

Promoting intercultural competence among criminal justice students using interview-based signature assignments

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Abstract:

This paper presents findings from a mixed methods study aimed at promoting intercultural competence in a Multicultural Issues in Criminal Justice course using three interview-based signature assignments. Over the course of two semesters, quantitative data was collected through the evaluation by two faculty members of written student reflections using the AAC&U VALUE rubric for Intercultural Knowledge and Competence (n=14, n=14, and n=17 in Fall 2016, and n=13, n=13, and n=14 in Spring 2017, respectively) and qualitative data was collected from student self-report surveys (n=17 in Fall 2016 and n=14 in Spring 2017). Statistically significant differences were noted in the area of skill development (particularly empathy and intercultural communication) and anecdotal evidence suggests that students felt they improved in the knowledge area of cultural self-awareness and the attitudinal aspects of curiosity and openness. Details about the assignments and their value, as well as suggested modifications, are discussed.

Key Words:

Intercultural competence; skill development; cultural awareness.

Introduction

It is a widely accepted truism that college graduates entering the contemporary work force are expected to be able to function effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds (Whitehead, 2015). Intercultural competence, multicultural communication, and a demonstrable sensitivity to and appreciation for individual and group differences are valuable and necessary professional skills. Whitehead (2015) writes that intercultural competence, defined as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 8), cannot be learned through one solitary experience. Rather, it is a skill that must be honed through an intentional, comprehensive curriculum that focuses on promoting students’ “background knowledge of [a] community and its cultural norms,

an understanding of how individuals interact with one another, and an ability to bridge the background and preparatory knowledge with the actual interaction” (Whitehead, 2015, p. 8).

Nowhere is this need for tolerance and understanding greater than in the criminal justice field. Students preparing for a career in law enforcement, the court system, or corrections must have a solid foundation of this preparatory knowledge in order to be able to serve their respective communities effectively and justly. Failure to be appropriately trained and educated in intercultural competence, critical thinking, and other “soft” skills, as discussed in greater detail below, may seriously compromise police-community relations, erode trust, and impede officers’ abilities to carry out their jobs effectively. Nearly twenty-five years ago, Block asserted that the development of cultural understanding and, even more critically, cultural empathy was imperative for law enforcement officers, if for no other reason than its potential value to deescalate conflicts between two cultural groups (1994). Less than a decade later, Coderoni reiterated the need for multicultural training for police officers, arguing that failure to provide this may result in “tragic consequences” (2002, p. 16). He specified that this sort of training, which could ultimately produce police officers that are recognized as “a part of” rather than “apart from” the community they serve (Coderoni, 2002, p. 17), must include the development of interpersonal skills, such as active listening, and greater awareness of officers’ “own feelings, values, biases, and behaviors” (p. 18). The onus of providing this training and education before officers go out into their communities falls on institutions of higher education.

Accordingly, an upper-level Multicultural Issues course required of criminal justice majors was revised to include three interview-based signature assignments aimed at developing intercultural competence. Signature assignments, as described by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, require students to demonstrate and apply their proficiency in one or more key learning outcomes (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2018). This typically involves synthesizing, analysing, and applying cumulative knowledge and skills through problem- or inquiry-based assignments or projects. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of signature assignments is their emphasis on prompting students to apply their knowledge to real-world issues and problems.

Assessment of the effectiveness of these assignments in achieving their desired objectives was conducted using a mixed method approach. Analysis of quantitative data gathered over the course of two semesters in the form of student papers suggests that there was a statistically significant difference in the area of skill development, most notably empathy and communication (both verbal and non-verbal). Qualitative data collected through student self-report surveys (as a form of indirect evidence) showed that student attitudes (namely curiosity and openness) and knowledge (in the form of cultural self-awareness) were also positively impacted. This paper describes the methods used to introduce aspects of intercultural competence into the learning framework, with an emphasis on providing regular opportunities for students to debrief and reflect on new insights gained throughout the process. Quantitative and qualitative results are analyzed and presented with a view to suggesting how criminal justice

students can be better positioned to thrive in a multicultural environment upon graduation.

Literature Review

Deardorff (2011) posits that emphasizing and assessing intercultural competence in the curriculum is necessary as institutions of higher education seek to prepare their graduates for careers in a global society. She explains that there are multiple ways of defining intercultural competence and suggests that the common ground between them appears to lie in the overall external outcome of “effective and appropriate behavior and communication in intercultural situations” (p. 66), which varies given the specific context of a given situation.

