

Drama Education Empowers Students as Social Action Leaders: The Culture Connection Project

by Tina Ruggirello and Lucia Yiu Matuk

Connection Project



For years, Canada has opened its doors to immigrants for economic or political reasons; it ranks second to Australia as the nation with the highest proportion of immigrants. The 2001 Census revealed that today's New Canadians are now more diverse than ever, representing more than 200 ethnic origins. Of these, approximately 13.5 percent are visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2003). This diversity has largely been driven by the 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act, the mandate of which was to promote equity and to make Canada a richer nation socially, economically, and culturally (Canadian Heritage, 2004).

There is also speculation as to whether the growing incidence of bullying in schools is related to racial composition, as opposed to school size and/or rural versus urban schools (Banks, 1997; Rigby, 2003).

Multiculturalism is "a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society" (Rosado, 1998). Promotion of multiculturalism thus refers

Although cultural awareness and sensitivity is being addressed in the core elementary school curriculum in Canada and students are taught to respect others, the content is centered more at a knowledge level rather than behavioral and skills levels.

Although multiculturalism has since been promoted in many Canadian schools and communities through curriculum, cultural workshops, annual festivals, fairs, and celebrations, there is no strong evidence to support increased cultural tolerance, respect, or acceptance among those of different ethnic, religious, linguistic, racial, and/or cultural backgrounds (Chapman, Davidson, & Panet, 2002; Yiu Matuk, 1995, 1996).

to raising one's awareness of cultural differences, promoting racial harmony, and respecting and accepting people of a culture or color other than one's own (Canadian Heritage, 2004). Although cultural awareness and sensitivity is being addressed in the core elementary school curriculum in Canada and students are taught to respect others (Government of Ontario, Canada, 2005), the content is centered more at a knowledge

level rather than behavioral and skills levels. Although schools make attempts to eliminate racism through posters, plays, festive celebrations, cultural fairs, and workshops, students are not prepared to deal with the reality of racism outside their school setting (Morgan, 2001). Early interventions to assist students in dealing with day-to-day conflicts in schools with varied racial compositions, therefore, are warranted.

The purpose of this article is to describe how drama serves as an intervention strategy to empower students as social action leaders to promote multicultural awareness. Specifically, it describes how the Culture Connection Project evolved to raise awareness of cultural diversity, promote attitudinal and behavioral changes, and generate actions to promote multicultural awareness in elementary school settings. Project findings and implications for classroom teachers and multicultural education are also discussed.

Project Framework: Transformative Learning and Drama

The framework of the Culture Connection Project is based on transformative learning theory (Freire, 1995, 2002; Mezirow, 2000), emphasizing empowerment, transformation, and sustainability. This project is founded on the principle that cultural sensitivity and awareness can be meaningful to students only when they have the opportunity to experience the problem in a real-life situation or created environment. This experience allows them to critically reflect on their personal values and beliefs while relating to the situation with others of a different culture or race. Critical reflection helps students internalize the experience and gain insight into the problems or issues that pertain to their multicultural setting. When relating these problems to their personal lives, students are able to generalize meanings of the situations and personalize their importance. This leads students to draw conclusions, make conscious choices, and act according to their new understandings of the problems/situations.

Drama is a powerful vehicle for transformative learning, as it allows learners to discover, reflect, and gain deepened awareness of themselves and their surroundings. As learners engage and interact in a nonthreatening environment, they are free to express, explore, and apply problem-solving processes to real-life experiences (Doston & Tromski, 2003; Wagner, 1998).

Vital to the transformation process is Freire's notion of "critical consciousness." Participants examine their world and understand how their existence in that world is constantly changing, requiring ongoing action and reflection (Freire, 2002). Through raising this critical consciousness, participants develop the confidence, motivation, and skills needed for taking action toward promoting tolerance and acceptance in their environment. They become empowered as social action leaders as they learn to process the knowledge or understanding of the presented problem or situation, and they come to believe in their abilities to assert and advocate for the changes they wish to make by influencing their peers to take collective actions (Holden, Evans, Hinnant, & Messeri, 2005).

