Culture Connection Project

Promoting Multiculturalism in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To promote multiculturalism among grade school students through drama education.

Participants: Grade 3-6 students (N=665) from 6 targeted schools including lead-class students (n=158) representing each school.

Settings: Elementary schools in Windsor-Essex County, Ontario, Canada.

Intervention: In this non-experimental design study, group discussions conducted with each lead class to explore students' understanding of multiculturalism were developed into an interactive drama performance and performed for all grades 3-6 students in their respective schools. A follow-up drama workshop was offered to each lead class one week after the drama performance. All students completed a 7-item questionnaire before and after the drama performance and after the drama workshop. Pre-test and post-test data collected were analyzed using T-test and ANOVA to determine the effects of drama education on students' attitudes toward multiculturalism.

Outcomes: Statistical analysis at 0.05 significance level revealed that both the performance and the drama workshop heightened students' awareness of racism, and instilled cultural respect through "talking with others", "accepting others", and "believing that they can make a difference" in multiculturalism promotion.

Conclusion: Drama education was an effective experiential tool for promoting multiculturalism in a school setting. The key to promoting inter-racial harmony is to respect and accept individual differences and to broaden the social determinants of health by providing culture safety care.

MeSH terms: Multiculturalism promotion; drama education; experiential learning

La traduction du résumé se trouve à la fin de l'article.

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Canada's increasingly diverse population has resulted in a greater need to promote multiculturalism as a priority social and equity issue. In 2001, one in five Canadians was foreign-born, and 13.5% of the population consisted of visible minorities representing over 200 ethnic origins.¹ Between 2000 and 2001, 70% of new immigrants had difficulties finding employment, and those with employment earned 24% less than their predominantly white counterparts.^{2,3} Although the 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act promotes equity to make Canada a richer nation socially, economically and culturally,⁴ new immigrants continue to face many challenges surrounding language, ethnicity, and transferability of their foreign qualifications. They are more likely than others to be alienated from mainstream society and to experience poverty, isolation, depression, domestic violence, and substance abuse.⁵⁻¹¹ Their children may also be at risk of racial bullying at school.^{12,13} Disparity in health exists among visible minorities; what determines their health goes beyond income and employment.¹⁴ Equity in health must be reflected in equal rights and opportunities among all Canadians.

Multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviours that respects the presence of all diverse groups, values their socio-cultural differences, and supports their social inclusion within their environment.¹⁵ Multiculturalism promotion involves raising awareness of cultural differences, promoting racial harmony, and respecting people of other cultures or colours.¹⁶ In the last two decades, despite the efforts through cultural fairs and sensitivity workshops, there is little research to support increased cultural tolerance or respect for visible minorities.^{5,15-17} The unspoken inter-racial discrimination is worse than ever before and has deterred immigrants from seeking the needed health and social services and assimilation into the host country.^{5-8,11,18} Prevention of racism is a public health issue. Achieving health for all, as a goal for health promotion, is rudimentary to social justice and applies to all Canadians including visible minorities.^{19,20} This paper describes the Culture Connection Project, which used drama education to promote multiculturalism among elementary school students and changed their attitudes toward people of different races.

PARTICIPANTS, SETTING AND INTERVENTION

Funded by Heritage Canada, this project aimed to promote respect, equality, and diversity for people of varied backgrounds among grades 3-6 students in Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Following approval from the University of Windsor Research Ethics Committee and the Windsor public and separate school boards, a 10-member Project Advisory Committee was established with representatives from both school boards and multicultural agencies to oversee the project planning, implementation, and evaluation during the 2002-2003 school year. Once the Advisory Committee identified a purposeful sample of six elementary rural and urban multi-racial schools, principals and teachers were approached to participate. Each of the six schools was asked to designate a "lead class" whose role was to initiate and lead future multicultural promotion activities in its own school. Consent for voluntary media and school project participation was included in the schools' general consent for students.