Bennett (1993), who has written extensively on the subject of intercultural competency and sensitivity, explains the former as the way someone understands, feels about, and responds to cultural differences, which includes the capacity to shift cultural perspective and to adapt one’s own behaviour to a particular context. His Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) outlines the stages through which individuals typically progress as their cultural competency increases. At one end of the spectrum is ethnocentrism, marked by the belief that one’s own culture or ethnic group is superior to all others (Bennett, 1986). Individuals in this category may experience denial, polarization (defense/reversal), and minimization; the latter is the beginning of a transitional stage wherein individuals remain ethnocentric while learning about other cultures and recognizing similarities to their own. As individuals progress through this transitional stage, they ultimately move to experience ethnorelativism, which is characterized by the acknowledgement that one’s own culture is one of many, with no single group or ethnicity superior to another. Persons who are ethnorelative experience others in a more interactive, meaningfully intercultural way. They may progress through acceptance, adaptation, and finally integration, whereupon they can and do cross cultures and adjust easily and naturally to situations, contexts, and expectations. Ideally, then, the goal for faculty members seeking to promote students’ progression through this process is to facilitate an increase in their cultural competence development.

Deardorff (2011) notes that intercultural competence development is an ongoing process and that a critical element of that process is providing individuals with multiple opportunities to self-reflect on their own progression and development (Deardorff, 2011). This self-reflection, she argues, is an excellent way for students to think intentionally and deeply about their own opinions, attitudes, and perspectives, and to evaluate where and how these originated, as well as how they may impact interactions with others from diverse backgrounds. Indeed, in her intercultural competence process model (Deardorff, 2006), she underscores the inestimable value of these reflective opportunities by showing how individual-level attitudes ultimately impact interaction-level outcomes. Attitudes, especially respect, openness, and curiosity, serve as the basis for the model (Deardorff, 2006), which necessitates attitudinal assessment in conjunction with any evaluation of knowledge or skills gained as a result of student exposure to diverse cultures.

Nielsen and Stambaugh (1998) argued nearly twenty years ago that changing demographics and shifts in public opinion necessitate the revision of criminal justice curricula in higher education to include a greater emphasis on multiculturalism. White and Escobar (2008), in their discussion of effective recruitment, selection, and training for law enforcement officers, highlight certain arguments that have been made in favor of requiring police officers to be college educated. They contend that as American society becomes more culturally diverse, police departments need to strive to understand the cultural backgrounds of the communities they serve (White & Escobar, 2008). For this reason, they assert, higher education is key, since it provides an opportunity for future police officers to learn how to interact and engage with others who look and act differently and who may be guided by different cultural or religious beliefs, even before they enter a particular community (White & Escobar, 2008). This educational exposure should, ideally, result in “greater tolerance and understanding” (White & Escobar, 2008, p. 122) on the part of police officers when confronted with individuals out in the field who are different from themselves in some way, and that may aid them in resolving or deescalating conflicts with greater diplomacy. Calathes (1994) adds that an undergraduate education grounded in the multicultural approach would better position students to cope with the kinds of situations and circumstances they may encounter through the development of critical thinking skills and a greater awareness of the omnipresent socio-political landscape which they are expected to navigate.

More recently, Sereni-Massinger and Wood (2016) have suggested that multiculturalism in the United States is rapidly leading to societal changes that demand law enforcement officers assume the role of problem solvers in their communities, and they discuss the need for these officers to be trained and prepared in terms of “soft” skills competencies that would allow them to address challenges effectively. Safi and Burell (2007) had previously noted that officers who are well-educated in critical thinking and interpersonal communication are better positioned to deescalate threatening situations and to make decisions more effectively by questioning their assumptions and biases. Yet police training typically focuses on the tactical side of the use of force (Sereni-Massinger & Wood, 2016), and rarely provides the skill set for officers to be able to make decisions in a way that takes into account the impact of their actions on the larger, often diverse, community which they serve. As a result, police-community relations, and mutual trust, frequently suffer.

Sereni-Massinger and Wood (2016) posit that, had education geared to teach law enforcement intercultural competence been implemented and emphasized prior to officers’ first foray into their communities, the recent civil disturbances in Baltimore, Ferguson, New York City, South Carolina, and North Charleston might have been avoided (p. 259). Such a statement may be perceived as an oversimplification by some who would choose to focus on the political context of the issue and the increased polarization that has taken place in the United States over the last decade. Yet this research project was undertaken with the premise that the issue at hand supersedes the political arena and is, in fact, both an ethical and humanitarian matter. In a social environment which is becoming more diverse with each passing year, and where police officers can realistically expect to encounter and serve individuals from whom they are different in at least one respect, it is incumbent on those preparing them for professional life to address such things as intercultural competence, cultural awareness, and cultural

sensitivity. Sereni-Massinger and Wood (2016) assert that the burden of assisting with this process of intercultural competence development should fall to educational institutions.