Drama exploration provides a means for participants to gain insights by examining alternative perspectives and

sharing their beliefs and values through reflective dialogue with their peers. Drama for social transformation challenges participants to examine their own values and beliefs in relation to those of others. This is a critical process for social action leaders of all ages, as looking inward helps them better understand how they read their world (Freire, 2002). Drama with intention to promote social transformation therefore challenges participants to actively change situations that are unfair or unjust in a safe fictional setting. In doing so, individuals are more apt to transfer that thinking and action to real-life situations, promoting the notion that "Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it" (Boal, 1992, xxxi).

In the Culture Connection Project, transformative learning served as the foundation for inspiring student participants, as social action leaders, to take a lead role in making a difference in their school community and designing sustainable actions that would promote healthy attitudes and behaviors toward cultural diversity.

Participatory theatre is constructed on the principle of helping individuals critically examine their world. This approach is most effective when audience members actively participate to understand better the implications of their actions and the actions of others. Drama educators and theatre artists must present experiences that inspire meaningful dialogue and a clear purpose for significant action. Thoughtful and relevant choices help participants see how their input can contribute to the development of sustainable actions (Taylor, 2003). The Culture Connection Project applies principles of drama and theatre education and transformative learning to help students gain a deeper understanding of the implications of cultural diversity and acquire the skills and creativity to inspire change within the context of their own world.

The Culture Connection Project

The city of Windsor is the third largest destination of immigrants to Ontario. In 2001, Statistics Canada reported that 26.9 percent of its 208,000 residents were immigrants and 17.2 percent were of a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2003). The Culture Connection Project, a school-based multiculturalism promotion program aimed at promoting respect, empathy, and equality for people of diverse backgrounds, involved a partnership between the two local school boards and the University of Windsor's Faculty of Nursing and School of Dramatic Art. It was funded by Canadian Heritage and took place during the 2002–2003 school year.

Participants included students in grades three through six from six schools representing a varied racial composition from both city and county regions. Six schools were selected on the recommendation of an advisory committee. This advisory committee was established to oversee project implementation. It comprised three faculty advisers; two school board consultants from the Greater Windsor Essex District School Board and the Windsor Essex Catholic District School Board; one member each from the Windsor-Essex Health Unit and the Multicultural Council of Windsor Essex County; and a team of

eight undergraduate students from the University of Windsor who were involved as project assistants. There were four nursing students and four Drama in Education and Community students.

In order to facilitate participatory bottom-up decision making and to empower teachers to work together with the students to develop actions that would sustain harmony, respect, understanding, and equality in their schools, one teacher from each of the six targeted schools was invited to join the advisory committee for activity planning, implementation, and evaluation. These teachers and their students were identified and became the “lead class” and social action leaders for their school community. The lead classes were involved early on in the project through focus group discussions and contributed themes and ideas to the creation of a 45-minute one-act interactive play. They also participated in a two-hour post-performance workshop where they examined issues of cultural diversity raised in the play on a deeper level and eventually designed social action plans to promote multicultural awareness in their school community. This article describes the implementation of the project activities, which were largely facilitated by the team of project assistants under the supervision of faculty members and the Project Advisory Committee. Findings will be analyzed and discussed.

Sample, Design, and Methods

Of the total 43,745 elementary school students enrolled in both school districts, 665 students (1.5 percent) or 34 classes from six selected schools in Windsor-Essex County participated in the Culture Connection Project. The six lead classes included a total of 158 students.

The project began in the fall of 2002. Teachers of the lead classes were asked to discuss with their students the meaning of multiculturalism. Students conveyed their understanding through poetry or drawings. One week following this activity, the project assistants led an informal group discussion with each of the six lead classes, addressing and reinforcing issues of cultural awareness and adaptation, coping strategies, and related consequences and solutions (Table 1). These discussions were audiotaped and later transcribed. The students’ understanding of multiculturalism and their related personal experiences were identified through a series of cultural themes that were extracted from the group discussions,

Table 1

Discussion questions with lead class to generate themes on multiculturalism

1. What does culture mean to you?
2. How are you different from your friends who are from a different culture?
3. What would like others to know about you and your culture?
4. Describe an experience in which you felt uncomfortable or when you felt that you were treated differently because of your cultural/ethnic differences.
 - a. Why do you think people act they way they do?
 - b. How did you deal with the situation?
 - c. What would you do differently? Give examples.
5. What can you do to make other people feel respected and we comed?

