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Jeff Kerksen-Griep

University of Portland, kerksen@up.edu

Karen Eifler

University of Portland, eifler@up.edu

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When Cross-Racial Contact Transforms Intercultural Communication Competence:
White Novice Teachers Learn Alongside Their African American High School Mentees

Jeff Kerksen-Griep

Dept. of Communication Studies

email: kerssen@up.edu

Telephone: 503-943-7167

Fax: 503-943-7801

Karen Eifler

School of Education

email: eifler@up.edu

Telephone: 503-943-8014

Fax: 503-943-8042

University of Portland
5000 N. Willamette Blvd.
Portland, OR 97203-5798

Jeff Kerksen-Griep, Ph.D. (1998, University of Washington) is Associate Professor of Communication Studies and Karen Eifler, Ph.D. (1997, University of Nebraska-Lincoln) is Associate Professor of Education, both at the University of Portland. An earlier version of this report was presented at the February 2006 Western States Communication Association convention in Palm Springs, CA. We thank the study's academic mentors and Prospective Gents for their invaluable help with this project, and Dr. Maria Ciriello and Dr. Michael Rabby for their support of it. Reach the authors at kerssen@up.edu and eifler@up.edu.

When Cross-Racial Contact Transforms Intercultural Communication Competence:
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Abstract

This research analysis examined whether and why one particular academic mentoring program affected how skillfully its participants communicated with students steeped in a different cultural environment from their own. Based on fifty-plus years of research and theorizing about achieving perspective shift via intercultural contact, this longitudinal study assessed changes in the observed intercultural communication abilities of White preservice teachers over their eight months as academic mentors for members of an African American cultural group, from whom they themselves learned realities of institutional racism. Analysis revealed several statistically significant improvements in these novice teachers' observed interactional abilities over time. By highlighting actual improved actions, these results extend previous attitude-, and affect-focused research about intergroup contact outcomes. Advancing anti-racism education aims, this report also explicates the teacher training experience that successfully prepared these novice teachers to invest in communicating mindfully and skillfully across cultural boundaries. *Keywords:* contact hypothesis, intergroup contact, mentoring, intercultural communication skills, anti-racism, instruction, teaching

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*Of course, the 'holy grail' will be to find whether, and if so how, contact interventions have a lasting impact on actual behavior. When will people **act** more warmly, or at least less negatively or indifferently, toward the out-group as a result of positively structured cooperative encounters with individual members of it?*

(Brown & Hewstone, 2005, p. 324)

Anti-racism educators promote schooling designed to expose and reduce the impact of practices that limit access and growth opportunities for all learners (Goodman, 2001; Sonn, 2008; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). This article details one kind of success in such a program. Arising from a social learning theory perspective, this longitudinal study used an established observational protocol to predict and note significant improvements in White preservice teachers' actual intercultural communication skills over their eight months partnering as academic mentors with members of an African American cultural group, from whom they themselves learned realities of institutional racism. This report also shows how such communication skills require and indicate less ethnocentric thinking, and it applies existing scholarship to analyze these findings' implications for creating similarly productive intergroup contacts in educational settings. Although not undertaken from a critical perspective (i.e., privilege and conflict are not included in the study as theory bases), this research advances critical aims by offering social scientific case study evidence of novice teachers' successfully improved cultural navigation abilities, awareness, and investment in mindful cross-racial contact.

The Challenge

With their country's increasing demographic diversification and access to communication technologies, USAmericans are more and more likely to interact with people from cultures unlike their own, a trend that offers both opportunity and challenge. Intercultural contact concerns are prominent especially within U.S. education, where web technology and other initiatives are reaching into more culturally varied populations, challenging educators and systems that routinely underserve those groups (Goodman, 2001). At the same time, USAmericans taking up the teaching profession continue to be overwhelmingly White and female, even as the population in schools is increasingly diverse (Sleeter, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 1997). It is important to build up the cross-cultural awareness and skills of this teaching population, given those demographic realities.

Whites continue to benefit from entrenched U.S. social systems that sustain White dominance as normal and cast minorities as "others" (Marx, 2004). Established teacher training programs and their still mostly White students often show little motivation to confront implications of their own normative unearned privilege. As a result, such programs still tend to produce White-centric educators unaware of how they routinely participate in excluding minority students from optimal schooling experiences (Vaught & Castagno, 2008; Lippin, 2004). The "contact hypothesis" posits that "intergroup prejudice and discrimination can be reduced by interpersonal contact between members of the respective social groups" (Brewer, 2000, p. 165). The less ethnocentric attitudes produced by successful contacts are necessary bases for any significant intercultural communication skill improvement (Gudykunst, 1998). Such skills, in turn, can help enable the kinds of contacts that alter people's subsequent presumptions and expectations of people unlike themselves.

