Intercultural learning: generic or dyadic?

How international short-term voluntary work camps in the West Balkans reduced interethnic mistrust specifically between young people whose countries were in conflict.

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Outline

1. Overview
2. The standard story: our study
   - Method
   - Results
3. The alternative story
4. Outlook and discussion

Two stories

Will tell two stories today ...

The standard story: how mobility contributes to intercultural learning; in particular can help decrease mistrust. Presentation of research results.

The alternative story: mobility is partly sold on the promise of avoiding future conflict. Does it deliver?

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Who are we

Two NGOs, both based in Sarajevo, both working internationally

SEEYN: South-East European Youth Network. Network organising the workcamps and commissioning the study.

proMENTE social research: specialists in measuring pro-social outcomes

Previous work

1. Conducted many studies of impact of pro-social programs
2. Pilot study - 51 volunteers at five work-camps - April and May 2006
3. Representative sample of young people in B&H on voluntarism
4. Study of values amongst students in B&H

About the main study

Aim: impact of short-term international work camp participation on young people's pro-social values and employability.

Camps: 28 two-week work-camps in the countries of former Yugoslavia run by 9 organisations during summer 2006

Participants: 50% of young people ex-Yu countries. => Many encounters between people whose countries were at war

Data: from 183 volunteers

Note: big differences between characteristics of camps

Plus: will mention results from other studies (representative sample of young people in B&H on voluntarism)

Standard outcome dimensions

- Employability
- Pro-social values

Measured on mainly standardised questionnaires before and after the work camps

Definition: "Hot dyads"

1. pairs of nations/cultures/ethnicities which are or have been in conflict
2. classically: Blacks and Whites in US ...
3. also: opposing sides in military conflict, civil war, etc
4. may be assymetric
5. not the same as "culture-specific"
6. hot on the (geo-)political and individual psychological levels

Ethnic mistrust

The hottest individual-psychological aspect of these dyads: mistrust.

- (meta-)cognitions and cognitive styles
- held by members of one half of the dyad about (members of) the other
- more or less generalised to the whole group
- assessment of danger
- may be partly justified
- increase conflict potential (positive feedback)
- may play an important role in the outbreak and maintenance of conflict

Hypotheses

Standard hypotheses

1. workcamps lead to increase in pro-social values and employability

Alternative, additional hypotheses

1. trust, tolerance is not generic but may differ according to specific intercultural dyads
2. mistrust within hot dyads is not picked up by traditional, generic measures of tolerance.
3. higher levels of mistrust within hot dyads.
4. contact with members of other countries/cultures *can*reduce mistrust
5. this reduction is potentially higher in hot dyads

Measure of ethnic mistrust?

- Ethnic distance (Bogardus)
- Ethnic stereotypes: “Feindbilder”.
- Ad-hoc measures
- Your suggestions?

New measure of ethnic (mis)trust

Please write down the name of the national or ethnic group you feel you most belong to
Please write down the name of the national or ethnic group which members of your group tend to trust the least
How much do you agree (1= not at all, 5= totally) with the following statements?

1. Do you respect your own people?
2. Do you respect their people?
3. Do your people respect their people?
4. Do their people respect your people?
5. Do you think your people are a threat to their people?
6. Do you think their people are a threat to your people?
7. Do your people think that their people are a threat?
8. Do their people think that your people are a threat?