all Canadian-born, with three of the members from Asian, African, and Indian cultures. All members of the group brought a rich sense of diverse backgrounds and life experiences to the team. The interactive play was based on the lead class students’ perceptions and personal experiences. The play reflected their expressed beliefs and values and also portrayed some of their concerns through fictional scenarios. The interactive play was designed to generate student responses and stimulate possible solutions for the culturally specific situations presented in the play. In order to facilitate this process, students were invited to take part in the play. The performance was “frozen” at various moments portraying a critical situation, and students were called on to offer feedback to the characters in that moment as well as enter into the performance themselves at various times, offering alternate solutions for that particular situation. As the students spontaneously gave their responses and suggestions, the performers improvised around their suggestions, allowing the students to see and validate what their ideas would look like in action. Following the performance, the actors led an interactive question-answer period with the participants. As the student audience asked their own questions arising from the performance, the actors probed them further by asking critical questions such as: “What problems did you see in this play?” “Why do you think this was happening?” and “What do you think should be done, and how would you change that?” This line of questioning was intended to direct students to think beyond what just happened in the play, to how such events might affect others and how similar situations may occur in their own lives.

In the follow-up drama workshop, students from the lead classes created common fictional scenarios reflecting bullying and unfair treatment of new students, isolation and rejection by friends, and ridicule for being physically different because of clothing and gender.

their artwork, and their poetry. The project assistants later clustered these themes and developed the interactive play called “Culture Connection.” They performed the play for all 665 students in grades three through six in each of the six targeted schools in winter 2003.

The team of eight project assistants, two males and six females, represented diverse cultural backgrounds. They are

Based on the group discussion with the lead classes, themes were identified, analyzed, and separated into differences and similarities. The differences reflected such topics as food, language, physical appearance, religion, customs, traditions and rituals, nationality, comfort with respect to exposure to different cultures, environment, and power with respect to bullying and racial slurs. Similarities focused on togetherness, value of

friends and family, love being universal, sharing, and uniqueness with respect to talents. In all cases, students expressed that everyone should be respected and treated equally. Although students were able to identify significant themes related to culture, there was no overt evidence of experiences related to racial or ethnic harmony or conflict, nor was there evidence of how students interacted with others from another culture to resolve uncomfortable situations. Respecting the lead classes' positions, three scenes—one each based on food, appearance, and tradition—were created. Each scene presented a challenge, pushing the audience to think about alternative solutions and helping them shift perspectives to understand the positions of others (An excerpt of the Culture Connection performance can be viewed at www.uwindsor.ca/cultureconnection).

The lead class from each school then took part in a two-hour follow-up drama workshop, led again by the project assistants, within one week following the performance. The purpose of the workshop was twofold: First, to help students gain further insight into multicultural conflicts raised throughout the performance as well as in their own lives; and second, to empower students as social action leaders to promote change in thinking about multiculturalism in their school community. Under the facilitation of the project assistants and the lead class teachers, students worked in small groups to identify a problem related to cultural diversity. Each group of students then created fictional scenarios based on those problems and presented them through a series of still images or tableaux, “crystallizing” moments or thoughts through body-sculpted images (Neelands, 1990). Through thought tracking, a technique that prompts students to share their inner thoughts and feelings as experienced in that moment (Neelands), the project assistants guided students to reflect in character on the situation being represented by tapping them on the shoulder and prompting them with a question such as, “What would you like us to know at this moment?” “How does this situation make you feel?” and “What would you like to say to another character in this scene?”

This exercise was followed by out-of-role discussion regarding the perspectives of other characters and additional approaches to resolving conflict situations that arose in the scenarios. This dialogue strategically led students into thinking about specific/real situations related to cultural diversity that exist within their own school settings, and jumpstarted

Table 2
Pre-Test and Post-Test Questionnaire Items

- Please circle how strongly you disagree or agree with each of the following statements, using a rating scale of 1–5.
1. I have many friends of another culture and/or color.
 2. I feel comfortable talking to people of another culture or color than my own.
 3. If I see a new student of another culture or color, I make a point to talk to him/her.
 4. It is important for me to respect people of another culture or color.
 5. It is important for me to accept people of another culture or color.
 6. I like to learn and play in a school where we are all equal.
 7. I can make a difference in helping my friends to respect and accept people of another culture or color.

