The Diversity Opportunity Tool

Abstract

As predominantly white colleges and universities have been more successful in attracting greater numbers of students of color to their campuses, they have become acutely aware that the integration of different ethnic and racial groups does not come without tensions. Many students and faculty within the majority population are not prepared to deal with this diversity. Their inability to cope with campus diversity is manifest in the many hostile acts of intolerance directed at persons of color on campuses across the country. Less overt intolerant behavior abounds. These acts of intolerance often cause students of color to feel isolated and uncomfortable. For both the offender and the victim, the opportunity to learn from the pluralism of the community is lost when these acts are not responded to, or are responded to in non-productive ways. Students and faculty who want to address the problem of intolerance on college campuses find that effective resources seldom are available.

The project has produced an innovative problem-solving multimedia tool to improve the ability of students, faculty, and staff to deal with overt and subtle acts of intolerance on their campuses. This product is a computer driven, interactive CD simulation, called the Diversity Opportunity Tool (DOT). DOT simulates several common "critical incidents" of intolerance (e.g., direct verbal harassment, or discriminatory acts). User selection of an incident triggers a brief video depicting a typical incident of intolerance. Users are asked to consider a number of alternative responses to the incident and to select among them; selection triggers a vignette of the likely outcome of the response. The computer prompts users to seek further information and resources that would help in dealing with incidents of the kind being considered.

Although application of this technology can take several forms, the most common would probably be utilization by an individual student, the training of residential campus student affairs personnel (including professional and student workers), and orientation for graduate teaching assistants and new professors. DOT is more likely to be used by faculty than other common strategies for addressing racial and ethnic climate concerns because it can be experienced privately, it is research-based, and can be used as a teaching tool in some courses. Also, when production is incorporated into a for-credit course, the production process itself can become a transportable and replicable learning experience for those who use the process to update or make DOT campus-specific.

The Diversity Opportunity Tool
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Introduction and Statement of the Problem

In recent years, many colleges and universities have increased the racial and ethnic diversity of their student populations. This is the good news. The bad -news is that few colleges and universities have successfully addressed the resultant tensions and intolerance among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds so that the opportunities diversity offers all college students to develop relevant knowledge, understanding, and capabilities can be realized. Indeed, the racial and ethnic integration of higher education has exposed just how pervasive racism and ethnic intolerance is in the United States—a reality that has been demonstrated 'in recent months by widely publicized acts of hostility perpetrated against persons of color on many campuses.

Acts of intolerance on college campuses have escalated to the point that former Education Secretary Cavazos called on college and university presidents to "aid him and [former] President Bush in building a more tolerant, pluralistic America that encourages and draws on the talents of all its citizens" (Higher Education and National Affairs, 1990). The increasing prevalence of the acts and the damage done to the victims directly and to the lean-Ling environments for all students underscores that there is a pressing need to address the problem of racial and ethnic intolerance on college campuses. This need is likely to become even greater in the near future.

At the same time, the racial and ethnic isolation of students in the nation's schools is increasing, as the gains made through desegregation fade away (Orfield, Monfort and Aaron, 1989) and people of color comprise increasing proportions of families and individuals with low incomes.

Overview of the Project

The Center for Education and Human Development Policy at Vanderbilt University responded to this challenge by developing a research-based multimedia tool for learning and practicing effective strategies for understanding and addressing behaviors that reflect racial and ethnic intolerance. This has been accomplished through the development of a set of computer-driven, CD-based simulations that represent common examples of both overt and subtle forms of intolerance and insensitivity toward African Americans. These simulations and the information base that complements them encompass: (1) problematic incidents that are generic in character and with which product users can identify; (2) alternative ways of addressing the problems; (3) research and expert judgments that facilitate the evaluation of the outcomes of different "solutions"; (4) resources (e.g., materials, programs, and sources of assistance) that might be used to learn more about and deal with racial and ethnic intolerance; and (5) a data base of information. We call this interactive multimedia product to facilitate experiential learning the Diversity Opportunity Tool (DOT).

In addition to producing an innovative problem-solving tool that equips students, faculty, and staff with the knowledge and the skills necessary to deal with both the perception and reality of racial and ethnic intolerance on campus effectively, DOT provides colleges and universities with information about the process of developing interactive multimedia so that the process itself might be used as a teaching tool and to accommodate to specific campus conditions.

DOT Goals

At most campuses, there are faculty, students, and staff who are responsive to the call to embrace the school's racial and ethnic diversity. They express a willingness to do something when they encounter malicious or unknowing acts of racial and ethnic insensitivity or intolerance. Yet, they may discount particular incidents as unintentional or insignificant and they often don't know what to do that would make a difference. This lack of knowledge and. personal confidence undermines their willingness to change their own behavior or to undertake efforts to change the behavior of others.

