A Content Analysis of *From South Africa:* Nontraditional Literature in the Teaching of Minority Politics[1]

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A persistent problem for educators teaching highly subjective materials concerns drawing students into empathizing with these materials, then pulling them back from their involvement to view the contents and the analytical framework that shaped their cognitive field.

In this study, Taylor and Bane's anthology *From South Africa* was the basis for a content analysis exercise.[2] This empathy exercise fulfilled a major objective in an upper-level, undergraduate course in "Minority Politics": to help students develop an appreciation for the impact of apartheid upon South Africans. Other course books (see appendix) prepared students in minority political theory and practice. I was concerned that neither the black students (four males, two females) nor white students (four males, seven females) would understand the deleterious effects of apartheid without empathically experiencing it and that lecturing would reduce a highly volatile experience to mere pedagogy.

In order to facilitate both the subjective and objective discussion of the effects of apartheid, the students created a list of constructs from their reading of *From South Africa.* These constructs evolved from asking this question: "What does this poem (art, essay) tell me about apartheid?" A final, operationalized list of constructs was used to do a pair-comparison content analysis of the book.[3]

The Content Analysis

Students were told that they would develop a dichotomous political argument. Policy impacts involve the allocation of resources. Policy impacts also leave their mark on people. Politics of race are no different. To appreciate both sides of the political impacts of race, one-half of the class time was spent reading the traditional political science literature. This part of their political argument would serve as the factual content side.

In order for students to appreciate the policy impacts on people, I selected the South African experience: it lends currency to an important political issue, while also offering a reflective study of America's political past. Students were instructed to keep a journal. Each Tuesday for 12 weeks, the class discussed five pieces selected by them out of *From South Africa.* In their journals, the students wrote first a descriptive paragraph to summarize the selection. Next, they wrote an affective and reactive paragraph. They were told to try to understand what the author (artist, poet) *felt* as a result of apartheid, and what emotions the author was trying to convey. Both paragraphs framed the class discussions.

Our content analysis required that we make some rather broad assumptions. I suggested that the students think of *From South Africa* as the result of a hypothetical survey of South African artists and writers. We assumed that this book was a reasonably valid sample of the population of such writings, photographs, and other graphic expressions.

Our substantive content analysis next required that we determine the unit of analysis. We chose to write constructs that isolated the item or theme of apartheid. Individually, students wrote constructs for each class-assigned reading. As a class, students discussed their constructs. I kept a list of these and, when they appeared to resemble other constructs, grouped them as subheadings of a more general construct. These headings with subheadings would later be used as operationalized constructs.[4]

The final phase of the content analysis required each student to complete a pair-comparison of the 40 operationalized constructs. In a pair-comparison every item is paired with every other item in a matrix. Students chose one as the more intense of each pair. Through totaling, then averaging, we can assign a numerical value to each construct. With 40 constructs, the highest possible value is 40. The lowest is 0. Averaging across students, each construct was assigned a value that hierarchically served to define apartheid, at least inasmuch as one book will allow such an assessment. Finally, to get a sense of the reliability of this instrument across judges, a Pearson coefficient of correlation was obtained.

In all, the exercise was a resounding success, and the students, despite having to complete 800 pair-comparisons, thoroughly enjoyed this non-conventional approach to a political science puzzle.

The pair-comparison of all 40 of the constructs was driven by a two-fold logic. First, I was interested in isolating more powerful constructs through inter-coder reliability analysis and other effects. Second, I wanted students to force themselves to reexamine each construct in a comparative way against their own journal entries. Students were instructed to take each construct pair and ask themselves which of the two most closely identified their understanding of apartheid as based on the book *From South Africa.* Since they would have to demonstrate with examples from their journals the strength of the highest ranked constructs, students referenced their notes to make these judgments. Recall that the maximum number of times any one construct can be chosen is 40.

As a final exercise and a portion of their final examination, students wrote an essay that required that they (a) state the hypothesis for the pair-comparison project, (b) present

the methodology used, (c) discuss the most frequently chosen construct, and (d) support these constructs with examples from the text.