Table 3
Comparison of Correlations Analysis of Variables: Before Drama Performance, After Drama Performance, and After Drama Workshop

Correlations		1	2	3	4	5	6
Variable	Treatment** and Sample size						
1. Have Friends	T1 (n=665) T2 (n=559) T3 (n=155)						
2. Comfort with others	T1 (n=665) T2 (n=559) T3 (n=155)	.233*					
3. Talk with Others	T1 (n=665) T2 (n=558) T3 (n=155)	.318*	.272*				
4. Respect Others	T1 (n=664) T2 (n=557) T3 (n=155)	.298*	.437*	.197*	.283*		
5. Accept Others	T1 (n=664) T2 (n=556) T3 (n=155)	.447*	.521*	.322*	.458*	.339*	
6. Important to be all equal	T1 (n=663) T2 (n=558) T3 (n=155)	.264*	.323*	.346*	.342*	.567*	
7. Believe can make a difference	T1 (n=665) T2 (n=556) T3 (n=155)	.322*	.460**	.485*	.629*		
	T1 (n=663) T2 (n=558) T3 (n=155)	.109*	.210*	.164*	.147*	.169*	.195*
	T1 (n=665) T2 (n=556) T3 (n=155)	.212*	.210*	.268*	.227*	.264*	.343*
	T1 (n=665) T2 (n=556) T3 (n=155)	.218*	.210*	.360*	.353*	.404*	
	T1 (n=665) T2 (n=556) T3 (n=155)	.206*	.257*	.386*	.165*	.306*	.162*
	T1 (n=665) T2 (n=556) T3 (n=155)	.276*	.372*	.443*	.389*	.403*	.253*
	T1 (n=665) T2 (n=556) T3 (n=155)	.419*	.353*	.501*	.505*	.471*	.254*

* $p < .01$ level (2-tailed).

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

brainstorming ideas for sustainable actions plans. Each group in the lead class devised and presented their action plans. As a class, students selected a most workable plan for implementation. Lead class teachers and their students worked together to design and implement the action plan over the next two months. Each lead class teacher also received \$300 to support the implementation of the students' action plan.

Findings

All 665 participants and their teachers engaged in the interactive performance with great enthusiasm. Students interacted with the actors during the performance and were eager to suggest resolutions to the conflict situations presented in the play. To measure changes in students' attitudes and beliefs toward interacting with persons of another culture and/or

Table 4
ANOVA Testing for Effects of Drama Performance and Drama Workshop on the Lead Class

Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	p
1. Have friends					
Between Group	6.968	2	3.484	2,523	0.081
Within Group	643.620	466	1.381		
Total	650.588	468			
2. Comfort with others					
Between Group	6.467	2	3.234	2,712	0.067
Within Group	555.674	466	1.192		
Total	62.141	468			
3. 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			
4. Respect others					
Between Group	0.136	2	0.068	0.142	0.868
Within Group	223.310	466	0.479		
Total	223.446	468			
5. Accept others					
Between Group	0.6282	2	3.141	4.526	0.011*
Within Group	322.698	465	0.694		
Total	328.981	467			
6. 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				

* p<.05.

** p<.01.

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

color, a questionnaire (Table 2) was administered to all targeted students in each of the six schools on three occasions: One week before the performance (T1), immediately after the performance (T2), and immediately after the follow-up workshop (T3). Students independently rated their agreement or disagreement with each statement in the questionnaire.

In the follow-up drama workshop, students from the lead classes created common fictional scenarios reflecting bullying and unfair treatment of new students, isolation and rejection by friends, and ridicule for being physically different because of clothing and gender. Bullying and teasing were the most common manifestations of cultural-related conflict identified in their own schools. The drama workshop helped students to explore and construct their own understanding of cultural diversity and provided them with insights that would inform their action plans. The action plans included the creation of a multicultural club, puppet shows with script to reflect diversity, drama performances promoting multicultural awareness for students in junior grades, videotaping children's views on multiculturalism and their personal experiences as New

Canadians, and a mural representing acceptance of diverse cultures for hanging in the school.