Attempts to help prospective teachers work across racial lines often meet with spotty success (Cochran-Smith, 1995, 2000; Haberman & Post, 1992; Sonn, 2008). In particular, multicultural education and racism awareness, too frequently relegated to a single course or in-service workshop (Banks & Banks, 1997), are given short shrift in teacher preparation programs (NCATE, 1996), even as they are judged vital to the formation of teachers equipped to meet 21st century classroom challenges (Lippin, 2004; Schniedewind, 2005; Sleeter et al., 2005). This is a key missed opportunity, since Pettigrew & Tropp's (2000) meta-analysis found that intergroup contacts in structured organizational settings (such as schools) outperform travel- and tourism-based contacts in producing positive changes for participants. All levels of the U.S. educational system face reform pressures, even from their own accrediting bodies (e.g. National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2000). Many schooling initiatives have been underway to bridge disparities and enhance opportunities for marginalized groups (Carbado, 2002; Cook, 1978; Damico & Sparks, 1986; Duncan, 2002; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Hamm, Bradford Brown & Heck, 2005; Johnson & Johnson, 2000; Scott, 2004; Singh, 1991; Slavin, 1985; Stearns, 2004).

The Bridge Builders Program

Several programs have attempted to transform African American students' academic and social schooling experiences, though their effectiveness has been mixed (see, e.g., Duncan, 2002). The Bridge Builders program organized in 1996 to serve grade 9-12 African American males living in a large Pacific Northwest metropolitan area. Established and led by African American volunteer mentors from the community, the group provides social, emotional and academic support for these young men as it fosters their cultural pride and awareness through ongoing communal study of Black history, particularly its African influences. As "Prospective Gents" (the title Bridge Builders assigns its young men) move through the program's four years, they

experience an array of African influenced rites of passage rooted in the “Seven Barometers of Manhood” professed by the organization, which include spirituality, cultural awareness, effective use of time, community building, respect, entrepreneurship, and scholarship.

Early in their organizational history, to advance primarily the program’s “scholarship” aim (and after the city’s large urban public university had denied the group access to their programs), Bridge Builders partnered with the teacher education program at a small, private Pacific Northwest comprehensive university to create a formal academic mentoring program that linked the university’s preservice secondary education majors with Prospective Gents one evening each week at the university. There the young men were assigned university ID cards allowing them full computer lab, library, and athletic facility privileges. This new relationship was designed to increase scholastic support for the Prospective Gents as potentially successful college students, and to give these White, mostly female, economically privileged preservice secondary education teachers extended experience improving their ability to work across a common cultural barrier.

Aware that effective multicultural experiences need specific course, field, and debriefing components (Cochran-Smith, 1995, 2000; Haberman & Post, 1992), the Bridge Builders Academic Mentoring Program (hereafter called BAMP) was the primary field experience for two secondary education courses in the preservice teachers’ junior year: models of teaching & literacy in the fall and classroom management in the spring. A maximum 3 mentors-to-10 Gents ratio lent itself to detailed knowledge about what made each person tick. The novice teachers were trained in mentoring during class and organized into interdisciplinary triads for the program, with rotating leadership responsibilities. Mentors built relationships with their Gents, visiting them in their schools 3-5 times each term. The novice teachers met in class on campus for three hours on

Monday evenings, then worked in the academic mentoring program for three hours after dinner, which they also ate with the Gents.

Around 60 Prospective Gents came to campus each week. They began in 30-minute homebase groups of 8-10, each headed by interdisciplinary triads of preservice teachers (hereafter called academic mentors), who led a mini-lesson on a current problem or topic of interest for the Gents in the “Taalimu” (Swahili for “The Study”). Participants then moved to subject-specific classrooms for two 50-minute academic mentoring sessions, where up to three mentors monitored homework and school projects and facilitated solving particular academic problems brought by particular Gents. The academic mentors supported the Gents’ high school coursework, but also aided their computer literacy skills, strategic study skills, and general college education awareness during these sessions. Post-tutoring, the Gents also attended a weekly “Kikao Wa Ndugu” (Swahili for “Meeting of the Brothers”) gathering where they explored African and Black-related themes, often through rituals designed for that purpose.

One key Bridge Builders goal has been to ensure that each Prospective Gent is equipped with the skills and confidence to apply, attend, and thrive in post-secondary institutions. Since 1996, 100% of the Gents involved have graduated from high school in four years, 97% attended their first year of college, and 89% have returned for their second, third, and fourth years at universities of their choice. Academic success for the Gents is nearly four times the national average for African American males. BAMP itself has received substantial external grant support and been named a national Model of Excellence by the Association of Independent Liberal Arts Colleges for Teacher Education.

