Learning, Culture and Social Interaction xxx (2017) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Learning, Culture and Social Interaction

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/lcsi

A dialogue with the 'self': Identity exploration processes in intergroup dialogue for Jewish students in Israel

Lipaz Shamoa-Nir

Department of Behavioral Sciences, Zefat Academic College, Israel

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 15 August 2016
Received in revised form 7 January 2017
Accepted 9 January 2017
Available online xxxx

Keywords:
Identity
Construction
Student
Intergroup dialogue
Religion

ABSTRACT

Intergroup dialogues can create a safe environment that encourages individuals to engage in self reflection. This article has examined identity exploration processes among undergraduate students who have participated in a dialogue course. Findings have pointed out several factors that have enabled self-exploration in the group and the dialogue course was fulfilling for most students. The participants felt that the dialogue had helped them form a greater understanding of their identities through two levels of discourse: with the 'self' and with 'the other' - however, findings also indicated a process that appears to disrupt a 'deep' and authentic discourse and can be considered as a contestation of identity. The contribution of this research lies in investigating how identities are shaped within a context of intergroup dialogues and in proposing several hypotheses and questions to advance the research in this field.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Intergroup dialogues are structured conversations between members of different ethnicities, cultures or religions through a collaborative communication process that engages people in self-other exchanges (Dessel & Rogge, 2008; Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, & Zúñiga, 2009). Intergroup dialogues have been implemented in international, community and academic setting and research indicates positive results in all these settings (Dessel, Rogge, & Garlington, 2006). The literature points to two sets of processes within the intergroup dialogues: the psychological processes that occur within individuals (Dovidio et al., 2004), and the communication processes that occur among individuals (Nagda, 2006). Yet, the value of these discourses in the participants' identity investigation receives little direct attention (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On, & Fakhereldeen, 2002). In studying these issues in more detail, this article suggests that a discourse on intergroup religious conflict functions as an opportunity for a meaningful process both on a personal level and in self exploration.

The dialogue course studied in this article was developed in 1995 following the assignation of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in order to moderate the chasm between religious and secular Jews in Israel. The dialogue model is greatly based on the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969), and is facilitated by individuals knowledgeable on the Jewish secular-religious conflict (Shamoa-Nir & Hellinger, 2015) who have been trained to lead the discussions (Miller & Donner, 2000). I propose that within an Israeli context, it is assumed that the dialogues would bring about changes in identity constructions, as most of the participants were aware of social and political realities and express multiple and conflicting identities. For this purpose it was decided to use the final papers of undergraduate students who have participated in the dialogue course throughout a semester. It should be noted that this article illustrates the peculiarities of intergroup dialogue in an Israeli context and may not be generalizable to other cultural contexts. In the following sections, existing literature on identity processes will be reviewed with a particular

E-mail address: lipaznir@zahav.net.il.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2017.01.001
2210-6561/© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Please cite this article as: Shamoa-Nir, L., A dialogue with the 'self': Identity exploration processes in intergroup dialogue for Jewish students in Israel, *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction* (2017), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2017.01.001

ARTICLE IN PRESS

focus on how these processes are manifested in intergroup dialogues. Following this, the methodological line of inquiry will be outlined and the principle findings. Finally, in the last section, conclusions and recommendations for future improvements will be proposed.

1.1. Identity exploration

Identity can be described in terms of the individual's "self" (Erikson, 1963, 1968). Individual identity is defined both by the questions "Who am I?" and "What am I?" with the various answers individuals provide, and through the meanings attributed to them by others. The identity formation process constitutes the principal developmental task in teenage years, but continues all through life and is prone to social influences (Erikson, 1963, 1968). Therefore, although the definition of self-identity might result from individuals' perceptions of themselves in a specific context and a given moment (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004), development of the self occurs in a continuous process of interactions among individuals and their surroundings; from here, there may be changes in self-identity throughout life.