Of the 664 (99.8%) respondents, students from the city schools (n=377 or 56.8%) had higher mean scores for "having friends of another culture" than students attending county schools (n=287 or 43.2%). This finding was expected, as the makeup of the population is more diverse in the city than in the county. One hundred and fifty-eight lead class students completed the post-workshop questionnaire (T3). A Pearson Correlation Analysis (Table 3) performed at .01 significance level found statistically significant positive relationships among the seven variables from the questionnaire. The correlations among the variables before the drama performance (T1) were moderately positive, with increasing correlations after the drama performance (T2) and again after the workshop (T3), noticeably in these variables: "comfort with others" and "talk with others," "respect others" and "accept others," and "believe can make a difference." Regardless of students' grade levels, school districts, or locations, T-tests using the Bonferroni correction at the .05 level of significance found that the drama performance did not make a difference

on any of the scores in the questionnaire except the score on "talk with others" (T1: n= 665, x=3.98, SD= 1.06; T2: n=559, x=4.22, SD=.96). In other words, after the drama performance, students reported that they would talk with others of a different culture or color more than before. For the lead classes, ANOVA (Table 4) 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 .05 level were found among T1, T2, and T3 on "talk with others," "accept others," and "believe can make a difference." Comparison of the means for each variable in the questionnaire showed increasing higher scores with each T1, T2, and T3 (Table 5). In summary, both the drama performance and the workshop were able to make positive changes in students' values and beliefs toward interacting with people of another culture and/or color. Having respect for others and the comfort level to begin to talk with others and accept others are important elements if students are to become change agents in promoting multiculturalism.

Discussion

The Cultural Connection Project had several limitations. Only a small sample of schools participated; therefore, generalization of project findings to other schools and communities must be exercised with caution. When replicating this project, a competent working knowledge of drama and theatre education as well as an understanding of multiculturalism as it relates to education and social issues are paramount. Although interdisciplinary collaboration was a positive learning experience for both the drama and nursing students involved, more meaningful learning may have occurred if there was more time for discipline-specific training. Both nursing and drama students need mentoring to better understand and appreciate the importance of cross-discipline collaboration, including the different ways of working and thinking specific to each others' discipline.

Constructing a script from the students' perspective was time-consuming. We wanted to build a script that would respect the students' beliefs and values as well as challenge them to construct meaning and understanding, while evaluating various conditions and situations that may not have come up in their discussions.

Lead class teachers played a pivotal role in implementing and sustaining the action plans developed by their students. Success in achieving this was influenced by the teachers' availability, commitment, and workload. Many teachers expressed frustration in keeping up with regular routines and curriculum while involved with the Culture Connection Project.

Individual students' socio-demographic data, such as ethnic group, age, gender, and their residence status were purposely not collected. This was to ensure the anonymity of the students and to keep the questionnaire simple and short, appropriate for their age and attention span. Findings from the pre- and post-questionnaires indicate that students in city schools have more friends of another culture than those attending schools in the county. This finding is expected because of the geographic density and diverse population makeup in cities. Yet the understanding and attitude toward multiculturalism among grade school students was consistent regardless of location. This raises the questions: Do students play together because they happen to be together? Do students respect and accept one another as equal when they play together? More qualitative data may provide insight into these inquires.

The Culture Connection Project has demonstrated that the interactive performance and drama workshops were effective intervention tools to promote multicultural aware-

Table 5

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

Variable	Treatment*	N	X	SD	SE
1. Have friends	T1	157	3.92	1.330	.106
	T2	158	4.14	1.043	.083
	T3	154	4.20	1.134	.091
	Total	469	4.09	1.179	.054
2. Comfort with others .095	T1	157	3.98	3.98	1.185
	T2	158	4.21	1.047	.083
	T3	154	4.25	1.037	.084
	Total	469	4.14	1.096	.051
3. Talk with others	T1	157	3.96	1.095	.087
	T2	158	4.05	.956	.076
	T3	154	4.25	.967	.078
	Total	469	4.05	1.019	.047
4. Respect others	T1	157	4.61	.739	.059
	T2	158	4.65	.677	.054
	T3	154	4.62	.658	.053
	Total	469	4.63	.691	.032
5. Accept others	T1	157	4.34	1.004	.080
	T2	158	4.53	.746	.059
	T3	153	4.61	.717	.058
	Total	468	4.49	.839	.039
6. Important to be all equal	T1	156	4.32	.984	.079
	T2	157	4.53	.931	.074
	T3	154	4.55	.894	.072
	Total	467	4.46	.940	.044
7. Believe can make a difference	T1	157	4.22	1.027	.082
	T2	157	4.36	.884	.071
	T3	154	4.49	.834	.067
	Total	468	4.35	.924	.043