Evidence of BAMP’s broader transformative nature has become more calculable as long-term data on the academic mentors also accumulate. Whereas the national turnover rate for new

teachers is dismal, with nearly one-third of all new teachers leaving the profession within three years, in the seven years over which records have been maintained, 97% of BAMP mentors still were teaching in middle and high schools in the years following their initial certification, most in culturally diverse settings. Most reported higher levels of confidence and competence at dealing with discipline and diversity issues (two of the reasons most often cited as problematic by novice teachers leaving the profession) than their peers who had not had the BAMP experience prior to their first teaching jobs. In addition, BAMP veterans generally perceived themselves as leaders in their buildings, another indicator of professional longevity. In stark contrast to the high proportion of new teachers leaving the profession in their first three years, nearly one-third of BAMP veterans were pursuing advanced licenses and administrative credentials to become principals three-five years post graduation.

BAMP as a Means to Enhance Mentors' Communication Competencies

Humans tend to transform continuous social variables into discrete groupings of people, leading to greater presumed similarity, liking, and trust among in-group members, but also to often-inflated dissimilarities with out-group members (Brewer, 2000). This social sorting process has cognitive and emotional weight for individuals, which explains most people's inherent ethnocentricity and preference for homophily in their close relationships (Moody, 2001; Stephan & Stephan, 1992). Strong in-group identification easily distorts perceptions of threat from out-groups and thus reduces a person's chance to create mindfully flexible intercultural contact (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 1999).

The Contact Hypothesis

The contact hypothesis argues that the anxieties and prejudices a group's members hold about another's group should subside in the face of their contact with individual group members.

Dovidio et al. (2000) argued that intergroup contact could spotlight cognitively dissonant inconsistencies (Festinger, 1957) between individuals' non-prejudiced self-images and their actual feelings or intergroup actions. Resulting negative emotions can spur people to adopt more egalitarian attitudes and actions as a way to resolve that self-image vs. behavior dissonance and re-achieve perceived balance among one's attitudes and actions. Most contact research has examined resulting changes in participants' affect, beliefs, stereotyping, and social distance (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000), with successful contacts shown to mitigate such things as prejudice and bias (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969; Dovidio et al., 2000), friendship segregation (Moody, 2001), and intercultural uncertainty and anxiety (Stephan & Stephan, 1992; Stephan, Stephan & Gudykunst, 1999).

Intergroup contact's positive effects often extend to include additional members of the other's group, and sometimes to other out-groups as well (Pettigrew, 1998). Such generalization may be due to seeing out-group members more as individuals than as group members (Brewer & Miller, 1984), or by feeling subgroups combined into a common in-group identity (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993), or by diminishing the perceived importance of any single cultural distinction in the face of so many newly evident differences (Brewer, 2000; Dovidio et al., 2000; Hewstone & Brown, 1986), or because successful contact leads people through stages that encompass all of these realizations (Pettigrew, 1998). Theoretically, intergroup contact may succeed as much by highlighting new diversities between individuals as by helping participants feel like increasingly similar facsimiles of each other.

However, achieving contact aims in school settings is complicated by pervasive norms and structures that sustain inequality among different groups, including deficit views of learners, and schools' perceptions that some students' language, culture, and class are inadequate and unworthy

within the academic environment (Goodman, 2001; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Intergroup contact gains in schooling are severely challenged by these entrenched forces. Still, as a final unifying experience for many in society, schooling offers a key venue to establish patterns of equitable contact for life outside of school.

Intercultural Communication Competence

Successful intergroup contact should influence participants' actual intercultural communication abilities, not just their attitudes or beliefs. Anxiety / Uncertainty Management (AUM) theorists have shown that intercultural adjustment (i.e., application of cultural knowledge and skill) is impeded when participants are overly anxious or uncertain about dissimilar others (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986; Gudykunst, 1998). AUM theory posits anxiety (affective) and uncertainty (cognitive) management as key phenomena having a reciprocal, positive relationship with each other (Gudykunst, 1998), noting that people "can communicate effectively to the extent that they are able to manage their anxiety and accurately predict and explain others' attitudes, feelings, and behaviors" (Stephan et al., 1999, p. 614). Intercultural adjustment is stunted when prejudice and bias impede a person's empathy, awareness, and adjustment to the "other" and force anxiety or uncertainty above manageable thresholds (Stephan et al., 1999). If uncertainty is too high, strangers act awkwardly because they cannot predict or accurately interpret each others' behaviors. When anxiety exceeds manageable thresholds, strangers communicate in oversimplified, stereotypical, often exaggerated and negative ways that apply only their own cultural frames of reference to understanding an encounter (Gudykunst, 1998; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Unmanageable uncertainty or anxiety exacerbates the likelihood of incompetent communication across cultural lines.