In light of this need and demand, criminal justice programs across the United States have gradually begun to include more courses focusing on such topics as race, gender, social inequality, and cultural diversity (Wilson & Moyer, 1992), and although this is certainly a necessary first step, simply having courses on the books that address difference and inclusion is insufficient. Calathes (1994) suggests that a multicultural approach to education calls for a revision not only in the content being taught but also in the strategies used to teach it. Bintz (1995) describes “getting to know you” exercises and “welcome” assignments that allow students to begin exploring and sharing their own rich identities and backgrounds from the very outset of a course. Students are encouraged to interview classmates who are different from themselves in some way and then to introduce them to the rest of the class on the basis of that interview. What may constitute a point of difference can either be specified by the instructor or left to individual student interpretation.

Nielsen and Stambaugh (1998) suggest that another useful and effective strategy for promoting cultural awareness among students is to introduce criminal justice professionals from various cultural backgrounds as guest speakers. Not only does this relate directly to students’ professional goals and to their desire to know what working in the field is actually like, but it also sparks their thinking about the role of cultural diversity (and culture in general) in criminal justice professions. The latter is particularly significant in light of the fact that selecting teaching materials that may expose students to diverse perspectives is often challenging for faculty members (Calathes, 1994), given that minority criminologists are still underrepresented as the authors of journal articles and books (Duffee & Bailey, 1991; Young & Sulton, 1991). Faculty members must identify other vehicles for providing cross-cultural exposure and interaction, which Calathes frames as “fresh primary source material that gives expression to previous unheard voices” (1994, p. 9). For that reason, guest speakers may be tremendously valuable additions to the criminal justice classroom.

Given the pressing need for criminal justice practitioners in general and law enforcement officers in particular to enter the workforce with significant exposure to intercultural competence and sensitivity, an upper-level Multicultural Issues class, which the author has taught for several years, was identified as the ideal point in the curriculum at which to work with students to develop the necessary skills and attitudes. The course is one which highlights issues pertaining to difference, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination as these relate to race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexual orientation, abilities, and age. Historically, content has been addressed exclusively through the use of a textbook and supplementary readings, and students have been expected to think critically about particular prompts and submit one-page position papers in which they presented cogent, coherent arguments in response. There was a distinct opportunity there for incorporating more interactive assignments that would allow students to hone and develop their intercultural competence in the manner envisioned by Calathes (1994).

Methods

In light of the perceived need for promoting multicultural awareness among criminal justice students by exposing and encouraging them to interact with individuals who are different from themselves, an upper-level Multicultural Issues in Criminal Justice course was revised to include three interview-based signature assignments. The first assignment required students to interview someone from a different religious or spiritual background and to learn about their beliefs, habits, customs, taboos, and traditions, which Stier (2003) calls the content-competence component of intercultural competence. Students were then instructed to reflect on what they had asked, what they had learned, and what they might still be curious about in a short paper (approximately one to two pages). Students were told that the specific questions they could ask would be up to them; no specific directions were provided other than a general reminder to be respectful to the interview subject and a prompt to pay particular attention to details that might be important for someone in law enforcement or other criminal justice professions to take into account. In addition to submitting their reflections in writing, students were also invited to share what they learned from their interview in class and to make connections between their experiences and those of their peers.

The second signature assignment emphasized cultural differences in non-verbal communication, particularly in relation to such aspects as gestures, positionality of feet, facial expressions, facial expressiveness, eye contact, and physical or conversational distance. Learning about such non-verbal behaviors and behavioural patterns can also be described as content-competence (Stier, 2003). Students were instructed to interview someone from a different cultural background than their own and to craft questions in their own words that would allow them to investigate such things as appropriate versus inappropriate touch and gestures, the relationship between facial expressiveness or eye contact and a presumption of cooperation, and what constitutes comfortable physical distance between people in social and other interactions. As in the previous assignment, students were asked to reflect on what they had asked, what they had learned, and what they might still be curious about in a short paper (approximately one to two pages), paying particular attention to those considerations that would have special significance for a law enforcement officer or other criminal justice professional. Time was also set aside in class for sharing interview findings in small groups.

