SI: The role of schools in promoting inclusive communities in contexts of diversity

Abstract

Against the background of evidence for links between ill-health and prejudice, in this paper we discuss how to promote inclusive communities in contexts of diversity. A brief critical overview of dominant psychological approaches to prejudice reduction reveals the apolitical nature of these approaches and we thus argue for a more contextual and political model on how to promote inclusive communities. Drawing on examples of different school practices on cultural diversity from across England, we argue that we need to develop a perspective that connects local contexts of everyday practice, resistance and agency to the institutional and structural realities of prejudice.

From prejudice reduction to inclusive communities

There is extensive research which shows that discrimination has a negative impact on health. For instance, discrimination functions as a stressor and puts in motion several 'risky' physiological responses such as high blood pressure (Pascoe and Smart Richman, 2009; Williams and Mohammed, 2009). Furthermore, members of disadvantaged social groups are less likely to seek health care if they fear discrimination (e.g. McLean et al., 2002; Tang and Browne, 2008). Health disparities therefore 'embody inequity' in that they reflect social, economic and political inequalities (Adelson, 2005). This has led to calls for a deeper engagement of health psychology with socio-political issues such as racism and prejudice (Estacio, 2009; Nairn et al., 2006).

Much research on prejudice focuses on the negative, stereotypical views of dominant groups (Dixon et al., 2012). This is evident in prejudice reduction approaches, which attempt to change negative intergroup attitudes through direct education and persuasion (Stephan and Stephan, 2001), intergroup contact (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006), or re-categorisation, that is, the construction of super-ordinate identities (Dovidio et al., 2009). These prejudice reduction frameworks tend to overlook the historical, institutional and political roots of intergroup inequalities (Reicher, 2012). Contact, for example, can sometimes have adverse effects; while decreasing perceptions of discrimination, contact may also decrease the readiness of disadvantaged groups to act against injustice (Dixon et al., 2012). Such approaches implicitly assume that 'all' we need to do is improve intergroup relations and attitudes, rather than tackle inequalities sustained in social structures (see Marks, 2008). Prejudice reduction interventions have indeed been found to have very modest outcomes (Paluck and Green 2009). Prejudice is not just a matter of dominant groups 'getting to like' non-dominant groups (Dixon et al., 2012; Dixon et al., 2010). Simply seeing prejudice from the perspective of dominant groups may entail a patronising attitude towards minorities who are seen as passive victims, not as 'agents of change' (Howarth et al., 2012: 437). Social psychological research has shown, for example, that active minorities can initiate social change through processes of social influence (Moscovici and Personnaz, 1980). Hence, we argue that we need to develop an overtly political approach that does two things:

1. Focuses on the contexts and social relations that empower minoritised groups
2. Connects this understanding of the local realities of prejudice and empowerment to the systems and representations that sustain inequalities and discrimination within broader institutions and practices.

Tackling prejudice in the context of English schools

Health psychologists have focused on schools as sites of health promotion, but traditional approaches tend to concentrate on individual factors that do not adequately consider broader historical, cultural and institutional contexts. We focus on schools as a setting that can both 'play an instrumental role in reifying racial and ethnic stratification and perpetuating disparities in health' (Goosby and Walsemann, 2012: 303) and also become a space of resistance against racialization (Howarth, 2004). Reviews of prejudice reduction in American schools suggest that school policy and practice play a key role in facilitating positive outcomes but also in perpetuating inequalities (Schofield, 2004, 2009). Our analysis identifies some of the ways that school practices can create 'receptive social environments' (Campbell et al., 2010) that promote agency and inclusion within an English context. The first two authors visited six schools in the north (Yorkshire) and south (London and Sussex) of England and conducted 13 interviews with teaching staff and 11 focus groups with pupils (ages 12-14). These explored views on multiculturalism and intercultural relations in the local community and the school. While our findings suggest that promoting inclusion is a multi-layered and complex process, we focus here on two main ways that schools seek to deal with cultural diversity and prejudice:

-   approaches that seek to reduce prejudice through celebratory awareness activities
-   approaches which seek to highlight and build upon interconnectedness

We found that the former constitutes a top-down effort to reduce the prejudice of 'majority' White English pupils and often does not acknowledge how cultural difference is negotiated 'on the ground' by pupils themselves. By contrast, the latter approach appears to have the potential of producing a receptive social environment that works with everyday, bottom-up practices of resistance initiated by pupils themselves. Below is an extract from an interview with a teacher who works on community cohesion activities. The local community is characterised by a strong divide (social, cultural, economic, residential) between the White British and the Asian British communities. Within this context the school organises several activities that aim to bridge this divide by celebrating diversity:

> [I]t's about you respecting the other person's differences and recognising the fact that they're different; they have a different religion, they have a different skin colour, they have a different accent, but they're still part of this community and still a valued part of this community […] we wanted people to actually have the opportunity to stand up and say 'this is who I am', 'this is where I was from', 'this is what my culture does' and one of the things we encouraged the students to do on that day was to come in cultural dress and we had an African boy who'd come from Nigeria, you know, he'd arrived from quite you know tragic circumstances and he'd arrived and was very unsure of himself, had lost, you know, lost his confidence, lost his way, and he came into school that day dressed in this fantastic colourful African outfit… (Yorkshire, Teacher)

Such celebratory activities aim to enhance cultural awareness, reduce prejudice and instil a sense of intercultural respect and self-confidence. However, what we found was that these

activities can essentialise cultural difference by not recognising existing cultural interconnections and 'ordinary' forms of cultural exchange in the everyday life of pupils. Indeed, pupils from the same school actually describe these events as 'embarrassing', seeing cultural dress as more appropriate for other settings such as 'the temple and going to a wedding' and highlighting that 'nobody wants to be an outsider' (Yorkshire, Year 10). Hence such an approach, though well-meant, may exoticise difference and 'lock' pupils into stereotypes of cultural difference. This has also been found in American contexts where the predominant colour-blind approach adopted by schools tends to reinforce intergroup disparities (Schofield, 2009). Our data suggest that, even in community contexts fraught with intergroup tensions, pupils engage in 'convivial' forms of multiculture that contest cultural boundaries and resist racialization (Gilroy, 2004).

> Ken: [M]e and Richard play rugby outside school so I'd say they're like my brothers; well, I see all of them as my brothers even if they're a different colour. Like Shin and Siddiq are different colours but I still see them as like, you know, like brothers or friends, yeah, I don't care if they're different colours. [...] Like when you play rugby you get like in a fight and you know that your mates are gonna help you out [...] that kind of builds the bond, you know, multicultural. (Halifax, Year 8)

Engagement in social activities seems to positively influence intercultural relations. Children do not necessarily need to be taught how to mix with others; they often develop their own, 'ordinary' ways of side-stepping or resisting stereotypical assumptions of difference. On the other hand, the same group of pupils from the extract above also argued that ethnic minorities who live in England should assimilate and restrain expressions of their ethnic heritage.

> David: No because you've got the Asian families come over and then like their children are born here and they've decided to choose, support England and we think that's a good thing. [...]
> Richard: Like you could walk around places and you could see Asian flags out of windows and things like that. [...] If I walk somewhere and see the Indian flag, the Pakistani flag I find that, I find that racist. [...] And that's, the people who do that, they're not willing to mix together and create a new community. They wanna stay as, you know, just do their own lifestyle. (Halifax, Year 8)

The force of hegemonic representations about otherness, particularly when these are made explicit in school activities, may make it hard for pupils to develop positive intercultural relations. Prejudice reduction efforts should build on actual practices within school settings, instead of imposing one right way of relating and mixing. This can be done through activities that empower students, engage with their realities and position them as agents. There were various examples of this in our data – from discussing the role of servicemen and women from around the world in the WWII, to bringing in examples of recycling in different cultures, even in music:

> And in music they looked at the national anthem and some of the girls reworded bits and pieces of it to put in certain words that they think should encompass what it means to be British [...] not just being born here but you know, coming in. (London, Teacher)

This extract is a description of a school project where pupils contested dominant racialised representations of Britishness by rewording the national anthem. Instead of instructing pupils, the school here recognises the pupils' agency and so becomes a receptive space for contestation and for a more inclusive sense of community.