Communication skill in such situations relies on a person's intent and ability to understand another person's actions as they were meant, and to know what that person logically expects from the encounter (Ting-Toomey, 1999; Triandis, 1973). Communication competence commonly is described in terms of an episode's situational *appropriateness* and its *effectiveness* in achieving mutually shared meanings and the communicators' preferred outcomes (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002; Stephan et al., 1999). Intercultural communication competence involves an additional *satisfaction* criterion, assessing how carefully the interactants address each other's valued (e.g., cultural) identities during the interaction (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Although identities are negotiated tacitly in all communication (Goffman, 1959), intercultural contacts often bring about "well-meaning clashes" with identity implications, where participants often behave appropriately according to their own culture's norms, yet unwittingly threaten another person's desired identity (Ting-Toomey, 1999, pp. 22-23). Such face-saving difficulties are amplified when the parties differ in status or power from another (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Teacher-student interactions exemplify this inherent power disparity, complicating communication especially for the lower status parties involved (Goodman, 2001; Cazden, 2001; Sabee & Wilson, 2005). Communication animated by appropriate cultural and situational knowledge, motivations, and skill is most likely to earn positive competence judgments (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Gudykunst, 1995; Kim, 1997; Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Effective intergroup contact can lead to more skilled communication by reducing the biases that heighten anxiety and uncertainty (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000; Schwarzwald & Amir, 1996; Stephan & Stephan, 1992). AUM research and modeling that show reactions to others (e.g., ambiguity tolerance, empathy, behavioral adaptability), situational processes (e.g., interactive scripts, normative support for interacting with others), and connections with others (e.g., intimacy

and interdependence of relationships, quality and quantity of contacts) influence a person's ability to manage anxiety and uncertainty (Gudykunst, 1998). Successful contact thus also can create the manageable cognitive and affective conditions necessary to see (and feel) the situation appropriately, and therefore approach competent communication within it (Gudykunst, 1998).

Skilled intercultural communication requires more than simply gaining information and managing anxieties, however. Competent communicators are flexible in that they offer adroit, culture- and situation-appropriate performances that achieve interactional goals in ways that satisfy all participants (Ting-Toomey, 1999). AUM theorists and others describe this flexibility as arising from "mindfulness," which includes creating new categories to interpret actions, seeking new information, and being open to alternate explanations for events (Langer, 1989). The BAMP mentors, for example, were challenged to re-interpret the significance of using certain Swahili terms or discussing the "shades of blackness" that mattered to many of the Gents. Managing anxiety and uncertainty has proven key to maintaining these 'mindful' conditions, and thus to producing intercultural adjustments that are appropriate, effective, and satisfying for the people involved (Gudykunst, 1998; Stephan et al., 1999).

Key intercultural actions are those that display respect appropriately, describe rather than simply judge, express empathy, problem-solve and harmonize relations within groups, regulate interactional beginnings, turn-taking, and endings, tolerate ambiguity, and show awareness of one's perceptions as personally rather than globally true (Koester & Olebe, 1988; Ruben, 1976). In cross-racial instruction, such interactional abilities are affected by the communicators' mindfulness in managing their uncertainties, anxieties, and actions as they navigate structural disparities in power and privilege. Anxiety and uncertainty management are influenced by (among other forces) participants' inter-group contacts (Gudykunst, 1998; Kim, 1997). Thus, these novice

teachers' intercultural communication abilities should be affected by their extended involvement in intergroup contacts.

Six Conditions for Successful Intergroup Contact

Mere presence or quantity of intergroup contact is insufficient to reduce prejudice, and can increase it (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Eller & Abrams, 2004; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000). Seminal research found that intergroup contact reduced intergroup prejudice only in situations where the two groups had relatively equal status, common goals, cooperative interdependence, and official endorsement of the contact (Allport, 1954). Recent re-examinations (including meta-analysis) of the literature affirm research support for these optimal conditions, plus two additional: the opportunity for personal acquaintance between members, and the development of intergroup friendships (Dovidio et al., 2003; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000). Our observations show BAMP's mentor-Gent contact fulfilled these conditions to varying degrees.

One, the *members of both groups should be of equal status*, both inside and outside the contact situation. Although the privileged mentors clearly 'outranked' the Gents in these academic settings, two relational dynamics added back some equity. First, each of the academic mentors attended at least one (several attended more) of the Gents' weekly "Kikao Wa Ndugu" meetings as invited participant observer. These mentors experienced--many for the first time--being a mystified 'minority' group member, wading the shallows of cultural rituals that plainly had deep, clear meaning for the Gents (Eifler & Greene, 2005). Additionally, several academic mentors reported that when they ran into 'their' Gents in the high schools where they student-taught, the Gents discouraged peers from making trouble for the student teacher. Although neither experience mitigated their power disparity overall, both offered the participants some leveling influence within their unequal power relationships.