The third and final signature assignment dealt with microaggressions. Students were instructed to interview someone from a different cultural, racial, or ethnic background than their own and to explore their exposure to microaggressions. Microaggressions were introduced in class as subtle, often unintentional but offensive, comments, slights, or slurs; in addition to reading about them in the textbook and in an assigned journal article (Nadal, Escobar, Prado, David, & Haynes, 2012), students viewed a panel discussion about microaggressions on YouTube in which participants shared their experiences. The parameters for the assignment were left fairly open-ended, as in the preceding two assignments, although students were encouraged to solicit details respectfully about their interview subjects' feelings, reactions, and responses following the incident in question. The intent behind this third assignment was to expose students more deliberately to what Stier calls processual competencies (2003). These can be

classified into intrapersonal competencies (in this case, as students would learn to keep an open, receptive mind and listen without judgment or criticism) and interpersonal competencies (focusing in this instance on accurately interpreting subtle signals and emotional responses as individuals described the impact that being microaggressed against had on them). What students had asked, what they had learned, and what they might still be curious about was to be summarized and analyzed in a brief reflection paper (approximately one to two pages), as well as shared in class.

These interview-based signature assignments were introduced early in the fall and spring semesters as part of the learning unit on intercultural communication. In compliance with IRB protocol, students were told about the current research project during the first week of class and then again before each assignment was due. The informed consent form that was distributed and collected from the participants explained that they would receive credit for completing the assignments even if they opted not to participate in the research. Students were also told they could withdraw from the study at any time and that doing so would not prejudice any future interactions between them and the faculty member; their papers, however, would still be graded for course assessment purposes. Those students who volunteered to participate in the research allowed for their written assignments to be evaluated as part of the research study using the AAC&U VALUE rubric for Intercultural Knowledge and Competence (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009). The levels of the rubric are informed in part by Bennett's DMIS (1993) and in part by Deardorff's intercultural competence process model (2006).

Each paper was evaluated by two faculty members in criminal justice in the areas of knowledge (cultural self-awareness and knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks), skills (empathy and verbal and non-verbal communication), and attitudes (curiosity and openness). Scores ranged from 1 (benchmark) to 4 (Capstone). If the two raters' scores were identical, the agreed upon score was noted. If the scores were within one point of each other, the arithmetic mean was noted. If the scores were more than one point apart, the faculty raters would discuss the paper in question until a consensus was reached. This only happened in two instances. In all other cases, the raters' scores were identical.

Following the submission of each assignment, students were asked to complete a "debrief worksheet" in class. A copy of the AAC&U VALUE rubric for Intercultural Knowledge and Competence was projected on the white board and students were invited to view it individually on their smart phones or other devices as well. The intention behind the debriefing exercise was to prompt student thinking about their interactions with their interview subjects and to raise their awareness about the goals and objectives of the assignment. The worksheet asked them to rate their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, respectively, on a scale of 1 to 4, based upon the criteria outlined in the rubric; they were also prompted to explain their reasoning and to state clearly what they wrote in their assignment that would suggest they deserved that particular score. They were then asked whether they felt that the score they gave themselves in each of the aforementioned areas (namely knowledge, skills, and attitudes) was an accurate measure of what they actually learned from the assignment. If their answer was no, they were asked to brainstorm what they could have done differently, or included in their

reflection, that might have earned them higher scores in those areas. Not only were these opportunities for reflection regarded as critical for the development of intercultural competence (as suggested by Deardorff, 2011), but they were also viewed as useful steps for promoting self-regulated learning by forcing students to assess their own work and to note what was (and what was not) working.

One explanation of note pertains to the deliberately and decidedly open-ended nature of each assignment: other than a general directive about the theme or concept to be addressed, students were given a great deal of latitude in determining how many and what types of questions to ask. This may appear to be somewhat disconcerting from the perspective of a systematic approach; if students were left to craft their own questions, how could the faculty member be certain that the right sorts of questions were being asked that would tap into the constructs and concepts embedded in the rubric? Yet that was part of the latent function of the assignments. While the manifest functions focused on spurring students to learn content (for example, what types of customs were observed by individuals from the Baha'i faith or what a lack of eye contact may signify in an interaction with someone who is Jordanian), the aim was also for students to learn how to formulate questions that went beyond the superficial and to ask them in ways that conveyed their intent and meaning respectfully and clearly. The debrief worksheets then allowed them to self-reflect and to evaluate whether they accomplished what they had intended to accomplish. Setting parameters for students by delineating the number of questions they should ask or the kind of wording they should use would have inhibited their own inquisitiveness and would have been counterintuitive for the purposes of the current study.