DOT deals with two major sources of tension and conflict among persons of different racial and ethnic groups: (1) inappropriate behaviors that derive from ignorance and ineptitude; and (2) behaviors that are racist in origin and are manifest because it is not clear what behaviors the culture of the institution will sanction. DOT will not, in itself, have much impact on prejudice that reflects deeply held beliefs. But there are reasons to believe that such racism is a decreasingly small part of the conflict and unease among different races (Jaynes and Williams, 1989; Katz, 1988). Moreover, DOT should help further isolate such bigotry and undermine its effects on the campus climate.

We see DOT having its effect on two levels. It can be used to change the behavior of individuals and its use will serve to manifest institutional norms of acceptance of racial and ethnic differences among the members of the campus Community. Obviously, the first outcome will contribute to the second and the second will reinforce the effects of the first.

As noted, DOT is directed toward people who are mindful-or, at least, responsive to admonition that they should be mindful of the benefits provided by a learning environment that includes and is responsive to persons from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. DOT's immediate goal is to supply these persons with the awareness and skills needed to deal directly and individually with behavior that reflects racial and ethnic intolerance. We do this by providing these individuals with a realistic way of recognizing and assessing subtle and overt acts of intolerance, their potential impact on the victim, the consequences of inappropriate or inadequate responses to the acts, and practical means of responding to the acts. This sensitivity, knowledge and competence should improve the learner's behavior and, very importantly, give the individual the confidence to assume the role of teacher and advocate.

As more students, faculty and staff leam new and better ways of relating to persons of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, the cumulative impact on the campus climate will grow. But the potential of DOT transcends its effects on the individual participants. DOT motivates participants to actively engage others whose behavior is insensitive and intolerant, and to do so with skills that will avoid the defensive and counterproductive reactions that often result from accusations or blame. Unchallenged acts that undermine group relations, of course, undermine efforts to develop a sense of community, but the character of challenges will determine their effectiveness.

Different people see the world through different frames, as Goffman (1974) states:

> What people understand to be the organization of their experience, they buttress, and perforce, self-fulfillingly. They develop a corpus of cautionary tales, games and other scenarios which elegantly confirm a frame relevant view of the workings of the world ... in countless ways and increasingly social life takes up and freezes itself into the understandings we have of it. (Pg. 563)

The goal of DOT is to create new frames for understanding the sources of intolerance and insensitivity that facilitate changes in behavior that will permit members of the campus community to derive all they can from the experience that racial and ethnic diversity provides.

As we noted earlier, intolerance and other sources of interracial and interethnic tensions victimize all persons of color. But the specific sources of conflict and ways of remediating them will vary by race and ethnic group. This version of DOT focuses on relationships between whites and African-Americans; additional versions can be developed to address the interaction between other racial and ethnic groups.

DOT focuses on developing competencies and positive attitudes of whites toward persons of color, especially African Americans. Intergroup ineptitude is not confined to the white population, of course. In some cases the responses of African Americans to apparently discriminatory behaviors will exacerbate racial tensions. Studies show, however, that African Americans and other persons of color are significantly less likely to be prejudiced against whites (Jaynes and Williams, 1989).

What is DOT and How DOT Works

Overview

Users of DOT can be individuals, small groups, or classes of learners. The user of the DOT -CD can experience a number of different situations that represent common problems in race relations. The program allows the user to explore different explanations of the problem and different "solutions" and to witness the consequences of different responses.

The Interactive Video Medium

Problems to be solved are anchored in familiar situations depicted on CD. As the Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt (1990) point out, the interactive CD medium has several advantages. First, it allows learners to develop pattern recognition skills that, in turn, facilitate recall and transfer. Second, video is "dynamic, visual, and spatial." Learners can form rich mental models of problem situations. Third, CD technology allows random access. This last attribute encourages learners to reexamine assumptions, compare different situations, and pursue alternative paths to understanding. Interactive video [ad subsequent CD technology] has come of age on college campuses and its importance as an educational tool seems limitless (Getz, 1990).

Interactive CD-based simulation is not a new innovation. However, DOT represents the first effort to use this technology to deal directly with interracial interaction and relations, to incorporate a larger source of information and data that is keyed to the video, and allow users to engage a variety of issues, consult relevant research, and identify sources of assistance all in a self-contained product. Future versions of DOT will allow for this information and data to be modifiable and easily adapted to particular situations. The Learning Technology Center (LTC) at Peabody College of Vanderbilt is involved in a variety of research projects that utilize this exciting and versatile interactive technology. Previous projects include the Jasper Woodbury Series and the Personal Advisor project. One of the co-principal investigators for DOT (Hawley) was the director of the Personal Advisor project. The LTC has provided a unique resource and production capability that facilitated the development of DOT.