Two, *cooperative interdependence* occurred between the groups. The two groups collaborated on the scholarship aspect of Bridge Builders' mission, and in so doing they relied on each other to accomplish each group's respective goals. This dynamic was apparent in the program's mission and goals, and especially during the tutoring sessions when the Gents' particular scholastic problems became the focus of everyone's attention and work.

Three, the groups should *share common goals*. These two groups were not competitive, but worked in concert toward complementary goals. While sharing an overarching concern with helping the Gents prepare to be successful and confident college students, the two groups also pursued slightly different agendas from each other, as the academic mentors' and Gents' complementary program goals attest. Previous contact research demonstrates, however, that this criterion's importance for successful contact pales when cooperative interdependence is present (Brown & Hewstone, 2005), as is the case in this situation.

Four, the Bridge Builders program clearly experienced *strong normative and institutional support*. Institutional buy-in came from the University's administration and faculty, and its offices of financial aid, admissions, public safety, payroll, athletics, food service, and registration, as well as via 26 local high schools and several community funding agencies. Administrators in all of these areas referenced their institutional missions as grounds for program support and growth, supplying key structural support for these contacts (Eifler, Kerksen-Griep, & Thacker, 2008).

Five, the mentoring-student relationship at the core of the program did not focus on providing *friendship opportunity* among the participants, although more personal contacts sometimes did develop. However, BAMP did conform to a softer version of this criterion in that participants' contact was not superficial, extended beyond the immediate contact situation (e.g.,

mentors spending time at Gents' home high schools and sporting events), and involved many of the people from both groups (Martin & Nakayama, 2003).

Six and finally, Bridge Builder participants experienced regular, ongoing *personal interaction* across group boundaries. "Moving from polite interactions to meaningful engagement" (Zuniga, Nagada, & Sevig, 2002, p. 8) requires the sort of sustained intergroup communication characteristic of BAMP. Although always limited by the barrier of societal privilege, the program's interactive characteristics over time provided chances for individual Gents and academic mentors to listen, question, and develop less role-bound understandings of each other.

Overall, BAMP's transformative learning experiences appear to satisfy several accepted conditions for successful contact at the structural, curricular, and interactional levels, especially in the areas of cooperative interdependence, institutional support, shared goals, and ongoing interpersonal interaction. If these conditions are sufficient, BAMP's practices should have helped the academic mentors begin to view the Gents more individually, perceive a common in-group identity, and/or notice the many ways they differ (and thus come to care less about specific differences). We determined the existing intergroup contact circumstances should be sufficient to keep mentors' anxieties and uncertainties within manageable ranges, and thus facilitate mentors' increasingly mindful intercultural communication choices with the Gents over time. We posed the following hypothesis to check this assumption:

H1: All facets of these academic mentors' observed intercultural communication competence will improve significantly over the course of their eight months' involvement in BAMP's academic mentor-Gent interactions.

Method

Participants

Human subjects approval was obtained for the study. Participants in this case were all 12 novice teachers (9 women and 3 men) working as academic mentors in BAMP during the academic year studied. Each also served as an observer during the study, over time assessing interactions involving several of their peers (see *Procedures*). All were secondary education majors in their junior year at university. They ranged in age from 20 to 22. All identified their ethnicity as White.

Measuring Intercultural Communication Competence

The academic mentors utilized the Behavioral Assessment Scale for Intercultural Communication (BASIC; Koester & Olebe, 1988; Olebe & Koester, 1989) to observationally assess their mentoring peers' interactional competencies. The BASIC measure was adapted from Ruben's (1976) similar behavioral categories and items, which Ruben designed for use by expert observers to assess trainees' intercultural communication skills. Koester and Olebe (1988) created the BASIC as a more simply stated and familiarly situated measure that "could be reliably used by peer, nontrained observers" (p. 241).

On six of the scale's eight items, observers link the observed person's actions with one of four or five descriptions of increasingly skilled behaviors associated with an aspect of culture-general communication competence. For example, these excerpts from the *interaction posture* item distinguish the extremes of less (1) from more (4) competent actions in this area:

(1) High Evaluative. ... Judgmental comments follow others' opinions very quickly, indicating little thought was given to what was being said before judging it.

(4) Descriptive. ... provides evaluative responses, but only after gathering enough information to provide a response that is appropriate to the individuals involved. She or he

asks questions, restates others' ideas, and appears to gather information before responding evaluatively.

