

# TEACHING OTHERNESS IN POSTSECONDARY PROFESSIONALIZING PROGRAMS: A PILOT STUDY IN POLICE TECHNOLOGY

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## Abstract

*Globalization, immigration, and mobility of workers have, among other phenomena, contributed and are still contributing to important changes in ethnic and cultural cohabitation around the world. If these phenomena have not created prejudice based on race, gender, social status, religion, sexual orientation, etc., they certainly are, through enhanced proximity and induced cohabitation of differences, adding to the importance of knowing more about prejudice and how to educate to otherness.*

Keywords: Prejudice, diversity, otherness, professionalizing programs, student police officer,

## Specific Context

In Québec (Canada), the *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* (Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission, abbreviated to CDPDJ, 2011) recommends “that the ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport (MELS), in collaboration with the university faculties concerned, ensure that the degree programs for each sector concerned contain antiracism and intercultural training, and that the students have acquired intercultural competency upon completion of their studies” (recommendation no. 4, CDPDJ, 2011, p. 50). Specifically targeted by this report were the public security and education sectors as well as the corresponding Police Technology and Teacher Training professionalizing programs.

At the cégep<sup>1</sup> level, the Police Technology Program identifies two competencies to develop for a professional intervention with stigmatized, victimized, or frequently prejudiced clientele: 1) competency 009B – *To interact with distinctive clienteles*, and 2) competency 009H – *To interact with clienteles belonging to different cultural*

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<sup>1</sup> CEGEP is an acronym for Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel, known officially in English as a "General and Vocational College". It refers to the public post-secondary education collegiate institutions exclusive to the education system in the province of Quebec in Canada. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cégep>  
CEGEPs offer two-year pre-university and three-year technical programs. College education normally follows the fifth year of the secondary cycle.

and ethnic communities (Gouvernement du Québec, 2005). Yet, based on our teaching experience with this clientele, we have to recognize that many students cannot or do not want to acknowledge erroneous conceptions or prejudiced beliefs they may hold *vis-à-vis* different communities or ethnic groups. Knowing that “prejudices and discriminatory behaviours are not innate but acquired, and that their acquisition mainly takes places through the dominant public discourse” (van Dijk, 2005, p. 1, free translation), it becomes important to start working on future police officers’ preconceived ideas and prejudices they may have during their initial training and studies. As a matter of fact, we believe that by not doing so, we run the risk that professional training may confirm or even reinforce some of the prejudices students hold through contacts with fellow classmates who may hold similar ideas. In light of this, it can be said that preparing future police officers to intervene efficiently in today’s multicultural society has definitely become an important challenge for cégep professionalizing programs.

Like many educators around the world, Québec’s post-secondary teachers lack the necessary tools and are looking for resources to teach otherness and to foster positive attitudes toward stigmatized clienteles. Concerned with the issue of racism and starting from their teaching experience at the collegial level, Boucher and Gosselin (2010) developed what they called the *Method of cognitive activation*. Can the *Method of cognitive activation* help Police Technology Programs teach diversity and otherness?

#### Theoretical background

Prejudices include both a cognitive and an affective dimension. These two dimensions are not entirely independent (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) and they may interact with each other (see Mackie & Hamilton, 1993). Cognitive dimensions of prejudice are commonly represented as one’s perceptions, judgments, and beliefs about a group (see Ostrom, Skowronski, & Nowak, 1994). In contrast, affective dimensions of prejudice are generally based on one’s feelings and emotional responses to a group (see Smith, 1993). In accordance with this bipartite conceptualization of prejudice, some scholars suggest that a combination of cognitive and affective approaches to educational interventions is necessary (Herek, 1987; Sears, 1997). In other words, teaching otherness and the development of positive attitudes toward distinctive clienteles would imply working on people’s knowledge (attitudes, opinions, prejudice) as well as addressing their affect (feelings, emotions, (non)favourability) toward outgroup members.

On the one hand, Allport’s contact hypothesis (1954) poses that, given the appropriate conditions are present, the more one is in contact with victimized or stigmatized people, the more their prejudices tend to disappear. Moreover, “[r]ecent studies suggest that contact theory is successful in bringing about more positive attitudes towards others [and] reducing prejudice (Centre for Social Relations, 2013). For example, the Contact Hypothesis has proven to be effective in predicting more favourable attitudes and alleviating prejudice directed toward homosexuals (Herek, 1987; Herek & Glunt’s, 1993) and Muslims (Savelkoul, Scheepers, Tolsma, & Hagendoorn; 2011; Novotny & Polonsky; 2011). Other researchers have also found that attitude toward and perception of outgroup members can significantly be enhanced following contact experience with a single outgroup member (Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Bachelor, 2003).