The data collected from the rubric-based evaluations of students' written reflections submitted for the three signature assignments over two semesters (n=14, n=14, and n=17 in Fall 2016, and n=13, n=13, and n=14 in Spring 2017, respectively) constituted the direct, quantitative evidence for assessment purposes, while an open-ended survey distributed after the third signature assignment was submitted provided the indirect, qualitative data (n=17 in Fall 2016 and n=14 in Spring 2017). Students were asked to reflect on the ways in which they had (or had not) grown, developed, or changed in some way in each of the three areas (knowledge, skills, and attitudes), as described in the rubric, and to provide specific statements or examples from their different assignments to support their position. For example, a student that claimed she had changed attitudinally in terms of the curiosity she demonstrated toward her interview subject could provide a sentence from the first signature assignment reflection that suggested minimal or superficial interest in learning about other cultures, and subsequently contrast it with a statement from her final signature assignment reflection that showed her ability to formulate deeper questions about the subject.

Results

A single-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for each of the two semesters under study (n=14, n=14, and n=17 in Fall 2016, and n=13, n=13, and n=14 in Spring 2017, respectively) to investigate whether there were statistically significant differences across the three signature assignments based upon the scores allocated by the two faculty members who evaluated these using the AAC&U VALUE rubric for Intercultural Knowledge and Competence. Although quantitative changes in students'

knowledge and attitudes were moderate at best, both semesters showed statistically significant development in the area of skills (namely empathy and verbal and non-verbal communication).

Figure 1. Single Factor ANOVA for Skills (Fall 2016)

| SUMMARY | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| <i>Groups</i> | <i>Count</i> | <i>Sum</i> | <i>Average</i> | <i>Variance</i> | | |
| Sig. Amt. 1 | 14 | 33 | 2.357143 | 0.708791 | | |
| Sig. Amt. 2 | 14 | 36 | 2.571429 | 0.417582 | | |
| Sig. Amt. 3 | 17 | 51 | 3 | 0 | | |
| ANOVA | | | | | | |
| <i>Source of Variation</i> | <i>SS</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>P-value</i> | <i>F crit</i> |
| Between Groups | 3.35714286 | 2 | 1.678571 | 4.814634 | 0.0131045 | 3.21994229 |
| Within Groups | 14.6428571 | 42 | 0.348639 | | | |
| Total | 18 | 44 | | | | |

Figure 2. Single Factor ANOVA for Skills (Spring 2017)

| SUMMARY | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| <i>Groups</i> | <i>Count</i> | <i>Sum</i> | <i>Average</i> | <i>Variance</i> | | |
| Sig. Amt. 1 | 13 | 30 | 2.307692 | 0.230769 | | |
| Sig. Amt. 2 | 14 | 38 | 2.714286 | 0.373626 | | |
| Sig. Amt. 3 | 14 | 40 | 2.857143 | 0.131868 | | |
| ANOVA | | | | | | |
| <i>Source of Variation</i> | <i>SS</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>P-value</i> | <i>F crit</i> |
| Between Groups | 2.17153578 | 2 | 1.085768 | 4.417159 | 0.0188438 | 3.24481836 |
| Within Groups | 9.34065934 | 38 | 0.245807 | | | |
| Total | 11.5121951 | 40 | | | | |

A post-hoc analysis was conducted using the Tukey procedure to test all pairwise comparisons in the area of skills for both semesters. The aforementioned ANOVA calculations revealed that there were statistically significant differences across the three assignments in each semester but did not clearly indicate where those differences lay (i.e., between the first and second assignment, between the second and third assignment, or between the first and third assignment). Interestingly, there was some variation across the two semesters in terms of what may have been a particular “turning point” for students. During Fall 2016, the Tukey test revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the first and second assignments, but there was between the second and third assignments (with an HSD statistic of 2.87). During

Spring 2017, there was no such difference between the second and third assignments, but the difference between the first and second assignments was statistically significant (with an HSD statistic of 2.96). More importantly, in both semesters, the difference between the first and final assignments was the most strikingly significant (with HSD statistics of 4.266 and 4.07, respectively). This suggests that students did demonstrate significantly greater skill levels in terms of empathy and non-verbal communication, assumed to be consistent with the development of intercultural competence and sensitivity, over the course of each semester.

