



Small TLEF Project – Final Report

Report Completion Date: (YYYY/MM/DD)

1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

1.1. General Information

Project Title:	Cultivating citizenship skills through teaching and learning in the humanities		
Principal Investigator:	Michael Griffin		
Report Submitted By:	Michael Griffin		
Project Initiation Date:	March 2015	Project Completion Date:	March 2017

1.2. Project Summary

Policymakers and students both describe “citizenship skills” as desirable learning outcomes and graduate attributes in higher education (UBC 2009, Banks 2007, Sax 2004). This project aims to identify methods of teaching and learning within the humanities that are correlated with a positive increase in citizenship skills, using validated psychological measures of perspective-taking, empathy, interpersonal and intercultural fluency, and tolerance of other’s values (outlined below). We aim to test the hypothesis that the rigorous and charitable study of literature and philosophy drawn from diverse cultural traditions positively influence traits perceived to be conducive to good citizenship (cf. Kidd & Castano 2013); if true, we aim to identify content and pedagogical perspectives and practices that are correlated with citizenship skills by creating pilot courses for several hundred students in year one, adapting and expanding in year two, and to disseminating these results within and beyond the university community.

1.3. Team Members – (Please fill in the following table and include students, undergraduate or graduate, who participated in your project).

Name	Title/Affiliation	Responsibilities/Roles
Michael Griffin	Associate Professor, CNER/PHIL	PI
Marlise Hofer	MA/PhD Student, Psychology	RA

1.4. Courses Reached – Please fill in the following table with past, current, and future courses and sections (e.g. HIST 101, 002, 2017/2018, Sep) that have been/will be reached by your project, including courses not included in your original proposal (you may adapt this section to the context of your project as necessary).

Course	Section	Academic Year	Term (Summer/Fall/Winter)
CLST/PHIL 211	001	2015/16	1
CLST/PHIL 212	001	2015/16	2
PHIL 310A	001	2015/16	1



CLST 105	001	2015/16	1
CLST/PHIL 211	001	2016/17	1
CLST/PHIL 212	001	2016/17	2

2. OUTPUTS AND/OR PRODUCTS

2.1. Please list project outputs and/or products (e.g. resources, infrastructure, new courses/programs). Indicate the current location of such products and provide a URL if applicable.

Product(s)/Achievement(s):	Location:
We have identified significant difference across UBC faculties (Arts, Science, Business, Applied science) in change from year 1 to year 4 in validated measures of perspective-taking and empathy.	Report: UES Survey of 5,000 undergraduates on empathic concern & perspective-taking blogs.ubc.ca/ubcempathy
Using qualitative methods, we have interviewed UBC Arts students and alumni to identify self-reported factors in change for perspective-taking and empathy through undergraduate coursework.	Report: UBC Arts Self-Reporting of Empathy and Perspective-Taking—Students and Alumni blogs.ubc.ca/ubcempathy
The PI is an author on a paper currently under review with <i>Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes</i> , based partially on pre/post-surveys in CLST/PHIL 211.	TBD

2.2. Item(s) Not Met – Please list intended project outputs and/or products that were not attained and the reason(s) for this.

Item(s) Not Met:	Reason:
We have not yet identified signature pedagogies or disciplinary methods responsible for the changes described.	VP Students imposes privacy constraints on analysis of smaller majors for confidentiality reasons. Data needs to be analyzed within the PAIR office. Results will hopefully be obtained within approx. 12 months.
We have not organized an internal workshop or collaborative report with CTLT to discuss results.	Waiting for further analysis of PAIR data at majors level in order to consider methods (above).

3. PROJECT IMPACT

3.1. What were you hoping to change or where were you hoping to see an impact with this project? – Please list the intended benefits of the project for students, TAs, instructors and/or community members.

This project sought to identify whether undergraduate education at the University of British Columbia may contribute to students’ ability to represent and empathize with the perspective of others, and if so, whether these changes differ by discipline. The value of a university education is frequently articulated in terms of citizenship—roughly, the tools and disposition to understand and contribute to a pluralistic society (e.g., Harlap et al., 2008). If this is true, then university education may have an effect on students’ tendency to understand and empathize with others (empathic concern & perspective taking) and



perception of the meaningfulness of their own lives as contributing citizens. We explored this question by sampling students across years at the University of British Columbia and comparing mean trait levels of meaning in life, empathic concern and perspective-taking across students in 4 years of university at UBC.

Were these changes/impacts achieved? How do you know they occurred? – To what extent were intended benefits achieved or not achieved? What evaluation strategies were used? How was data collected and analyzed? You are encouraged to include copies of data collection tools (e.g. surveys and interview protocols) as well as graphical representations of data and/or scenarios or quotes to represent and illustrate key themes.