Connecting local contexts to broader institutional practices in tackling prejudice

Local community contexts and bottom-up resistance as well as broader, top-down institutional practices, work together to produce social change (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012). Minorities can develop alternative representations of the world which contrast with hegemonic worldviews and these provide a basis for social change and for positive social identities for group members (Howarth et al., 2013; Sonn and Fisher, 1998). Collective action by minorities can indeed be more successful in achieving social change than mainstream prejudice reduction approaches (Dixon et al., 2012). In the field of community health psychology, such ideas have led to the development of community mobilisation approaches, often within a critical Freirian framework, which advocate the participation and empowerment of local communities in intervention programmes (e.g. Campbell and Jovchelovitch, 2000). For example, through participation in community arts processes people are able to jointly deconstruct and reconstruct stereotypical stories of self and others (Madyaningrum and Sonn, 2011). Strong ingroup identities and community ties can increase resilience towards discrimination (Mossakowski, 2003) and enhance overall well-being (e.g. Verkuyten, 2010). Our approach highlights the role of local communities as agents of change. It stresses the importance of creating settings that can empower minorities and operate as a receptive context where the powerful are willing to listen and act to challenge oppression (Campbell et al., 2010).

Conclusion

In light of well-established research on the negative impact of prejudice on health, in this paper we have argued for a more political approach to prejudice reduction that community health psychologists can use in their efforts to construct more inclusive communities. Our approach incorporates the level of local action, in the field, and the level of the wider social and structural context. While prejudice reduction efforts commonly target individuals from dominant social groups, we argue that we need to examine how communities actively resist stigma and discrimination on a local level. On the one hand, routine social interactions can perpetuate social and health inequalities as micro-power draws on the patterns of macro-power (Stephens, 2010). On the other hand, however, ordinary interactions can also challenge intergroup boundaries and pave the way to disrupt social and health inequalities (e.g. Rohleder et al., 2008). Using examples from research on intercultural relations in English schools, we have shown that promising prejudice reduction efforts by schools seem to be those that use pupils' own concrete practices (Cornish, 2009) of resistance and intercultural exchange to build inclusive and health-promoting schools and communities. However, this is a deeply complex and contested issue as different contexts may call for different strategies of social change (Campbell, this issue). This paper has shown that a good starting point is to incorporate a micro and a macro perspective: both building on local acts of resistance and addressing structural inequalities with top-down policy-making or legislation.

References

Adelson N (2005) The embodiment of inequity: Health disparities in Aboriginal Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 96: S45-S61.

Andreouli E and Howarth C (2012) National identity, citizenship and immigration: putting identity in context. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 19(2): 165-183.

Campbell C, Cornish F, Gibbs A and Scott K (2010) Heeding the push from below: How do social movements persuade the rich to listen to the poor? *Journal of Health Psychology* 15(7): 962–971.

Campbell C and Jovchelovitch S (2000) Health, community and development: Towards a social psychology of participation. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 10: 255-270.

Cornish F (2009) Let's get real (with a small 'r'): For a health psychology that prioritises the concrete. *Journal of Health Psychology* 14(5): 638-642.

Dixon J, Levine M, Reicher S and Durrheim K (2012) Beyond prejudice: Are negative evaluations the problem and is getting us to like one another more the solution? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 35: 411–466.

Dixon JF, Tropp L, Durrheim K and Tredoux C (2010) 'Let them eat harmony': Prejudice-reduction strategies and attitudes of historically disadvantaged groups. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 19(2): 76-80.