It should be noted that there was a great deal of variability in terms of the actual questions asked by the students, and this was largely related to the amount of background knowledge individuals had (or lacked) about a particular culture, religion, or ethnic group. For example, for the first signature assignment, one student (who self-identified as Protestant in her reflection paper) interviewed someone who self-identified as agnostic. This alone led to some meaningful discussions in class during the sharing component, with certain students questioning whether agnosticism “counts” as a religious or spiritual background or if the determining criterion would have to be some belief in a higher power or deity (or indeed, in more than one). The student in question (Respondent 4, Fall 2016) described her conversation with her interview subject (and used the word “conversation” rather than “interview” to describe their encounter) and explained that she had known this individual for a number of years and was grateful for the opportunity finally to be able to ask about why that individual (who had also been raised Protestant) had “converted” to agnosticism and what the difference was between agnosticism and atheism. In contrast, some other students were less bold in terms of the kinds of questions they asked on this assignment. One student, who self-identified as Catholic, interviewed a co-worker who self-identified as Muslim (Respondent 5, Spring 2017) and asked exclusively closed-ended, yes or no questions: Did he drive? Did he drink alcohol? Did he fast during Ramadan? No attempt was made to probe or to understand the subject’s beliefs or decision-making processes, although it is unclear whether that was as a result of a lack of interest overall or of a sense of discomfort with how to follow up, even if interest existed.

There was a similar lack of consistency in terms of the kinds of questions asked by students in a bid to connect the content of their interviews with their future professional roles as criminal justice practitioners. One student, who shared that he intends to enter the police academy upon graduating, mentioned that his third interview subject described frequently being the target of microaggressions, specifically where she was singled out as the “voice of the African American community just because I’m black” (Respondent 9, Spring 2017). He followed up by asking his interviewee what she would want police officers to know in interacting with her, “so she wouldn’t feel like she was only being talked to a certain way because she’s black” (Respondent 9, Spring 2017). Some other students made the connection in their reflection paper, but not during the interview itself. One such example is noted below, wherein a student observed that Muslim women should only be touched by female officers in accordance with their cultural and religious beliefs (Respondent 3, Fall 2016), but the student did not probe further on the matter during the interview itself. Still other students made only generic connections between the interview content and their future professional roles, such as,

“I’m glad I did this interview because I need to know this stuff to be a good cop” (Respondent 11, Fall 2017).

Qualitative data analysis was carried out in accordance with principles described by Chi (1997), who posits that the aim of conducting qualitative research on verbal (or written) utterances is to ascertain what it is that subjects say about what they have learned and how they use that knowledge, and, based upon that information, to determine what knowledge (that may go unexpressed) underlies those statements. Identifying the content of what a student has said is as simple as listing a set of propositions or concepts, but meaningful qualitative analysis delves into the actual relations between these seemingly fragmented pieces of knowledge. The philosophy behind the qualitative data analysis in the current study is interpretational; that is, as Chi contends, the qualitative data are used to understand and derive meaning from the quantitative data. She writes specifically about categorization results and explanations of those categories, which is what the current study entailed; in other words, the AAC&U VALUE rubric that was used to collect the quantitative data identifies such categories of student growth in the areas of intercultural competence as knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Qualitative data were used to flesh out and expand on those constructs and to report, in students’ own words, what those categories meant to them.

The coding scheme for the data analysis process was largely informed by the concepts and terms used in the AAC&U VALUE rubric for Intercultural Knowledge and Competence itself. For example, for the category “Skills: Verbal and non-verbal communication,” the rubric delineates criteria for the highest level (Capstone) as, among other things, “demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures” (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009). Therefore, the following excerpt from a student could be understood as a discussion of the development of that particular skill:

These interviews really made me look at people different, not just what they believe but how the things they believe make them act different, and how we should act different when we’re with them so we don’t rub them the wrong way. Like in the Muslim religion, if a woman was Muslim, it wouldn’t be appropriate for me as a male officer to come up and touch her on the arm to try to comfort her if she was a victim or a witness to a crime. It would be better to have a female officer do that so I don’t end up disrespecting her without meaning to.
(Respondent 3, Fall 2016)

In line with these general principles, qualitative analysis was conducted on the open-ended reflections provided by the students themselves (n=17 in Fall 2016 and n=14 in Spring 2017). Any responses to the questions which did not include specific examples offered as support were discounted; the researcher was interested in how students could show that they had changed rather than in a simple declarative affirmative statement. It was through this self-reported anecdotal data that evidence emerged of growth and development in students’ knowledge and attitudes (as suggested by Deardorff, 2011). Fourteen students in Fall 2016 and fifteen in Spring 2017 specifically described the changes they had undergone in terms of their cultural self-awareness (knowledge). One student wrote:

I definitely think I showed minimal awareness of cultural rules and biases in the first assignment. If I look at the questions I asked, it never even occurred to me that the person I was interviewing might believe in more than one God, or not believe in God at all. I just assumed they knew the same things about God as I did, even if they called their God something different. By the last assignment, I didn't go in assuming anything. Like the person I interviewed was Puerto Rican, but I didn't ask what microaggressions they had experienced because of that, which was good because the incident they wanted to tell me about was about a microaggression they had been done because she was a woman. I definitely became more aware of my own biases and assumptions. (Respondent 12, Fall 2016)