According to Marcia, identity development occurs on the basis of two principal dimensions: exploration and commitment. At first, a search and exploration of alternatives takes place, and following extended exploration, the appropriate identity is finally attained (Marcia, 1980). In an exploration of the identity that mostly occurs during early adulthood (ages 18–25) (Arnett, 2002, 2006), the individual's worldview is explored and general questions are asked on the meaning of life, along with specific questions on religious values and beliefs. In addition, this process is characterized by an examination of whether their personal worldviews differ from those of their parents (Arnett, 2006) and in thought on their belief systems, along with religious questions even when the individual is not living in a religious home environment (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). Religion provides a powerful support to individuals and groups as they endeavor to establish and maintain secure identities, and therefore serves the identity impulse more powerfully and comprehensively than other repositories of cultural meaning can or do (Seul, 1999).

Research has found that only one third of young adults engage in exploration of their ideological identity, continuing in the exploration process into their late twenties (Côté, 2006). In certain cases there is an early identity formation (Branch, Tayal, & Triplett, 2000) or identity confusion (Erikson, 1963, 1968). Further, a claim introduced recently by Syed and Mclean (2015) states that there isn't much point in engaging in age-dependent identity development processes and continuing to explore questions like: "When does the identity develop?" or "How does the identity develop at a specific age?" Rather, one should focus on the link between the nature of the developmental process and the timing to which the development applies. It is often not the age that is the principal component in the timing of the occurring process, and therefore focus should be directed on the development processes that occurred at that time. Syed and Mclean believe that as exploration of personal development has focused on exploration and commitment processes, not enough weight has been placed on the identity domains in which these processes are expressed, although focus on these domains may contribute much to the understanding of identity processes (Syed & Mclean, 2015).

One can see that the identity formation process expresses two contrasting human needs: the need to belong to a group vs. the need to maintain personal uniqueness (Brewer, 1991), and actually, any perception or understanding of the self is linked to the individual's cultural environment, its characteristics and values (Bruner, 1990). Litvak-Hirsch, Chaitin, and Zaher (2010) argued that identity perception touches on the relationship between the "self" and the "other" and is found on a chain that includes three dimensions of identity: a. monolithic identity – a negative perception towards the "other", which has difficulties in the containment of opposites in the perception of "self" and "other"; b. intermediate space – including expressions of ambivalence and duality and of the ability to recognize contradictions in identity together with the difficulty to contain them; c. complex identity – an identity that has the coherent ability to express questions and to cope with uncertainty and ambiguity.

Further, according to Tajfel and Turner's (1986)social identity hypothesis, an individual's definition of self relies on his/her sense of belonging to a group and can only be fully defined in the presence of others, in belonging to a group and in comparison to an external group (Festinger, 1954). Therefore, there is actually a process of identity verification, where individuals explore the extent of suitability between the way they perceive their identity and the changing social conventions as to an accepted identity in a position or group (Burke, 2004). The identity exploration process can continue for many years, during which young adults may re-evaluate new possibilities and even redesign character traits (Côté, 2000). It is possible, therefore, to claim that what is involved is not merely a non-age-dependent process, but also that in certain contexts in young adult lives there are social processes that accelerate identity exploration, and that these opportunities should be explored.

1.2. Intergroup dialogues and identity

Dialogue is perceived as a mutual discourse that may have an influence on each speaker's identity; according to Martin Buber dialogue expresses the recognition of a person's existential existence and ability to create interactions with the 'other' (Buber, 1958). The individual works actively to construct his/her identity, to interpret it and to shape it through social processes. The post-modern approach sees an individual's identity as a kind of 'text' that is constructed and continues to be constructed in every social encounter or interaction, as a consequence every encounter with the 'other' is a new and different expression of the human self, and with time, all of these self-expressions are gathered together and united into one overall identity that Gergen calls the "collage personality" (Gergen, 1991, p.1–21; Gergen, 1997). Thus, it is quite possible to assume that dialogue encounters may be a constitutive element of identity development and construction.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) argued that significant identity processes occur in groups that are in conflict. According to their model group identity is a central component of the individual's personal identity, and therefore, one shouldn't attempt to blur

Please cite this article as: Shamoa-Nir, L., A dialogue with the 'self': Identity exploration processes in intergroup dialogue for Jewish students in Israel, *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction* (2017), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2017.01.001

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4939907

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/4939907

Daneshyari.com