Aside from *interaction posture*, the BASIC's observational assessment categories include *communicating respect, orientations to knowledge, empathy, interaction management, and role tolerance*. The remaining two BASIC items describe competent *task* and *relational role behaviors* (respectively), asking observers to rate how often the observed person (1 = never; 5 = continually) enacts those behaviors. We adapted the BASIC scale for instructional settings by changing "my roommate" to "my teaching colleague" throughout the measure. Koester and Olebe's (1988) final analysis of the eight BASIC items revealed a one-factor solution associated with intercultural communication ability. They reported a .84 Cronbach's alpha score for the BASIC scale, consistent with the present study's acceptable .83 Cronbach's alpha score for the measure.

Procedures

In order to access intimate knowledge of each mentor's nuanced communication tendencies, we utilized academic mentors' structured observations as analytic tools in this case. As described earlier, the academic mentors were already well engaged in "Critical Friends" peer review protocols (Cushman, 1996), learning how to utilize constructive criticism from and with their peers to strengthen their subsequent performance as teachers. The use of the BASIC peer review observational instrument in the present study reflects the culture of this teacher preparation approach and model of self- and peer-reflective, grassroots professional development; it is consistent with the intellectual and emotional rigor demanded of learners in transformational approaches to education. More concretely, we (and their course instructors) found that mentors' temptations to gloss over peers' shortcomings were mitigated by BAMP's fairly relentless focus on improving instruction for their own students via peer and self-review, including follow-up

discussions focused on potential solutions to thorny problems. We are confident the peers conscientiously evaluated the details of each others' observed interactions to the best of their abilities.

Each of the 12 academic mentors used the BASIC protocol to evaluate the two other mentors in her/his teaching triad early in October, after BAMP had been underway for 4 weeks. We wanted the mentors to have several weeks of scaffolded observational experiences before assessing each others' communication practices. All 24 of those October assessments were returned to us two weeks later, with each academic mentor being evaluated by two peers. The second round of data collection occurred late in April the following year, once the mentors had been involved in the program for approximately 8 months. Each of the 12 mentors again used the BASIC protocol to evaluate at least one other member of her/his immediate teaching triad. Importantly, none of the mentors re-assessed a peer they had evaluated in October, because the mentor teaching triads had been shuffled in January in order to give BAMP mentors experience working both with junior/senior and with frosh/sophomore aged groups. Again, all 12 mentors were observed and evaluated; 17 peer assessments were returned. To protect observees' anonymity, each mentor maintained a pseudonym (e.g., "Zena") for their observers to write atop the BASIC observation forms. Only the mentors, not the researchers, knew which pseudonyms belonged to which of their peers. This procedure hid each mentor's true identity from the researchers while still showing us that each nickname (i.e., each academic mentor) received from peers two pre- and at least one post-assessment of her/his intercultural communication practices.

Results

Paired samples *t*-tests were conducted to examine differences between the academic mentors' observed communication abilities between October and in April. Each two evaluators'

October ratings of each academic mentor were averaged to create a single “pretest” rating for each mentor. Any multiply evaluated mentors’ ratings in April also were averaged to produce a single “posttest” rating for each mentor. We used the pseudonyms to match each academic mentor’s October and April ratings. Comparing the sums of all eight communication competence dimensions showed that the academic mentors’ overall intercultural communication abilities increased significantly between October ($M = 30.3, SD = 2.06$) and April ($M = 35.2, SD = 3.05$), as predicted, $t = 5.50, p < .001$. Hypothesis One was supported.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

Exploring each individual competence dimension revealed significant gains in five of the eight observed competencies, and non-significant gains in the remaining three abilities. Applying the Bonferroni correction to ward off possible familywise Type I error reduced the acceptable p value from .05 to .006; three of the eight dimensions maintained statistically significant gains at that level. Findings showed significant improvements observed in these academic mentors’ abilities to express appropriate respect ($t = 4.77, p < .001$), give descriptive responses ($t = 7.99, p < .001$), and display appropriate empathy ($t = 6.08, p < .001$). Their abilities to demonstrate ambiguity tolerance ($t = 3.54, p < .01$), and embody skillful interaction management ($t = 2.97, p < .05$) also nearly cleared the Bonferroni-corrected bar. The mentors’ observed ability to “own” their perceptions as personal rather than universal did not improve to a significant degree ($t = 1.66, p = .12$); neither did the mentors’ observed abilities to enact group problem-solving behaviors ($t = 1.75, p = .10$) and group relational maintenance behaviors ($t = 1.93, p = .07$) improve to a significant degree, although all of these scores improved between the October and April assessments.

Discussion

We hypothesized that these novice teachers' intercultural communication competencies would improve over the course of their 8-month involvement as academic mentors in BAMP. Results showed the predicted improvement in intercultural communication abilities, understood more specifically as significantly positive changes overall, and specifically in three of the eight observed dimensions of competence assessments (Koester & Olebe, 1988). Academic mentors' observed improvements in expressing respect, displaying empathy for others, and communicating tolerance for ambiguity showed the largest and most significant differences over time, while their abilities to manage interactions gracefully and offer descriptive rather than simply evaluative responses also improved to a nearly significant degree. .