Another student also addressed cultural self-awareness by providing insight into her own cultural biases:

I think for me I noticed the biggest change between the first and second assignment in how I thought about the person I was talking to. I actually used the same person for both assignments, someone I had been working with for three years. The first time I asked her questions, I knew she was Muslim and I asked her about things like whether she drives and whether there are certain foods she couldn't eat or if she drinks alcohol. Then after we talked in class I realized that that was pretty biased of me to ask that stuff, like the microaggression we saw in the video about Arab Americans where they get asked if they ride on camels. Like the rubric says, I showed a strong preference for my own cultural group by asking about the driving and the drinking. When I interviewed her again about the body language stuff, I went in wanting to ask the questions differently. I tried not to assume so much and I started off by asking her what she would want people to know about her culture before I asked her specific things. (Respondent 4, Spring 2017)

In describing how their attitudes had changed over the course of the assignments, thirteen students in Fall 2016 and ten students in Spring 2017 alluded to curiosity and openness; the latter was occasionally framed in terms of comfort during the interview process, as in the case of the following student's response:

What I really noticed was that I got more comfortable talking to someone who was different from me and not feeling like I had to pretend the difference wasn't there. Like we talked about in class, noticing that someone is different from us isn't being racist. And asking them to tell us more about their culture, if you do it respectfully, isn't ignorant. It's more ignorant to just sit back and assume you know everything about that person because you're judging them based on what you think, when what you think is probably wrong because it's based on only stuff you've had experiences with before. You're never going to get the experiences in other ways if you're not open to them and you have to be willing to talk to people and to ask questions if you want to be open. (Respondent 8, Fall 2016)

Some students described openness in relation to curiosity, as in the following example:

I was definitely a 1 for the first assignment in terms of my interest. I honestly went in just wanting to do the assignment for a grade and not thinking too much about the questions I was going to ask. The interview was over in five minutes and I didn't follow up on anything the guy said. Then in class I was listening to what other people said and I was like, hey, this is what my guy said too, I wonder why, and I wished I had asked more questions. So by the next assignment, I wanted to ask more, not for the assignment because I got credit for the first one anyway, but because I honestly wanted to just know. (Respondent 6, Spring 2017)

Interestingly, detailed responses in the area of skill development were most scarce; only four students in Fall 2016 and five in Spring 2017 provided specific examples to illustrate how they had grown or changed with respect to empathy and communication (both verbal and non-verbal). When these examples were provided, they were brief and somewhat vague. For example, one student wrote the following:

I get now that people from different cultures communicate differently. Like they may stand really close to someone not to be obnoxious because that's how they show respect. (Respondent 2, Fall 2016)

Another student's response was equally generic:

I learned that there's more than one worldview and that it's important to see things from someone else's perspective because you never know how someone feels until you look at whether they were discriminated against or treated with racism. (Respondent 3, Spring 2017)

It is unclear from these responses whether students genuinely did not feel that they grew or developed in the area of skills to the same extent that they felt they grew or developed in terms of knowledge or attitudes, or whether they simply failed to understand the descriptions in the rubric for the various cells.

Discussion

While clearly not a panacea for promoting intercultural competence among criminal justice students, both the quantitative and qualitative data analyzed as part of this research project suggest that interview-based signature assignments of this nature may be a valuable first step in exposing students to people who are different from themselves in some way, and in facilitating their progression from an ethnocentric to a more ethnorelative perspective. Requiring students to conduct multiple interviews forces them to stretch themselves beyond their comfort zone and to interact with people with whom they might otherwise not come into contact; or, in some cases, to interact with people with whom they have daily contact in a more meaningful, informed way. Assignments such as these demand that students confront their own discomfort and ignorance in certain areas and recognize that acknowledging and accepting those (often unpleasant) feelings is necessary for overcoming them. Perhaps the most critical element of these assignments is the debriefing process, both verbal and written, which allows students to articulate what they felt they did well and where they believed they fell short, as well as to evaluate their own biases and assumptions.