The framework of the Culture Connection Project is based on Paulo Freire's²¹ transformative or experiential learning theory, where students explore the issues, reflect on their personal experience, generate new meaning of the experience and take actions to create change. In this project, drama education was the experiential tool used to allow students to play and assimilate learning in a non-threatening environment and to develop the needed confidence and skills to promote inter-racial harmony.^{22,23}

Using a non-experimental design, this project examined the effects of drama education on the attitudes of grades 3-6 students toward multiculturalism. Data were collected throughout the three phases of the project: group discussion, performance and drama workshops. Phase 1 took place in October 2002. Three project assistants led a 1.5-hour audio-taped group discussion with each of the six lead classes. They explored students' understanding of culture, and their experiences and behaviours with people of different races. Students also expressed their views of multiculturalism through art work and poetry. Audiotapes were later transcribed and simi-

TABLE 1

ANOVA Testing for Effects of Drama Performance and Drama Workshop on the Lead Class†

Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	p
Have friends					
Between Group	6.968	2	3.484	2.523	0.081
Within Group	643.620	466	1.381		
Total	650.588	468			
Comfort with others					
Between Group	6.467	2	3.234	2.712	0.067
Within Group	555.674	466	1.192		
Total	562.141	468			
Talk with others					
Between Group	12.032	2	6.016	5.919	0.003**
Within Group	473.636	466	1.016		
Total	485.667	468			
Respect others					
Between Group	0.136	2	0.068	0.142	0.868
Within Group	223.310	466	0.479		
Total	223.446	468			
Accept others					
Between Group	0.6282	2	3.141	4.526	0.011*
Within Group	322.698	465	0.694		
Total	328.981	467			
Important to be all equal					
Between Group	4.890	2	2.445	2.785	0.063
Within Group	407.277	464	0.878		
Total	412.167	466			
Believe can make a difference					
Between Group	5.964	2	2.982	3.527	0.030*
Within Group	393.155	465	0.845		
Total	399.120	467			

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01.

† Sample size for lead class: T1 (n=157), T2 (n=158), T3 (n=154).

lar words and expressions were clustered by frequency of occurrence and generalized into cultural themes. These themes were then used to create a one-act play pedagogically appropriate for the students.

Phase 2 consisted of a 45-minute interactive drama performed by the six project assistants for all students in grades 3 to 6 in six schools during March 2003. The performance symbolically portrayed cultural conflicts experienced by newcomers in the host country while students identified possible causes and proposed resolutions.

In Phase 3, one week following the performance, the three project assistants returned to conduct a 2-hour follow-up drama workshop with the lead classes. In groups, students reflected on the drama performance and created fictional scenarios to examine conflicts related to cultural diversity. They related this new knowledge to personal experiences and later developed action plans to promote cultural sensitivity and awareness in their own schools. With the guidance of teachers and the project team, each school implemented an action plan within the following two months that would empower students to continue promoting multicultural awareness in their own schools after the project ended. A follow-up evaluative personal interview with each lead class teacher was implemented in January 2004.

Pre- and post-tests were used to determine the effects of the drama performance and workshop on students' attitudes toward other races. All students independently completed a pre- and post-test involving a 7-item questionnaire using terms from their school curriculum and worded according to their appropriate reading levels, one day before the drama performance (T1), immediately after the drama performance (T2), and after the drama workshop (T3). Students were only identified by grade and school. Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire were T1= 0.855, T2 = 0.866, and T3 = 0.9157.

OUTCOMES

The targeted schools in this project included two separate schools and four public schools, one of each from the county area and four from the city. Of the total 43,745 elementary school students in Windsor-Essex County, 665 (1.5%) grades 3-6 students participated in the project consisting of grades 3 (4.4%), 4 (36.4%), 5 (31.7%) and 6 (27.5%). The 158 lead-class students represented 23.6% of the sample population: three grade 4's or 78 (11.7%) students, two grade 5's or 61 (9.2%) students, and one grade 6 or 18 (2.7%) students. All students took part in the project activities and questionnaires unless they were absent from school.

