometric instrument designed to measure intercultural competence
   - validated across gender, ethnicity, and education-level
   - Scores (55 – 145) aligns with developmental model
   - 3 scores: perceptual orientation (PO), developmental orientation (DO), and orientation gap (OG)

ANALYSIS

Univariate: describe characteristics of overall sample and subgroups; determine distribution and variation of outcome scores (frequencies, skewness, and kurtosis)

Bivariate: examine mean differences between subgroups (Independent t-tests); examine paired pre/post measures (Paired t-tests)

Correlations: examine relationship between additional pedagogical enhancement hours and outcomes (Pearson r)

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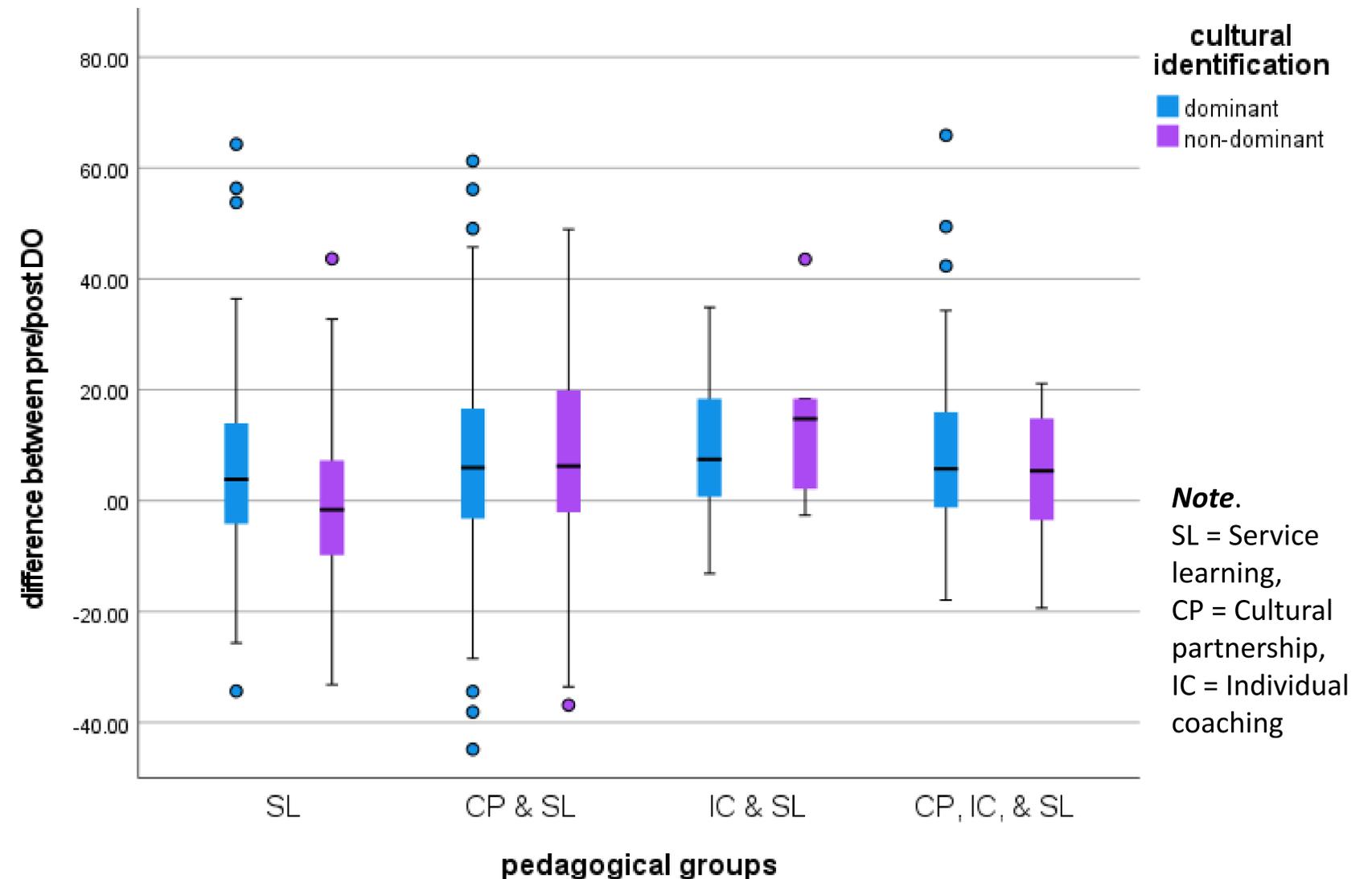
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FINDINGS

Table 1. *Paired samples results by pedagogical and cultural identification factors*

	Non-Dominant Culture			Dominant Culture		
	t	Significance (two-tailed)	Cohen's *d*	*t*	Significance (two-tailed)	Cohen's *d*
Overall	3.19	.002**	0.27	13.13	.000**	0.38
Service Learning	0.05	.963	0.01	7.15	.000**	0.39
Individual Coaching Addition	1.89	.132	0.85	4.53	.000**	0.38
Cultural Partnership Addition	3.55	.001**	0.43	9.41	.000**	0.45
All Pedagogical Enhancement	0.93	.383	0.33	4.34	.000**	0.59

Figure 1. *Box plots of change in IDI by cultural identification and pedagogical group*

Note. SL = Service learning, CP = Cultural partnership, IC = Individual coaching

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DISCUSSION

o Dominant culture student pre-test (M = 88.3, SD = 14.6) and post-test (M = 94.9, SD = 16.4) IDI scores shifted significantly both with the use of pedagogical enhancements ($t(54)$ = 4.34, $p < .001$) or without pedagogical enhancements beyond service-learning ($t(333)$ = 7.26, $p < .001$), but the effect size was greatest with participation in all pedagogical enhancements (d = 0.59).

o Overall, non-dominant students displayed significant intercultural competence gains after course participation ($t(135)$ = 3.19, p = .002). M = 7.9, SD = 16.0), but with a small average mean change (M = 4.40, SD = 16.03) and a small effect size (d = 0.27). However, the overall subgroup improvements seemed to be driven by increased scores for students completing cultural partnership projects (M = 7.01, SD = 16.28)

o Students identifying with dominant culture that participated in individual coaching session experienced the largest consistent advances in intercultural competence upon completion of the course (M = 9.49, SD = 12.57). Non-dominant students engaged in individual coaching showed impressive yet inconsistent gains (M = 15.26, SD = 18.04)

o Findings suggest that higher educational programs seeking to prepare students to interact effectively across cultural differences ought to consider the widespread implementation of individualized experiential learning activities with the consideration of differential experiences for students with non-dominant identities.

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