The flexibility of this technology has allowed for the creation of a number of different scenarios and a variety of response options to be incorporated into the users' choices.

> **Step 1** : Users sit at a computers terminal that accesses software that is linked to the videodisc player. The user selects one of two types of incidents to consider that represent racial insensitivity or intolerance. A simple user's manual 5-6 pages is provided. No special knowledge of computers is necessary. Once the machines are turned on and the diskette-based program is accessed, it is as simple as a video game.

> **Step 2:** The selection of an option through the computer triggers a brief video that is shown on a TV screen. As the user moves through the program, a variety of options are provided to engage the user in the activity.

> **Step 3: DOT** presents a brief scenario of particular types of responses selected by the user and the outcomes of each (e.g., to react to the act or not to react and the outcomes of each option). Information about how campus users respond is stored in a data base and accessible to campus administrators. In addition, information and available resources germane to the incident being considered is provided. For example, the reasons why different persons might respond in different ways to the situation presented can be explored.

> **Step 4:** The user is invited to try and to consider different responses and examine, through the computer-based information, the research, theory and expert opinion which supports the specified connection between the response and the incident and the likely outcome of that response.

> **Step 5:** At the conclusion of the simulation the computer prompts the user to seek further ` information and resources that will help in dealing with incidents of the kind being considered. Users are able to get a printout of the data base information and available resources for future ` reference.

> **Step 6:** The computer also offers users suggestions about activities that might improve race relations on their campus. Other cases, in narrative form, can be provided and the user can be coached to recognize the relationship between these situations and the video-based scenarios.

Theory and Research Underlying DOT

The behaviors we seek to change derive from two broad sources-prejudice and social incompetence resulting from ignorance and inexperience. We are concerned both with the actions that initially reflect prejudice and incompetence and the responses to them. Frequently, responses to acts of intolerance and insensitivity are either: (1) not forthcoming because people do not know what to do, or what they should do; or (2) counterproductive because they confirm biases, increase tensions, or result in defensive counteractions.

Whether the intolerant behaviors are the product of prejudice or social incompetence, they are unlikely to be changed by exhortation, conventional workshops on "diversity," or reading relevant information.

Bringing about changes in behavior relating to race relations through education requires that the learning experiences involved be exceptionally effective. Thus, we have turned to research on learning for the design principles that shape DOT's development. We were advised in this task by an exceptional group of scholars in the Learning Technology Center (LTC) at Vanderbilt University. Table 1 below identifies several propositions from research on learning and the implications these propositions have for the design of DOT. These propositions are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive.

How DOT Is Used

The simulations can be used in several ways, with the most common of these being by one individual or small groups. While DOT can be effective in all types of campus environments, it can be especially useful for residential campuses, in part because the direct and indirect effects of acts of intolerance are likely to be more critical on these campuses than on- commuter campuses. Residential campuses provide special opportunities for applying the product because they have "captive audiences." These statements are not meant to imply that DOT cannot be effective on commuter campuses.

A study of Vanderbilt undergraduates showed that 90% of the African American students who reported having experienced discriminatory acts say that these acts were perpetrated by other students (Campbell, Clayton-Pedersen, and Cornfield, 1991). Hence the need to engage the student population in these efforts seems obvious. DCT can be introduced as part of the training for resident advisors and other student affairs personnel who would have substantial contact with students. DOT can be a productive tool for training student organization leaders (e.g., fraternities, sororities and other service and social student organizations). These highly organized subgroups can be made more open and welcoming to all students if they adopt these tools as part of their leadership training prior to activities designed to solicit new members.

New arrivals to campus communities often look to those more experienced members for cues that indicate "acceptable behavior." Thus, an effective way to strengthen a campus ethos supporting positive race relations is to influence the information new members receive during the socialization process (i.e., to train those who socialize new members to productively' deal with acts of racial and ethnic intolerance as they surface among the community's newest members). Productively dealing with acts of intolerance allows the offended person to engage the offender in dialogue in ways that maximize the learning opportunity that the situation provides. Not only does this encourage further dialogue on issues of race and ethnicity, it also communicates the value that higher education institutions place on open and responsible discussion of all types of issues. Freshman orientation committees and students who help freshmen throughout their first year will be more sensitive and predisposed to respond to overt and subtle acts of intolerance and be better able to deal with them if they are exposed to DOT.