Student exemplar Susan Tinsley captures the students' reaction to the exercise. She writes:

> In conclusion, it would have been extremely difficult for me to limit my definition of apartheid to one sentence. However, this exercise, through the use of the content analysis and pair-comparisons allowed me to formulate a single definition. In my opinion, [my constructs] best describe apartheid as evidenced in the book *From South Africa*. As this part of the course concludes, I remain hopeful that this book which presently sits on the shelf under "current events" will soon be moved to the section entitled "history."

Non-Traditional Literatures and Content Analysis as Instructional Devices

The search for and discovery of political concepts in non-traditional literature is hardly new. Although generally restricted to a lecture comment, most faculty use black literature or African thematic literature in their classes.[5] While there are a few examples of the use of content analysis techniques to understand racial problems,[6] the analytical models of content analysis nevertheless are an underutilized tool of the social sciences.[7] They are rich in their discovery potential, and virtually cost-free under the present design. They are labor intensive, and as such, draw the student into an intimate, immediate relationship with the materials under study.[8] The student may regard the products of his labor in a deeply personal, energizing fashion. And while not one of these students (nor professor) suffered the anguish of apartheid, many were aware for the first time of this anguish.[9]

Of the students completing the 40 construct pair-comparisons, there was little agreement on the strength of all 40 constructs. A Pearson r correlation was completed for each student against each other student. An r transformation to Z for purposes of collapsing the data was not done because I could not make the critical

assumption of a bimodal population for this sample. Nonetheless, with the exception of one pair of students with r = .77, the correlations were very low (.30 through .70). No effects for race were noted.

The rather scattered ranking I observed for these 40 constructs should not be surprising, given the heterogeneity of the class and the number of independent decisions the grid required. Despite this, there was a high correlation along several of the constructs for all 15 coders. These constructs were initially identified by their low standard deviations.

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They are:

10. [$\bar{x}$ = 7] women aging beyond their years
12. [$\bar{x}$ = 4] a lack of black monumental architecture
21. [$\bar{x}$ = 36] oppression through a variety of techniques: force, destruction, psychology (using fear and power), and a lack of legitimate outlets for expression (like art)
35. [$\bar{x}$ = 4] superstition
40. [$\bar{x}$ = 34] domination of governmental policy

The low priorities assigned to constructs 10, 12, and 35 may not be nearly as useful as the high value placed on constructs 21 and 40. For these students, these latter two constructs derived from the book *From South Africa* demonstrated in verse, photo, graphic art, and essay that South Africans suffer repression at the hands of their government. Their

lives are ruled by governmental policies beyond their control. This government uses a variety of techniques to repress the peoples of South Africa. Further, these repressed peoples have no legitimate outlets, including their artistic forms, for expressing their dissatisfaction with this government.

Appendix

Minority Politics Course Materials

Thomas Sowell. 1983. *The Economics and Politics of Race: An International Perspective*. New York: W. Morrow.

Thomas Sowell. 1981. *Markets and Minorities*. New York: Basic Books.

Hanes Walton. 1985. *Invisible Politics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

William Julius Wilson. 1978. *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

William Julius Wilson. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Notes

1. My appreciation to my students, and specifically to Tim Mann, Lee Ann Sieveking, Susan Tinsley, Len Wentz and Stacy O'Neill for sharing their journal insights with the world. This exercise was completed during the 1989-90 fall term at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Due to limitations in space, the entire study is not presented here. Readers who desire a copy of the course syllabus or the full-blown content analysis are encouraged to write the author.

2. David Bunn and Jane Taylor, editors, *From South Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

3. For a review please see James North, "Voices of Hope: Anthology Captures South Africa's Pain and Promise," *Chicago Tribune*, October 25, 1987, Section 14 (Books), pp. 6-7.

4. Please refer to Jarol B. Mannheim and Richard C. Rich, *Empirical Political Analysis: Research Methods in Political Science*, 2nd edition, White Plains, NY: Longman Inc., 1986, pp. 152-63; and Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 4th edition, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Press, 1986, pp. 266-83.