Dovidio JF, Gaertner SL and Saguy T (2009). Commonality and the complexity of "we": Social attitudes and social change. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 13: 3-20.

Estacio EV (2009) Human exploitation is not a joke – so don't laugh! *Journal of Health Psychology* 14(5): 627-637.

Gilroy P (2004) *After empire: Melancholia or convivial culture?* London: Routledge.

Goosby BJ and Walsemann KM (2012) School racial composition and race/ethnic differences in early adulthood health. *Health and Place* 18(2): 296–304.

Howarth C (2004). Re-presentation and resistance in the context of school exclusion: Reasons to be critical. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 14: 356-377.

Howarth C, Andreouli E and Kessi S (2013) Social Representations and the politics of participation. In: Kinnvall K, Capelos T, Dekker H and Nesbitt-Larking P (eds) *Palgrave Handbook of Global Political Psychology*. London: Palgrave.

Howarth C, Kessi S, Wagner W and Sen R (2012) The politics of moving beyond prejudice. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 35: 437-438.

McLean C, Campbell C and Cornish F (2002) African-Caribbean interactions with mental health services: Experiences and expectations of exclusion as (re)productive of health inequalities. *Social Science & Medicine* 56(3): 657-669.

Madyaningrum M and Sonn C (2011) Exploring the meaning of participation in a community art project: A case study on the Seeming project. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 21: 358–370.

Marks DF (2008) The quest for meaningful theory in health psychology. *Journal of Health Psychology* 13(8): 977-981.

Moscovici S and Personnaz B (1980) Studies in social influence V. Minority influence and conversion behavior in a perceptual task. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 6: 270-282.

Mossakowski KN (2003) Coping with perceived discrimination: Does ethnic identity protect mental health? *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 44(3): 318-331.

Nairn R, Pega F, McCreanor T, Rankine J and Barnes A (2006) Media, racism and public health psychology. *Journal of Health Psychology* 11(2): 183-196.

Paluck EL and Green DP (2009) Prejudice reduction: What works? A review and assessment of research and practice. *Annual Review of Psychology* 60: 339-367.

Pascoe EA and Smart Richman L (2009) Perceived discrimination and health: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin* 135(4): 531-554.

Pettigrew TF and Tropp LR (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90: 751-783.

Reicher S (2012) From perception to mobilization: the shifting paradigm of prejudice. In: Dixon J and Levine M (eds) *Beyond prejudice: Extending the social psychology of conflict, inequality and social change.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 27-48.

Rohleder P, Swartz L, Carolissen R, Bozalek V and Leibowitz B (2008) "Communities isn't just about trees and shops": Students from two South African universities engage in dialogue about 'community' and 'community work'. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 18: 253-267.

Schofield JW (2004) Fostering positive intergroup relations in schools. In: Banks JA and McGee Banks CA (eds) *Handbook of research on multicultural education*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 799-812.

Schofield JW (2009) The colorblind perspective in school: Causes and consequences. In: Banks JA and McGee Banks CA (eds) *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (7th ed). New York: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 271-295.

Sonn CC and Fisher AT (1998) Sense of community: Community resilient responses to oppression and change. *Journal of Community Psychology* 26(5): 457-471.

Stephan WG and Stephan CW (2001) *Improving intergroup relations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stephens C (2010) Privilege and status in an unequal society: Shifting the focus of health promotion research to include the maintenance of advantage. *Journal of Health Psychology* 15(7): 993-1000.

Tang SY and Browne, AJ (2008) 'Race' matters: racialization and egalitarian discourses involving Aboriginal people in the Canadian health care context. *Ethnicity & Health* 13(2): 109-127.

Verkuyten M (2010) Assimilation ideology and situational well-being among ethnic minority members. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 46: 269-275.

Williams DR and Mohammed SA (2009) Discrimination and racial disparities in health: evidence and needed research. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 32(1): 20-47.