These findings align with existing theory and research. AUM research on cross-cultural adjustment, for example, attributes one's ability to manage anxiety and uncertainty to one's ambiguity tolerance, empathy, behavioral adaptability, and knowledge of appropriate interactive scripts, among other forces (Gudykunst, 1998). Very similar attitudinal phenomena (e.g., reduced bias, openness to others) are established outcomes of successful intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000). Successful intergroup contact should enhance communication competence by reducing one's biases about outgroup members, thus keeping uncertainty and anxiety within manageable thresholds and allowing more mindful and sophisticated management of interpersonal actions such as displaying respect, empathy, evaluation, and ambiguity tolerance, as was found in these data.

Non-significant improvements appeared in these mentors' observed group task and group maintenance role behaviors, and in their tendency to personalize their perceptions (e.g., by using "I" language). Although effective intergroup contact in this case enhanced certain behavioral

expressions of the mentors' key intercultural attitudes, perhaps these findings also affirm the important role of targeted communication skills acquisition in improving intercultural communication competence (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Unlike the study's three most significant improvement dimensions (e.g., expressing empathy), perhaps these three actions are more distant behavioral extensions of the attitude adjustments effective contact is known to provide. As evidenced by their inclusion as topics in a variety of human communication courses, improving these particular competencies (i.e., social perspective-taking and perception-checking, group task- and socio-emotional leadership) may require more specific content and cultural knowledge and training than was provided by social learning from intergroup contact in the context of this program. Scores did improve in all eight observed categories, though not to equal degrees.

Caveats

Although this case largely met conditions known to impact contact's success (Dovidio et al., 2003) and fell within the scope of established theories explaining why such contact should affect communication competence (Stephan et al., 1999), note this was not a controlled, experimental manipulation capable of isolating only "intergroup contact" as the variable responsible for changes in this naturalistic setting. The mentors' involvement in BAMP coursework and their learning experiences with the Gents certainly influenced any paradigm shifts they experienced during their involvement in the program. Such acquired knowledge, however, is one of the forces thought to affect intergroup contact's influence on prejudice reduction and communication (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Thus our findings are consistent with theoretical expectations, but these *in situ* results must be interpreted in light of the constraints inherent in our situational and methodological choices. For example, our small sample size ($N = 12$) limited what we could do experimentally, so we chose to not to reduce the number of available

participants further by splitting off a control group of mentors. As a result, this should be read as a theoretically grounded case study rather than as an unproblematically generalizable experiment about transformative intergroup contact's cross-situational effects on intercultural communication competence.

Also, using peer assessors gave us access to the insights of those most intimately aware of their BAMP peers' sustained communicative actions throughout the program's lifespan, but it also introduced a concern. Although we used multiple assessors for each mentor, facilitated entirely different peer assessors for each mentor's October and April ratings, clearly guaranteed peer assessors' anonymity, emphatically and repeatedly encouraged raters' objectivity, and counseled them against kindheartedly exaggerating any peer ratings, those perceptual distortions were possible in these data, even though any given mentor's second round raters knew nothing of the first round raters' assessments of that mentor. We lacked data that might have let us triangulate these peer competence assessments with judgments from others' standpoints, but both contact-based research (e.g., Eller & Abrams, 2004) and these mentors' journaling for their courses indicated that the number and intensity of the academic mentors' required collaborations need not (and did not) push them to be artificially kind or forgiving of each other's actions over time.

As part of their coursework and professional formation, all BAMP preservice teachers had been inculcated into a style of peer review called "Critical Friends' Protocols," adapted from guidelines of the Coalition of Essential Schools movement (Cushman, 1996). The mentors routinely sat down with each other's observation notes and lesson videotapes to talk about their works' strengths, weaknesses, possible improvements, and research-based implementation suggestions. This intellectually and emotionally rigorous process was the norm for these observers; simply affirming one another's practices was not considered acceptable feedback. The

BASIC scale's reliability coefficients and BAMP participants' informal conversations with us indicated that their peer observations here were taken seriously enough to be valid. We also are confident that the BASIC scale's detailed distinctions worked as they were designed, and were clear enough for observers to discern and indicate correctly what they saw occurring. Still, future studies of contact's effects on communication competence will benefit from including more data sources and data points for analysis.