TABLE II

Descriptive Statistics of Variables for Lead Class, Before Drama Performance, After Drama Performance, and After Drama Workshop

Variables	Treatment*	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	SE
Have friends	T1	157	3.92	1.330	0.106
	T2	158	4.14	1.043	0.083
	T3	154	4.20	1.134	0.091
	Total	469	4.09	1.179	0.054
Comfort with others	T1	157	3.98	1.185	0.095
	T2	158	4.21	1.047	0.083
	T3	154	4.25	1.037	0.084
	Total	469	4.14	1.096	0.051
Talk with others	T1	157	3.96	1.095	0.087
	T2	158	4.05	0.956	0.076
	T3	154	4.25	0.967	0.078
	Total	469	4.05	1.019	0.047
Respect others	T1	157	4.61	0.739	0.059
	T2	158	4.65	0.677	0.054
	T3	154	4.62	0.658	0.053
	Total	469	4.63	0.691	0.032
Accept others	T1	157	4.34	1.004	0.080
	T2	158	4.53	0.746	0.059
	T3	153	4.61	0.717	0.058
	Total	468	4.49	0.839	0.039
Important to be all equal	T1	156	4.32	0.984	0.079
	T2	157	4.53	0.931	0.074
	T3	154	4.55	0.894	0.072
	Total	467	4.46	0.940	0.044
Believe can make a difference	T1	157	4.22	1.027	0.082
	T2	157	4.36	0.884	0.071
	T3	154	4.49	0.834	0.067
	Total	468	4.35	0.924	0.043

* Treatment: T1 = Before Drama Performance, T2 = After Drama Performance, T3 = After Drama Workshop

In Phase 1, the lead-class students ($n=158$) discussed multiculturalism in terms of different countries of origin, religions, languages, skin colour/physical appearance, customs, and food. They had difficulty explaining their own values and beliefs concerning multiculturalism, why racial harmony was important, and how to resolve issues in related situations. In Phase 2, all grades 3-6 students ($N=665$) responded enthusiastically to the interactive drama performance; they showed interest in understanding the reasons and sought resolutions to the portrayed cultural conflicts. (See video clips at <http://www.uwindsor.ca/cultureconnection>. Accessed July 1, 2005.)

In Phase 3, the cultural/ethnic conflict scenarios presented most by the 158 lead-class students during the drama workshops were bullying, feeling different, isolated, and rejected by peers because of dress, gender, and being new in school. Proposed action plans to promote multiculturalism included forming a multicultural club to share personal experiences, scripting a puppet show about diversity, performing scenarios on multiculturalism to younger students, videotaping children's views on multiculturalism and their personal experiences as new Canadians, and creating a mural depicting diversity and acceptance.

In the evaluative interviews, the six lead-class teachers reported that their students responded very positively to the drama performance and students' action plans, and drama was an effective means to promote multiculturalism. All but one teacher stated that they could not sustain their students' work into the future because of time constraints.

Students in city schools ($n=377$) reported significantly higher scores on the variable "having friends of another culture" than students in county schools ($n=287$) for T1 (city vs. county: $x=4.30$ vs. 3.80 ; $SD=1.01$ vs. 1.22), T2 (city vs. county: $x=4.37$ vs. 4.00 ; $SD=0.94$ vs. 1.22), and T3 (city vs. county: $x=4.43$ vs. 3.85 ; $SD=1.0$ vs. 1.3).

T-tests using the Bonferroni correction were performed to determine whether the drama performance had any effects on the variables. At the 0.05 level of significance, there were no effects found on any scores by grades, school boards, or locations. Only the variable "Talk with others" was significantly higher after the performance (T1: $n=665$, $x=3.98$, $SD=1.06$; T2: $n=559$, $x=4.22$, $SD=0.96$).

For the lead class, ANOVA (Table I) with Sheffe Post-Hoc test was conducted to test whether the drama performance (T2) followed by the workshop (T3) had any

effects on the variables. Significant differences at the 0.05 level were found among T1, T2, and T3 on "Talk with others", "Accept others", and "Believe can make a difference". The post-treatment scores for these variables were significantly higher than the pre-treatment scores (Table II).