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

ness. The performance increased the students' understanding and awareness by stimulating their critical thinking of why and how to respect and accept others of another culture. The drama workshop provided a safe place for students to interact with and examine various perspectives as well as discuss and reflect on how they could take action to promote multicultural awareness in their own school communities. Students who were already culturally aware reached a higher level of awareness. Some students thought they were culturally aware before, but through the project, realized that they could be more aware. Students were empowered by their task as social action leaders and developed their action plans with enthusiasm. Empowerment is central to transformative learning. Transformative learning takes place when those involved feel they are part of the situation or problem, and feel they can be principal agents for positive change (Freire, 1995; Hagquist & Starrin, 1997). Because students in this project were able to relate situations and problems that were unique to their school, they were committed to promoting positive change of attitudes toward multiculturalism.

The high mean scores indicate that "culture," "accep-

tance,” and “respect” are familiar terms to students of this age group, as noted in the group discussion with the lead classes at the beginning of the project and also in the pretest prior to the drama performance (T1); however, their understanding of these terms was vague. Students may very well have expressed these terms within what they had learned in their sociocultural contexts (Rosado, 1998). They recognized the importance of respecting and accepting others but felt uncomfortable talking with others of another culture or color. This lack of conscious awareness of what it takes to respect or accept others of a different culture or color may explain avoidance behaviors, stereotyping, or racism toward visible minorities.

Some Caucasian students shared that they were happy to be included in this project and were even surprised that it was not just for students from visible minorities.

Through the subsequent drama performance and workshops, students had opportunities to dialogue with their peers and gain further insight into the role of social action leaders. They were creative and open to new ideas; they were positive that they could make a difference by helping their friends respect and accept diversity. They also appreciated that people from outside their school really “care” enough to help them learn about respect and acceptance of individual differences. Some Caucasian students shared that they were happy to be included in this project and were even surprised that it was not just for students from visible minorities. Such attitudes only emphasize the dire need for multicultural promotion in our schools. Unfortunately, follow-up interviews with students were not conducted. More qualitative data would provide further insight.

Conclusion: Implications for Practice

Students could play a key role to sustain what they had learned from the Culture Connection Project and to become change agents in their homes and schools by practicing their new knowledge and skills in their everyday lives. However, further refinement of this project is needed to develop innovative and meaningful multicultural promotion activities unique to school situations. Sustainability of the students’ action plans could have been strengthened with an ongoing commitment from the school board, the administrators, the teachers, and the community. Longitudinal studies such as a one-year follow-up post-project evaluation would give a more accurate measure of the effects and outcomes of multicultural promotion activities as designed and implemented by the students.

Follow-up interviews with the teachers of each of the lead classes conducted by the project coordinators one year following the implementation of the action plans (December 2003 to January 2004) indicated that the teachers supported the Culture Connection Project as a much needed means of promoting multiculturalism. All teachers agreed that the interactive play was successful in promoting awareness of multiculturalism to an audience of this age group. However,

they expressed some anxiety regarding sustainability of their action plans. Only one teacher said she would continue with her multicultural club; other teachers stated that while their students were eager to implement their plans, teachers were reluctant to pursue activities that were not part of their required curriculum due to time constraints and their heavy workload.

Schools are an extension and reflection of their community. Responsible for equipping students with the needed knowledge and skills to live and play in an increasingly diverse environment, schools must be encouraged to embrace diversity and equity and reject discriminatory attitudes and behaviors (Government of Ontario, Canada, 2005). Further

opportunities for community partnerships with academic institutions are worth exploring with the caveat that projects such as the Culture Connection must be promoted and designed as an integral part of the regular curriculum rather than a one-time event. Creating opportunities and healthy environments to engage students in critical dialogue pertaining to diversity of ideas, beliefs, and positions should be what drives the curriculum rather than an extracurricular feature or separate unit of study. Teachers involved in the Culture Connection Project were presented with the opportunity to sustain the momentum of the project through continued involvement with the project team. Due to the demands of curricular deadlines, they were not motivated to continue.