Meaning in life and perspective taking both were found to increase across years in education. In addition, perspective taking was found to increase more quickly in students in the business disciplines, while empathic concern was found to increase more quickly in students in the arts disciplines. It is interesting to note that perspective-taking is “double-edged,” as recent findings have emphasized (e.g., Galinsky et al. 2008, Cohen 2010): a person may deploy perspective-taking strategically in self-interest, or empathically for prosocial ends.

Further detail from the UES survey subcomponent of the project follows.

An education in the “arts” (including humanities and social sciences) is generally thought to contribute to broader types of education (e.g. moral reasoning, perspective taking) while an education in areas such as “applied science” is generally thought to focus more on specific job related skills (e.g. how to build a bridge, design a building). Therefore, the hypothesised change in empathic concern and perspective taking may be stronger over time in students pursuing one type of education (e.g. arts) versus another (e.g. applied science). We explored this question by comparing the rate of change in traits across years in students pursuing different types of education.

Method

Participants

Participants (N=5,316) were recruited by UBC’s VP Academic and University Affairs to participate in the Undergraduate Experience Survey (UES), an internal university survey which is administered every spring. Questions concerning study measures (listed below) were asked after completion of the core survey. Upon completion of the main survey, students were asked if they would be willing to answer several further questions and, if so, they were entered into a drawing to win a \$100 gift card.

Measures

Empathic concern. Empathic concern was measured using a 7-item subscale of the interpersonal reactivity index (IRI; Davis, 1983). This subscale measures the degree of empathy people feel toward others (example item: I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me; 1 = Does not describe me well, 5 = Describes me very well).

Perspective-taking. Perspective taking was measured using a 7-item subscale of the interpersonal reactivity index (IRI; Davis, 1983). This subscale measures how prone an individual is to take on another person’s perspective (example item: Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place; 1 = Does not describe me well, 5 = Describes me very well).



Meaning in life. Meaning in life was assessed using a 5-item presence of meaning in life subscale of the Meaning in life questionnaire (MLQ; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). This subscale measures how much people feel that they have meaning in their lives (example item: My life had a clear sense of purpose; 1 = Absolutely Untrue, 7 = Absolutely True). This scale and all validated scales below were computed in the manner described in the associated scale development paper.

Year in School. Students reported their year in school in one of four categories creating a 4-point scale (1=1st year, 2=2nd year, 3=3rd year, 4=4th year). Students were fairly equally distributed across the years (Table 1).

Discipline. Students reported their major, and these majors were divided into four groups. The first group is *Science* which encompasses “hard science” disciplines such as biology, physics, and math. The second group is *Arts* which encompasses all majors in the arts program, including psychology, philosophy, economics and music. The third group is *Applied Science* which refers to majors such as engineering, computer science and architecture. The fourth group is *Business* which is comprised solely of students in the business school. Three majors were not a good fit within any of the four groups listed above (cognitive systems, kinesiology and social work). These groups had too few respondents to stand alone (<50 respondents per year). Therefore, these students were excluded from analyses (n =272).



Results

Main Effects

Empathic Concern. Empathic concern was compared across the four years of university. It had no discernable pattern across year in university. Empathic concern was lowest in year two and roughly equal in all other years (Table 1). Unsurprisingly, there was no significant correlation between empathic concern and year in university ($r = .01, p = .32$).

Table 1. Means (and standard deviations) for meaning in life, empathic concern, and perspective taking across years in university.

	Year			
	1	2	3	4
N	1409	1054	1297	1556
Meaning in Life	2.93 (1.05)	3.01 (1.03)	3.11 (1.03)	3.17 (1.01)
Perspective Taking	3.66 (.60)	3.66 (.59)	3.71 (.63)	3.75 (.60)
Empathic Concern	3.76 (.67)	3.70 (.70)	3.76 (.70)	3.77 (.69)

Perspective-Taking. Perspective taking was compared across the four years of university. It increased in each year in university (Table 1). The correlation between perspective taking and year in university was small but significant ($r = .06, p < .001$), indicating that students in later years had higher levels of perspective taking compared to those in earlier years.

Meaning in Life. Overall meaning was compared across the four years of university. Meaning in life increased in each year in university (Table 1). The correlation between meaning and year in university was small but significant ($r = .09, p < .001$), indicating that students in later years experienced more meaning in their lives compared to those in earlier years.

Effects by Discipline

Empathic concern. The correlation between empathic concern and year differed in the four areas (Table 3). Empathic concern was only significantly correlated to year among arts students. This positive correlation was significantly different from one of the other groups (Applied Science; z -Score = 2.01, $p = .045$). Again, this may indicate that in disciplines in the arts, such as psychology, empathy is emphasized due to its importance in these fields.