The in-class sharing component should be encouraged but not mandated; if students are reluctant to discuss what they may see as their own shortcomings or

mistakes in front of their peers, then that is to be respected. A number of students in both semesters preferred to remain quiet during the session and approached the faculty member after class to explain their passivity. Consistently, their explanations centered on their concerns that they “had done the assignment wrong,” “asked the wrong questions,” or “didn’t want to sound stupid” in front of their classmates. Such fears are commonplace in the college classroom. However, this reluctance to share and to become vulnerable provides a valuable teaching opportunity for the faculty member to initiate a discussion about objectivity; students may learn from this experience that there may be more than one approach to take and that doing or seeing something differently does not necessarily equate to doing or seeing it incorrectly. What a vital lesson this is for criminal justice students in particular to learn, given the amount of discretion with which they may be entrusted upon their entry into the professional arena.

Evaluating students’ growth in the areas of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, particularly in attempting to ascertain whether what was observed constituted “enough” growth or meaningful change, should be done through the lens of Stier’s (2003) classification of intercultural competence. What he describes as content-competence may be easier to teach and, consequently, to assess: students can read about the one-dimensional or static characteristics of a culture and perform well on exams or essays that ask them to demonstrate an awareness of various groups’ customs, habits, language, history, sex roles, and so on. Faculty members could conclude quite happily that students “got it,” and that they now know about a particular culture. Yet such assessments (and such conclusions) omit the interactional context of intercultural competence which can only be uncovered by examining interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies (Stier, 2003). These dynamic cognitive and emotional skills are ultimately what have the potential to propel students from a position of ethnocentrism to one of ethnorelativism (Bennett, 1993), fostering in them a reflective, axiologically distant, situationally sensitive orientation that is key to dealing with diverse feelings, unknown cultural settings, and challenging problems. These processual competencies (Stier, 2003) are far more nebulous than their content-based counterpart, and are both more perplexing to teach and more onerous to assess.

The fact that the development of skills such as empathy and verbal and non-verbal communication through these assignments was found to be statistically significant in both semesters is encouraging. One would hope that students seeking to become police officers, or to secure a job in any court-related or correctional position, would demonstrate empathy and be able to react respectfully to points of difference (both elements of processual competencies). Yet the idea of recognizing cultural differences in gestures, body language, and facial expressiveness is especially important given the sorts of misunderstandings that occur all too often when law enforcement officers are unfamiliar with the nuances associated with the cultural or religious backgrounds of the community members whom they serve. Reacting to community members with greater intercultural competence and sensitivity can make a significant and positive difference on police-community relations, on the capacity to build mutual trust, and on officers’ ability to deescalate and resolve conflicts in effective ways. By the end of the course, students were brainstorming ways to learn more about other cultures and their everyday habits and routines and were able to highlight (without prompting) the positive aspects of community policing as a promising means to an end.

With respect to growth or change in the areas of knowledge and attitudes, it must be acknowledged that self-report data (indirect evidence at best) is always somewhat suspect, although the specificity provided by some students' responses certainly does seem to suggest that they "got it." There may be two possible ways to affect greater change in these areas. The first is to incorporate more opportunities for reflective practice throughout the course, not merely in response to these assignments but possibly in the form of an ongoing journal that students maintain and in which they can articulate specific experiences and interactions (as well as their own individual feelings and reactions to those experiences and interactions). Such a journal would allow students to refer back to earlier entries and to chart their own development over time. The second opportunity for improvement has to do with the wording of the assignments themselves. Prompts provided to students, as explained above, were left deliberately vague and broad in order to allow students to interpret points of difference for themselves. Some students found this confusing and overwhelming; for example, a student who wanted to interview an atheist for the first assignment was unsure whether atheism constituted a "religious or spiritual background at all," and another student approached the faculty member and begged to be told "what you want me to find out." Perhaps a more effective approach would be to scaffold the assignments in such a way that students are provided with very specific instructions for the first assignment and then gradually given more latitude and more freedom to interpret successive assignments on their own.

A further limitation of the research pertains to the inability on the part of the faculty member involved to assess meaningful change in intercultural competence and sensitivity over time given the parameters of the current study. While the study does suggest that future law enforcement officers (and other would-be criminal justice practitioners) may be better positioned for post-graduation success in the communities they aim to serve by the exposure to these concepts and development of these skills, follow-up was not feasible given that the majority of the students in the course over both semesters were seniors. These skills, like any other, benefit from being consistently used and honed and reinforced. Consequently, an interesting future research project may attempt a longitudinal design, whereby students are administered the Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003) at multiple points: at the outset of the course, at the conclusion of the course (having completed all three of the interview-based signature assignments), six months after the end date of the course (by which time most of them will have graduated), and twelve months after the end date of the course (by which time those students who intend to enter the police academy will have completed their studies and begun their careers). That type of study would hopefully show whether the knowledge, skills, and attitudes gained in class are sustainable long-term.

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