On the other hand, *Transformational Learning Theory* (Mezirow, 1991, 2000) postulates that transformational learning occurs through critical self-reflection and that for new schemas or ways of thinking to emerge it is

necessary for people to assess or reassess their values, beliefs, and assumptions. A transformation in the way one sees and understands the world will likely occur in response to an “externally imposed disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 13). These disorienting dilemmas can be critical life events, new life experiences, eye-opening discussions, efforts to know or understand a different culture, etc. Yet, transformative learning cannot be achieved by simply making learners aware or by prompting them to experience a disorienting dilemma: it is necessary to involve them to critically reflect on their experience and critique their established ways of thinking and behaving.

Concisely, work on prejudice should address both the cognitive and affective dimensions of prejudice. Thus, in order to teach diversity and openness to otherness, educational professionalizing training should comprise a set of different strategies and tasks articulated to work on students’ preconceived ideas and feelings, to prompt contact with stigmatized clientele, as well as to exploit critical self-reflection for a change in one’s perception and understanding of others and otherness.

#### The study

The purpose of this study is to assess the impacts of the *Method of cognitive activation* (Boucher & Gosselin, 2010), a three-step, cognitive-affective tool which includes contact with clientele for emotional deactivation (Boucher, 2010). In order to assess its impacts, we first used the *Method* to teach otherness and diversity in professionalizing cégep programs (*idem*, 2010). We then administered a pre and a post questionnaire to 165 future police officers ( $n_{\text{experimental}} = 30$  and  $n_{\text{witness}} = 135$ ) from three different cégep-level establishments (1 private, 2 public) during the 2014 winter semester. The participants were registered in the course teaching *competencies 009b* and/or *009h* at their respective cégep. The questionnaire comprised a total of 94 questions and consisted of three different parts: 1) a questionnaire on prejudice, inspired from Yang and Montgomery’s Q study of attitudes toward diversity (2013); 2) a Q-sort questionnaire, inspired from Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta, and LaParo’s teacher belief Q-sort (2006); and 3) a French translation of Crowne and Marlowe’s social desirability scale (1960). Pre-test and post-test means were compared using paired-samples t-tests to determine the impact of the method on participants’ preconceived ideas. Our presentation’s objectives read as follows:

- Examine future police officers’ prejudices;
- Compare prejudices reported by experimental and witness groups at the beginning and at the end of the semester.

Pedagogical implications and the potential of the Method of cognitive activation for teaching otherness and cultural competency will be discussed.

1169 words

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## Biographies

Mariane Gazaille has been working at Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada, as professor of didactics of second languages since 2007. She is also Head of the program and Pedagogical Director of practical training for the English and Spanish Second Language Teaching Program. Professor Gazaille began her career in post secondary teaching at the collegial level, where she worked as an English as a second language teacher and

pedagogical advisor. Her research interests are focused on the use of ICTs to teach and learn a second language, non-verbal communication and teacher presence, and teacher thinking. (96 words)

Louis Gosselin is a professor of management and human resources. He is also Coordinator of the Department of Accounting and Management at the Amos Campus of Cégep de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Québec, Canada. At the beginning of his career, he took part in the implementation of the Donohue Normick Inc. plant. In the fall of 1991, aware of the importance of education and professional training, Mr. Gosselin undertook the challenge of post-secondary teaching. Building from his professional knowledge and work experience, he developed teaching material based on authentic situations. His current interests focus on the development of the *Method of Cognitive Activation*. (100 words)

Jean-Nil Boucher is a professor of sociology in the Humanities and the Police Technology programs at Cégep de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Québec, Canada. Building from the principles of active learning, Mr. Boucher's interests lie in the development of pedagogical tools for post-secondary students. He also created course material for different Cégep level programs in order to support students' emotional commitment in their learning. He has been working on and teaching with the *Approach of emotional deactivation of prejudice* and the *Method of cognitive activation* for 5 years, which he presented at different seminars both in Quebec and in Europe. (96 words)