Table 2. Correlation (and p-value) between year in university and meaning in life, empathic concern, and perspective taking.

	Area			
	Science	Arts	Applied Science	Business
N	1809	1779	1015	441
Meaning in	.10 ($<.001$)	.09 ($<.001$)	.06 ($<.001$)	.09



Life				(.058)
Perspective Taking	.06 (.012)	.06 (.009)	.02 (.45)	.14 (.003)
Empathic Concern	.005 (.82)	.05 (.031)	-.03 (.37)	.07 (.13)

Perspective-taking. The correlation between perspective taking and year differed in the four disciplines (Table 2). Science, arts and business students had significant positive correlations between year and perspective taking, meaning that as students got later in these programs they also reported higher levels of perspective taking. Of all the disciplines, business students had the highest correlation. The business students between year and perspective taking was significantly different from the correlation in applied science students ($z\text{-Score}=2.06, p = .039$). This indicates that the increase in perspective taking across year in program is significantly higher in business students than it is an applied science majors. This may be due to the nature of a business education, in which understanding the motivations of others is crucial for effective managers and marketers. Perspective-taking may be less emphasized in applied science curriculums, such as engineering, where the focus is more technical.

Meaning in life. Meaning in life did not substantially differ in the four discipline groups. All disciplines had positive correlations (Table 2) and none of the correlations were statistically different from any other.

Discussion

Meaning in life and perspective taking both were found to increase across years in education. In addition, perspective taking was found to increase more quickly in students in the business disciplines, while empathic concern was found to increase more quickly in students in the arts disciplines. It is interesting to note that perspective-taking is “double-edged,” as recent findings have emphasized (e.g., Galinsky et al. 2008, Cohen 2010): a person may deploy perspective-taking strategically in self-interest, or empathically for prosocial ends.

These results are correlation and causation can not be inferred. In order to test causation, a longitudinal study should be run that follows students across their university experience and measures if time spent in university leads to increases in meaning and perspective taking. However, it seems unlikely to the authors that students with similar ages and from the same generation have notable differences in their understanding of meaning or ability to take on others perspectives.

This research indicates that different areas of education may influence students in different ways. Students in all disciplines seem to have higher meaning in life during later years in university. However, students in the arts may be influenced to become more empathetic during their time in university, while students in the business program may experience greater increases in perspective taking.



References

Davis, M. H. (1983). Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 44(1), 113-126.

Harlap, Y (ed.) (2008). *Road to global citizenship: An educator’s toolkit*. University of British Columbia & UNICEF. Retrieved August 10, 2017 from ctlit.ubc.ca.

Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M. (2006). The meaning in life questionnaire: Assessing the presence of and search for meaning in life. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 53(1), 80.

See also detailed reports at blogs.ubc.ca/ubcempathy, including self-report data from UBC Arts students and alumni, and examples of the scales used.

NB: We have only identified changes at the faculty level, and still need to work with the PAIR office to identify changes at the major level.

3.2. Dissemination – Please provide a list of **past** and **upcoming** scholarly activities (e.g. publications, presentations, invited talks, etc.) in which you or anyone from your team have shared information regarding this project.

2016 CTLT “Celebrate Learning”; paper under review with OBHDP (above, §2.1)

4. TEACHING PRACTICES – Please indicate if **your** teaching practices or those of **others** have changed as a result of your project. If so, in what ways? Do you see these changes as sustainable over time? Why or why not?

A basic outcome of our qualitative research in Arts—with both alumni and current students—is to confirm that students identify exposure to multiple perspectives on polarizing questions, within the classroom environment, to be responsible for positive change in empathy and perspective taking. This has influenced the PI’s own teaching: it is important to present more than one disciplinary view *and* to moderate questions in class in a way that welcomes diversity of opinion. This is not surprising, but it is an initial interpretation of the evidence for positive change in the Faculty of Arts in the traits studied: very broadly, the presence of a humanities disciplinary perspective or “signature pedagogy” recognizes and celebrates a diversity of viewpoints.

5. PROJECT SUSTAINMENT – Please describe the sustainment strategy for the project components. How will this be sustained and potentially expanded (e.g. over the next five years). What challenges do you foresee for achieving the expected long-term impacts listed above?

Currently, we need to drill down into majors-level results with the support of the PAIR office, for confidentiality reasons sketched above; we anticipate having these results ready in the next year.

The PI is working with the Assistant Dean for Student Success in Arts (Sunaina Assanand) to identify further recommendations.