5. The works of Alan Paton, Toni Morrison, and Chinua Achebe belong in this group. For a broadly stroked discussion, please see Allen H. Merriam (1988), "Literature as Window: Developing Interracial Understanding Through Fiction," *Journal of Black Studies* 19: 61-69; Nilgun Anadolu Okur (1989), "Drama as Social Criticism: Assessing Baraka's *Great Goodness of Life*,"

Journal of Black Studies 19: 411-21.

6. Most recently, Bishetta P. Merritt (1986), "Jesse Jackson and Television: Black Image Perception and Affect in the 1984 Democratic Campaign Debates," *Journal of Black Studies* 16: 347-67; and Steven A. Shull and Albert C. Ringelstein (1989), "Presidential Attention, Support, and Symbolism in Civil Rights, 1953-1984," *The Social Science Journal* 26: 45-54.

7. A slightly different variation of this model can be used for pre-determined constructs. A very nice discussion is Todd M. Davis and James E. McLean (1988), "Simplifying Ranking Tasks in Survey Research: A Method and Example," *Psychological Reports* 62: 987-92.

8. Eric Woodrum (1984), " 'Mainstreaming' Content Analysis in Social Science: Methodological Advantages, Obstacles and Solutions," *Social Science Research* 13: 1-19.

9. Content analysis is a useful way of drawing emotion from words. In her study, Susan B. Shimanoff [(1985) "Expressing Emotions in Words: Verbal Patterns of Interaction," *Journal of Communication* 35 (Summer): 16-31] demonstrates that the analysis of verbal contents for affect can produce statistically significant interrater reliability scores on fairly simple coding schedules.

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The Individual Learning Contract

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. . . there are alternative ways to handle a classroom or a course . . . alternative assumptions and hypotheses upon which education can be built, alternative goals for which educators and students can strive. . . .

Carl Rogers

Political scientists, often unconsciously, discourage transformational thought, not by what they teach but by the manner in which they organize their classrooms. This is done through using the traditional method of instruction, referred to by Freire (1970) as the banking concept of education. This approach treats students as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge. Courses are based upon that assumption—professors select the subject matter, and students dutifully complete the assigned readings; professors lecture, and students passively take notes; professors write exams, and students regurgitate the information fed them; professors discipline, and students are disciplined. This approach, dominant in higher education and political science, is inconsistent with the education of a democratic citizenry. Alternatives are available.

The Independent Learning Contract (ILC) is a nondirective approach to teaching which moves in the direction of civic education for democracy while operating within the parameters of traditional education. As Rogers (1983) puts it, "contracts provide a sort of transitional experience between complete freedom to learn whatever is of interest and learning that is relatively free, but that is within the limits of some institutional demand or course requirement" (p. 140).

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The Independent Learning Contract

The Independent Learning Contract (ILC) is an approach built upon the evolving interests and aspirations of each student. Working together, the student and professor shape a program of study which is founded upon the student's compelling interests. I have used the ILC at every level of undergraduate political science education. With adaptation, it has been used by colleagues in the humanities and natural sciences in small colleges as well as at larger universities. Neither the level of instruction nor the discipline present major obstacles to its implementation.

The Contracting Procedure [1]

Contracts are developed by negotiating with students. Analytically, negotiations occur in three areas: goals, activities, and evaluation criteria; practically, the entire process of developing a contract can usually be completed in two student-teacher meetings. On the first day of class the contracting procedure is explained, and the first student-teacher meetings are scheduled. The assignment given each student is to read material on the ILC (which is provided) and to prepare a written statement identifying individual goals to accomplish in the course.

Goals. Students are asked to identify semester goals in three areas: content, liberal arts skills, and life goals. Content interests relate to the formally designated subject matter of the course. Students are asked to skim the reading materials the professor has selected to get a general idea of what subjects will be covered. A minority of students develop detailed, specific content-related objectives; most include vague, general statements; some omit identifying goals in this category altogether. The professor needs to reassure students that it is acceptable not to have clearly defined goals at this point. For