Differentiates self from group; captures circularity of mistrust

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Main results

Traditional hypotheses

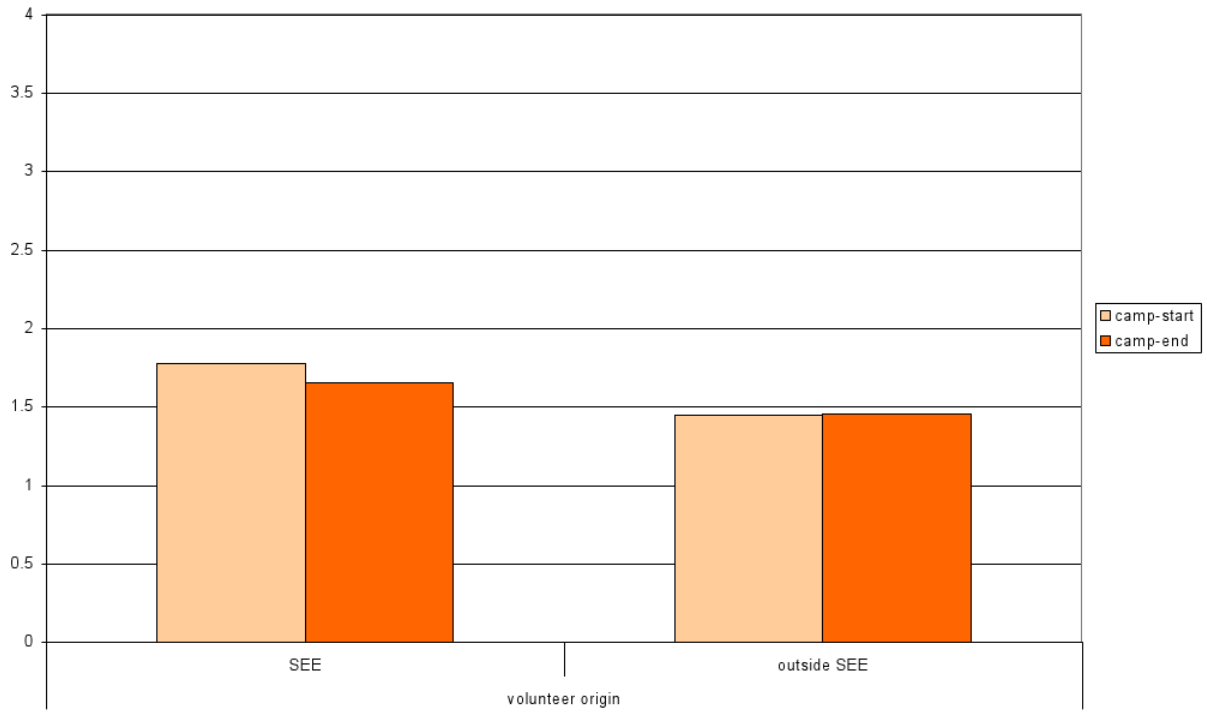
1. Mainly no change in pro-social values and employability. Slight decrease in mistrust. Dose-response?

New hypotheses

1. Even before the camp, volunteers from South-East Europe (SEE) have significantly higher pro-social values than other volunteers
2. Yet, they show more mistrust towards specific ethnic neighbours => generic measures do not pick up dyadic mistrust
3. No change in mistrust in the vols from outside SEE
4. Significant improvement in mistrust overall ....
5. ... but entirely due to improvement in volunteers from SEE

Focus: differential improvement in mistrust amongst SEE volunteers

Figure: Improvement on ethnic mistrust



Focus: SEE volunteers are more pro-social than others

Compared with other volunteers at the camps, with a representative survey of B&H young people, and with typical students in B&H, *volunteers from SEE*

- are much more likely to want to volunteer next year than all others
- are much more likely to say their parents volunteered than all others
- have higher pro-social values than volunteers from outside SEE except readiness to confront
- are more interested in career motivation than vols from outside
- score higher on on all dimensions of the Schwartz value survey than typical B&H students

Who is to learn from whom?

What leads to what?[5][6]

Is it like this? (Standard view)

1. Generic competences
2. Non-escalatory behaviour even when caught in one's worst hot dyad

Or like this? (Alternative view)

1. Non-escalatory behaviour even when caught in one's worst hot dyad
2. Generic competences

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Or like this? (Alternative view)

1. Non-escalatory behaviour even when caught in one's worst hot dyad
2. Generic competences

Dialogability

(Martin Buber, Fritz Perls, Willi Butollo) [3, 4][2][7]

- ... the ability to remain in contact even when the going gets tough.
- ... being aware of one's own "hot dyads"
  - when you are emotionally involved, especially in a "hot dyad",
    - being able to assess what is realistic about fears
    - and maintain dialogue
    - while maintaining personal integrity
- ... a component (precondition?) of real intercultural learning
- transferable?

Challenges for measurement

It is harder to measure changes in dyadic orientations

- Logistics (which dyad to choose?)
- Extremely politically sensitive questions
- Harder to interpret
  - Circularity
  - May be partly justified

Challenges for implementation

- Bennett's insight: achieving intercultural competence is a *developmental* task. But generic. [1]
- If dialogability is the sharp end of ICC, how can you become really interculturally competent if you don't have a hot dyad to overcome?
- Mobility across the new hot borders in inner cities could make a bigger contribution to social stability than international mobility

What about the people from conflict zones?

- conflict zones*: good as well as bad* examples of how to maintain dialogue in conflict situations
- people from conflict zones don't need "to learn to be tolerant again". They come from a world where different things are true.

Does ICC deliver on the promise of reducing conflict potential?

- ethnic mistrust in "hot dyads" is relatively independent of generic intercultural competence and tolerance as traditionally measured?
- how does dialogability relate to ICC? Research questions:
  - just the same?
  - the "sharp end"?
  - no connection?
- *dialogability, and not intercultural competence, will help avoid escalation in serious conflict situations*

Summary

- Youth mobility can help to decrease ethnic mistrust
- Dialogability = the ability to remain in contact even in one's own "hot dyads"
- Dialogability could be an export from conflict zones, not an import.
- The new hot borders are inside countries
- Is it dialogability, and not intercultural competence, which could help avoid escalation in serious conflict situations?
- Questionnaires and report freely available: *www.promente.org/seeyn5* or *steve@promente.org*

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