Does Cross-Cultural Experience Foster Moral Judgment Competence in College Students?

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Moral Judgment Competence
Measured using Lind’s Moral Judgment Test (MJT)

Lind’s Moral Judgment Test (MJT) assesses the capacity to make moral decisions and judgments and to act accordingly. The MJT measures how a person deals with arguments that oppose his or her position on a difficult moral problem. The main score, the C-index, reflects the degree to which judgments about moral arguments are determined by moral reasoning as opposed to opinion agreement. The MJT confronts persons with a moral task, not only an assessment of moral attitudes or values. Persons who show consistency in their judgments of pro and contra arguments receive high competence scores.

C ranges from 1 to 100. C is sometimes graded low (1-9), medium (10 – 29), high (30 – 49) and very high (above 50).

College Population Characteristics
“Eastern Mennonite University is a liberal arts university with an Anabaptist faith tradition committed to preparing globally aware servant leaders for the twenty-first century. Our general education program, called the Global Village Curriculum, highlights cross-cultural learning as a cornerstone of the undergraduate experience.”

The university could be characterized as religiously conservative and socially liberal.

Undergraduate students, the population studied, participate in a required cross-cultural program.

Students also participate in required community learning experiences.

A relatively high percentage of graduates work in international community development for relief and service agencies.

More than 75% of EMU faculty have lived and served abroad.

Cross-Cultural Program
The required cross-cultural seminars are faculty led.

Social justice issues are emphasized.

The cross-cultural seminars in the past two years included South Africa, Lithuania, Spain, Germany, Guatemala, Turkey, China, Peru, Vietnam, and India.

Most of the semester-long, and many of the 3-week experiences involve home-stays in the host culture.

Research Questions
- Does cross-cultural experience foster moral judgment competence in college students?
- Is there a relationship between a service learning curriculum and moral judgment competence in college students?
- Is there a relationship between religiosity and moral judgment competence in college students?

Sample Demographic Data
Response rate 26% (180 out of about 700)

No cross-cultural 113
Cross-cultural 67 (low response rate)

Mean age: 21  Males: 60  Females: 120

Moral Judgment Data: C-Scores
Mean: 20.9  (comparable to published US data). Range: 1 - 76

Distribution:

No overall change across years
No difference between males & females or academic majors
Correlation with age insignificant.

Discussion
Because of low cross-cultural sample size and high variance, no firm conclusions can be made about the relationship between moral judgment scores and participation in a cross-cultural experience. However, there is an indication (p = .11) that cross-culturals with home-stays increase moral judgment scores, while cross-culturals without home-stays decrease moral judgment scores, relative to no cross-cultural experience.

The cross-cultural findings could be interpreted in light of prior findings (Schillinger, 2006) that students in certain “unfavorable” (with lower opportunities for responsibility-taking) learning environments actually decrease in MJT scores. That scores increase for cross-culturals with home-stays may indicate a “favorable” learning environment.

There was a significant positive correlation between university required service learning hours and moral judgment scores (r = .17), in contrast to no significant correlation between moral judgment scores and community service outside the EMU curriculum.

Moral judgment scores were correlated with self-reported measures of religiosity. The most diagnostic item was “I can be OK without religion” (r = 0.25 **). Overall, higher religiosity scores predict lower c-scores.

The overall pattern of responses to religiosity items indicates some ambivalence about identifying oneself as a religious person. While 94% of respondents believe in God, only 32% agree that they are religious persons.

It seems plausible that the cross-cultural experiences are interacting with religious identity. This needs further research.

Lind, G. http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/home-e.htm