It is imperative that policy makers and school administrators examine their policies, programs, curricula, and services to ensure that they are meeting the changing needs of their increasingly diverse communities (Robinson, 2000). Investing in teacher support and resources is necessary for positive outcomes.

Children are the future of our society. The best time to shape children’s behaviors is during their early years. Schools are an ideal place to create an environment where students will learn factual and unbiased information about cultural diversity. In this project, elementary-age students were motivated to make a difference, and they felt they could help their friends respect and accept people of another culture or color. The students’ intentions could not be translated into action without a classroom climate that encouraged participants to engage in dialogue and action. Promotion of multiculturalism must reflect the values, beliefs, thinking, and behaviors of all ethnic groups and not just their foods, traditions, and customs. Understanding others comes through ongoing dialogue and interaction. Educators can play a pivotal role in empowering their students to promote multicultural awareness in their everyday lives by moving beyond cultural sensitization and awareness at the cognitive level and focusing on behavioral and attitudinal change directed at promoting tolerance and acceptance of individual differences.

References

- Banks, R. (1997). Bullying in schools. Clearinghouse on elementary and early childhood education. Retrieved on April 28, 2005 from www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content3/bul-lies.k12.2.html
- Boal, A. (1992). *Games for actors and non actors*. London: Longman.
- Canadian Heritage. (2004). Serving Canada's multicultural population: Practical approaches for public servants. *Multiculturalism*. Retrieved May 2, 2005 from www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/spmc-scmp/conference/summary_e.cfm
- Chapman, A., Davidson, A., & Panet, C. (2002). Cultural crisis in education. Retrieved May 11, 2005 from www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/culturalcrisis.html
- Doston, G., & Tromski, D. (2003). Interactive drama: A method for experiential multicultural training. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 31(1): 52—62.
- Freire, P. (2002). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1995). *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Government of Ontario, Canada. (2005). Antiracism and ethnocultural equity in school boards: Guidelines for policy development and implementation 1993. Ministry of Education and Training: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved May 3, 2005 from www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/antiraci/antire.html#3.3a
- Hagquist, C., & Starrin, B. (1997). Health education in schools: From information to empowerment models. *Health Promotion International*, 12(3): 225—232.
- Holden, D., Evans, W. D., Hinnant, L. W., & Messeri, P. (2005). Modeling psychological empowerment among youth involved in local tobacco control efforts. *Health Education & Behavior*, 32(2): 264—278.
- McCaslin, N. (2000). *Creative drama in the classroom and beyond*. New York: Longman.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformative theory. In J. Mezirow (Ed.), *Learning as Transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3—34). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Morgan, R. (2001). Eliminating racism in the classroom. Retrieved May 11, 2005 from www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/racism_morgan.html.
- Neelands, J. (1990). *Structuring drama work: A handbook of available forms in theatre and drama*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Rigby, K. (2003, June). Addressing bullying in schools: Theory and practice. Australian Institute of Criminology: Trends and Issues in Crimes and Criminal Justice. Retrieved on April 24, 2005 from www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi2/tandi259.pdf.
- Robinson, J. H. (2000). Increasing students' cultural sensitivity: A step toward greater diversity in nursing. *Nurse Educator*, 25(3): 131—135.
- Rosado, C. (1998). What makes a school multicultural? Retrieved on May 11, 2005 from www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/caleb/multicultural.html.
- Statistics Canada. (2003). Census of population: Immigration, birthplace and birthplace of parents, citizenship, ethnic origin, visible minorities and aboriginal people. *The Daily*, Tuesday, January 21, 2003. www.statcan.ca/Daily?English/030121/d0303121a.htm.
- Taylor, P. (2003). *Applied theatre: Creating transformative encounters in the community*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.
- Wagner, B. J. (Ed.). (1998). Educational drama and language arts: What research shows. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.
- Yiu Matuk, L. (1995). Health promotion surveys for multicultural clients. In M. Stewart (Ed.), *Community health nursing: Promoting Canadians' health* (pp 266—283). Toronto: W. B. Saunders.
- Yiu Matuk, L. (1996). *Health status of newcomers*. OPHA, 87(1): 52—55.

Tina Ruggirello is a professor at the School of Dramatic Art at the University of Windsor in Windsor, Ontario.

Lucia Yiu Matuk is a professor at the School of Nursing at the University of Windsor.

The authors would like to thank Canadian Heritage for funding this project. 