Implications

On top of its role helping the Gents advance their "scholarship" barometer, participating in BAMP appears to have been a transformative (not just incremental) learning experience for its academic mentors (see Mezirow, 1997). Arriving with relatively limited initial frames of reference, these mentors came to "unlearn common sense beliefs that may be common but unjustified" (McGonigal, 2005, p. 1). Journal entries from their courses at the time showed these school-loving mentors feeling disoriented to find themselves facing whole groups who did not see schooling as positive. Once mentors had noted firsthand how little culturally attuned pedagogy or practice appeared in their Gents' own schools, several reported now seeing limitations of the Gents' classrooms--which, disorientingly, resembled the ones where they themselves had excelled. Several mentors also reported experiencing near total "other-ness" during their visits to the Gents' Kikao Wa Ndugu sessions, suddenly realizing how little their White-normative educational training had prepped them for the rituals, history, and customs of African Americans. As one novice teacher recounted, "then they all stood to sing the Black national anthem. What was I supposed to do--stay seated or stand? Who even knew there *was* a Black national anthem!?"

Though facing institutionalized forces invested in resisting such growth (Marx, 2004), students are able to engage diversity productively at structural, curricular, and interactional levels,

requiring educational practices that raise consciousness and bridge differences through weeks or months of sustained intergroup communication (Zuniga et al., 2002), as apparently occurred via BAMP. Although novice teachers' instructional practices tend to be driven more by how they themselves were taught as students than by rigorous application of the concepts and practices learned in their education classes (Ball, 1990, Lortie, 1975), BAMP's curricular features were consistent with existing research about successful teacher education programs in multicultural awareness and race consciousness (Schniewind, 2005; Sleeter et al., 2005). Educating BAMP's mentors honored several elements of the "culturally relevant teaching" Ladson-Billings (1994) touted, for example, such as apprenticing learners within a learning community rather than in isolation, focusing on both written and oral literacy, engaging the status quo as change agents, and letting learners' experiences enter their curriculum.

As a result, mentors' BAMP participation seems to have provided the kind of intergroup contact experience to transform not simply mentors' attitudes and expectations, but also their actual intercultural communication skills. BAMP apparently helped its academic mentors notice and critique how their initial assumptions constrained their perceptions of and communication with the Gents, develop different and more inclusive expectations about interacting, and continually try out their ideas, skills, and fortitude with the Gents, whose responses offered immediate feedback about how those worked for them. Synthesizing their readings with authentic field experiences and scaffolded critical reflection seems to have encouraged mentors to assess and challenge old values and visions (Burbules & Berk, 1999) in ways that have continued in many of these mentors' expressed desire to be change agents in their current post-graduation teaching positions. Adding weight to the findings of the current study, aside from defying national trends simply by staying in the profession, the majority of BAMP graduates thus far have sought

out and exercised instructional leadership within school situations where cross-cultural contacts are the rule rather than the exception.

Conclusion

Working within structural constraints, teachers' communication choices help shape the identities and expectations that frame school-based contacts across cultural barriers. "Changing schools' perceptions of students' language culture and class...[helps us] glimpse the 'multiple layers of communication that are part of [students'] contextual worlds'" (Goodman, 2001, p. 17). Given the normative Whiteness and uncertain provenance of novices' earlier-life teaching models, many novice teachers start their careers with a long way to go toward achieving ethnorelative cultural awareness and communication competence in their instruction. Anti-racism education benefits when prospective teachers learn to unpack and engage other persons' communicative nuances amidst the ebb and flow of classroom life. In this case, BAMP itself was revealed as a dynamic learning partnership, offering growth also for its academic mentors and their institution, the ostensible service providers in this equation. The shape of BAMP training, planning, and teaching all have changed as a result of interacting with the Gents in these ways; those students also have become important teachers for their mentors and peers.

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Table 1

October-to-April Differences Observed on the BASIC Communication Competence Dimensions

Note: *Italicized dimensions'* changes were significant at the Bonferroni-corrected $p < .006$ level.

Communication Competence Dimensions	October		April		<i>t</i> -score
	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	
Summed B.A.S.I.C. Score	30.30	2.06	35.20	3.05	5.50***
1. <i>Respond Descriptively</i>	3.13	.30	3.90	.28	7.99***
2. <i>Display Empathy</i>	3.63	.61	4.53	.61	6.08***
3. <i>Express Respect & Positive Regard</i>	4.20	.65	5.00	.00	4.77***
4. Ambiguity Tolerance	4.13	.61	4.77	.42	3.54**
5. Interaction Management	4.00	.53	4.60	.60	2.97*
6. Group Maintenance Behaviors	3.93	.46	4.40	.71	1.93, $p = .07$ (n.s.)
7. Group Task Role Behaviors	3.87	.52	4.30	.70	1.75, $p = .10$ (n.s.)
8. Personal Knowledge Orientation	3.40	.60	3.70	.46	1.66, $p = .12$ (n.s.)

Note. October $N = 24$; April $N = 17$. Range of possible scores was 1-5 for all scale items except numbers 1 and 8 above, which ranged from 1-4.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$