DISCUSSION

This project demonstrated that experiential learning through drama education is an effective means to promote multiculturalism and suggests drama can be an effective tool for changing beliefs and attitudes in other similar settings. As expected, because of higher geographic density and population diversity, students in city schools have more multiracial friendships than those in county schools. According to Kohlberg's theory of moral development,²⁴ grades 3-6 children are most concerned with loyalty (to their friends) and conformity to acceptable school behaviours. As they reach the cognitive stage of formal operation, their behaviours become defined by how they interpret their individual rights, societal needs and standards. Multiculturalism promotion in metropolitan areas, therefore, must be emphasized during the early years.

All students in the six target schools acknowledged the importance of respect and acceptance of others but felt uncomfortable talking with those of other cultures or colours. Also, some Caucasian students initially thought that multiculturalism concerned only visible minorities. While popular discussions on customs, clothes, and food provide opportunities for interaction and learning about cultural diversity, it is imperative that individuals also reflect on their own cultural identities and life experiences, and recognize how their behaviours impact on others. Multiculturalism promotion must go beyond cultural awareness and sensitivity, aim for cultural safety, and commit to the ideals of equality and equity.²⁵

Teachers play a key role in facilitating and influencing students' learning. Administrators and school boards must support their teachers by providing a culturally sensitive curriculum to prepare students to function in our increasingly diverse society. Schools, in partnership with policy-makers from other sectors, must promote inter-racial harmony and pave the way toward social equity.²⁶

As Canada's diversity continues to rise, cultural groups must work to value and preserve their distinctiveness. The key to achieving inter-racial harmony lies in building relationships through mutual respect and acceptance between dominant and minority groups.²⁷ Health promoters and educators can help create a healthy, harmonious, and equitable society by addressing systemic barriers and broadening the social determinants of health and social inclusion. By doing so, cultural safety care can be achieved and all Canadians will feel safe and have access to essential health and social services.

Further research is needed to explore effective multiculturalism promotion strategies. The Culture Connection Project may be adapted or replicated in other elementary schools with attention to several limitations. Its implementation and outcomes were dependent on the teachers' cooperation and workload. The questionnaire focussed only on attitudes and beliefs with no identifiable personal data besides grade level and school name for further analysis. A follow-up study in 6-12 months would evaluate the impact of the project and the students' action plans on changing attitudes and beliefs towards multiculturalism.

CONCLUSIONS

Schools provide an ideal environment for children to learn factual information about multiculturalism, and contribute to the foundation of the value and belief systems they will carry into adulthood.²⁷ Increasing self-awareness by reflecting on one's core values and beliefs towards inter-racial harmony can be a starting point for changing behaviours.²⁸ Respect and equality must be cultivated among all young Canadians to prevent or minimize future stereotyping behaviours toward visible minorities.

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RÉSUMÉ

L'objectif : D'utiliser l'éducation de drame pour promouvoir le multiculturalisme parmi les étudiants d'écoles élémentaires.

Les participants : Des élèves du 3^e aux 6^e années (N=665) venant de six écoles visées, incluant des étudiants (N=158) représentant des classes à la tête de chaque école.

Le cadre : Des écoles élémentaires dans la comté de Windsor-Essex, Ontario, Canada.

L'intervention : Des discussions sur le multiculturalisme menées avec chaque classe à la tête étaient développées dans une performance dramatique exécutée aux étudiants des 3^e aux 6^e années. La semaine suivante, un atelier de drame était offert à chaque classe à la tête. Les étudiants ont répondu à une questionnaire à sept questions avant et après la performance et après l'atelier. Des analyses avec le T-test et l'ANOVA ont déterminé les effets de l'éducation de drame sur les attitudes des étudiants envers le multiculturalisme.

Les résultats : À signification de 0,05, les analyses statistiques ont révélé que la performance et l'atelier de drame ont amélioré la conscience des étudiants de la racisme, et inculqué un respect pour d'autres cultures en « parlant avec les autres, » « accepter les autres, » et « croyant qu'ils peuvent faire une différence » dans la promotion du multiculturalisme.

La conclusion : L'éducation de drame était efficace pour promouvoir le multiculturalisme parmi les élèves élémentaires. Afin de réaliser l'harmonie raciale, il faut respecter les différences individuelles, et élargir les déterminants sociaux de la santé en fournissant le soin sensible aux différences culturelles.