DOT can, of course, be useful to faculty and we expect that it will be used in centers to improve teaching, especially programs for graduate assistants and graduate preparation for the professorate, and in campus-wide efforts to address intolerance. DOT is more likely to be used by faculty than are other popular strategies for addressing racial and ethnic climate concerns because: 1) it is indirect and can be experienced privately; 2) it is research-based; and 3) it lends itself to use as a teaching tool in courses taught in social psychology, sociology, human development and education.

Table 1
Selected Propositions from Research on Learning and Their Implications
for the Design of the Diversity Opportunity Tool

Proposition	Design Implications
• Prejudices, stereotypes, and misconceptions are 'stored' in schemes, which are learned mainly through experience and observation. It usually takes experience to change experience-based learning.	• DOT gives users the opportunity to vicariously experience (the character and consequences of racially conflictual behavior and to engage, alone or with others, in problem solving.
• When the information provided is meaningful and useful (i.e., "authentic"), learning is easier.	• Vignettes are developed from common problems experienced on college campuses. DOT can be adapted to incorporate specific incidents from specific campuses.
• Learning is facilitated when knowledge is anchored in concrete environments or situations shared by the learners that can be revisited and viewed from different perspectives.	The vignettes provide "anchors" that become the bases for recall and discussion. Users are invited to view the problem and solutions through different lenses.
• Combined visual and verbal stimuli have a greater impact on learning than verbal or visual stimuli alone.	• DOT includes video, sound, text and graphics.
• Change value-laden beliefs is difficult when individuals are directly challenged or required to publicly deny or defend the belief.	• DOT can be used in private. In group problem-solving, issues can be dealt with hypothetically even though the incidents are vivid and authentic.
• When the learners actively use knowledge to find and solve problems, they develop the ability to use what was learned in different contexts.	• DOT is a problem solving experience, both the offending behavior and alternative responses are seen as problematic.
• Learning is enhanced when practice is "coached" or "mediated" so that the reasons for both right and wrong answers to problems are explored and reflection and conceptualization is encouraged.	• The program embedded in DOT encourages the user to examine assumptions, explore different paths and evaluate alternatives. The theoretical bases for improved behavior is elaborated and users are encouraged to apply theory to new situations.
• Misconceptions that impede learning should be identified, assessed, and undermined; misconceptions should be replaced by vivid mental images that will provide frames for future action.	• Vignettes and accompanying text materials encourage the examination of beliefs and conceptions; relevant information is provided that undermines false assumptions about racial differences and appropriate behavior.
• Knowledge learned in one domain is not readily transferred to another even though the two contexts appear analogous.	• Users are helped to develop schemas, heuristics and conceptualizations, which facilitate transfer. Differences between situations and the implications of those differences are identified and explored.

*Limits of space and the fact that the propositions cited integrate different bodies of research make it difficult to reference each to its research base. Studies upon which we draw are: Allport (1954); Bransford & Nye, (1989),- Brewer & Miller, (1988); The Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt University, (1990),); Jaynes & Williams, (1989); Sarabaugh (1988); Sears, (1988)

Conclusion

Other programs attempt to address the problem of intolerance through a variety of means. We have tried to show the limitations of these methods and have offered DOT as a viable and rich addition to existing strategies. Research on learning continues to develop convincing evidence that anchored instruction increases the likelihood that what is learned will be used for problem solving. DOT folly incorporates this and other aspects of the research findings on learning and social behavior in developing the video simulations. The vignettes vividly portray incidents that reflect authentic acts of racial intolerance in order to assure that users can and will use their new knowledge in real situations.

Although the situations depicted in the vignettes reflect generic incidents of intolerance and insensitivity, this first version of DOT is limited to assisting users deal specifically with acts directed at African-Americans. Other projects will need to develop scenarios that help address acts of intolerance and insensitivity directed at other groups that are victims of discrimination.

As noted, we believe that DOT responds directly to creating a learning friendly campus ethos. Response by students and faculty to DOT has been very positive and enthusiastic. The most common reaction to DOT has been: "What do I need to do to get DOT on my campus?"

Productively confronting behavior that reflects racial and ethnic intolerance communicates to the offenders that their behavior is unacceptable, and can set the stage for the development of a sense of campus community shared by all. If those who want to improve intergroup relations on their campuses can be strengthened in their abilities and convictions, and if they transmit their message to others in a way that builds openness, there is tremendous potential for achieving the long-term goal of decreasing the incidence of behavior that reflects racial and ethnic intolerance.

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