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Promoting Cultural Identity Through Dance/Movement Therapy with Immigrant Children

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

04/27/2018

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Dance Movement Therapy

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Abstract

The present research project focuses on exploring how culture influences identity and how the development of a bicultural identity affects bicultural individuals. Having a multicultural or multiethnic identity could be a source of strength and/or confusion, bicultural individuals may have difficulties in identifying and sorting their group membership status and their cultural attitudes, values, perspectives, and behaviors (Navarrete & Jenkins, 2011). The present research proposes that dance movement therapy and the Expressive Therapies could serve as a means to allow individuals to explore and strengthen their cultural identity. A cultural identity workshop was implemented with second grade, English language learner, elementary school students that focused on exploring their culture and identity. The workshop allowed individuals to begin to explore their own cultural identity and served as an example of one way in which such an exploration could be done through the use of the expressive arts. Further research should focus on expanding on the importance of developing a strong cultural identity and on developing ways to encourage this.

Keywords: cultural identity, bicultural identity, acculturation, dance movement therapy, biculturalism, acculturation

Introduction

The present research focuses on the exploration of cultural identity through an arts based therapeutic experience. This research was inspired by my curiosity in how an individual who has been either born within two cultures or has lived within various cultures shapes their own cultural identity. Individuals could consider themselves bicultural if they have lived within various cultures through their life for extended periods of times or if they have parents who are from different cultures and they identify as multicultural. Often times becoming multicultural or biracial is not a conscious choice. People are either born into two cultures or are somehow exposed to different cultures long enough for these to affect their identity. One of the most common ways in which individuals become bicultural is through immigration to a different country. Even in these situations such immigration may not be a conscious choice especially for refugees who must flee their countries for their safety or for children whose caregivers are the ones to make such a choice. For the purposes of this research project all participants were immigrant children, these children were born in a different country and have emigrated to the U.S. with their families.

As someone who has experienced living in two different cultures and identifying with two different cultures I wondered how others with a similar experience have navigated such a situation and how much do the different cultures they come into contact with impact their own identity. I also wondered about the importance of maintaining one's cultural roots as well as the importance and effects of acculturation. The experiential was designed to encourage the participants to reflect within themselves what their culture or cultures are and what parts of these influence their identity and sense of the world. Tummala-Narra (2014) discusses how separation and mourning are a part of an immigrant's internal experience, it is a process of negotiating

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losses as well as accommodating to the new culture. The process of immigration can create a split in the individual's self-representations with regards to how they identify with their culture of origin and the culture they are currently living with. "The experience of ambivalence about one's connection and/or disconnection with one's cultural origins and new cultural values and practices in the adopted land is thought to be part of the typical process of adjustment as an immigrant" (Tummala- Narra, 2014, p.397).

I was born in Colombia and moved to the United States while I was still in elementary school. It was relatively easy for me to learn English and transition into the school system and culture as I was still fairly young. Elementary school students who are English language learners have an advantage over older English language learners as research suggest that learning a second language should happen within five to six years from when the student starts school for easier transition to full English proficiency (Zarate & Pineda, 2014). My parents continued to speak Spanish in our household and continued to instill the values of our culture and its importance. Growing up in the United States that culture also became a very important part of my life and my identity. This experience allowed me to have a deep understanding of what it feels like to move to a new country and experience being between two cultures as I do have first-hand experience.

This personal experience allowed me to have a greater understanding of the participant's situations as the children who would participate in the experiential have also recently emigrated to the United States. around the same age as I did and are still struggling with learning the language and adjusting to the culture and the school system. However, when I moved to the United States. I moved to Miami, which is an area that is heavily populated by Latinos and other minorities. This aspect of the location may have also influenced my own experience and possibly

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made it easier. Furthermore, just because I experienced the transition as relatively easy does not mean this is the case for others. My experiences may influence the value and importance that I place on culture and so it is necessary for me to be aware of my potential bias.

Cultural Identity, Acculturation, and Biculturalism

“Culture is a dynamic ever- changing phenomenon encompassing the values, beliefs, attitudes, and changing phenomenon encompassing the values, beliefs, attitudes, and learned behavior shared by a group” (Hanna, 1990, p.116). According to Dosamantes-Beaudry (1997), culture dictates what an individual will pay attention or see as important to it provides us with guidelines for thinking, behaving, and expressing ourselves. “What we take in not only gives meaning to our lives but also provides the structure and form our social relationships take and the kind of self and personality structures we construct,” ((Dosamantes-Beaudry, 1997, p. 129). What we take in depends on our culture and what the culture chooses to pay attention to or see as important.

Acculturation occurs when two cultures come into long term contact with each other and this results in changes in the values, behaviors, and language of both cultures (Colón & Sánchez, 2010). This does not mean a complete loss of the original culture but rather an exchange between the two. The process of acculturation can be divided into three main parts: cultural identity development, behavioral adjustment, and psychological adjustment (Makarova & Birman, 2015). Through the process of acculturation an individual can develop an ethnic orientation in which they choose to identify with their heritage, a national orientation in which they choose to identify with the mainstream culture, or a bicultural orientation in which they are able to develop a bicultural identity that integrates both (Makarova & Birman, 2015). For a bicultural individual

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each fragment of their cultural identity is a part of their history and their identity. Roberts (2016) mentions the concept of self-verification theory which consists of the idea that “people have a strong tendency to be seen in a way that acknowledges their ongoing strongly held identities, even if these identities are devalued or undesirable” (p.66).

Makarova and Birman (2015) conducted a meta-analysis to determine which of these acculturation orientations lead to better school adjustment for minority students. The main categories observed in the study were: acculturation orientations (cultural identity), acculturation outcomes (academic achievement, psychological adjustment, behavioral adjustment), and acculturation condition (school context). Minority students who were bilingual and had developed bicultural identities had higher academic achievement, higher self-esteem, and greater feelings of competence in welcoming and supportive school environments (Makarova & Birman, 2015). Bicultural identities had negative impact if the student experienced discrimination or felt threatened in the school environment. Makarova and Birman (2015) proposes that “educational settings need to establish healthy intercultural relationships, where minority students feel appreciated and supported in order to support young people’s bicultural development” (p.320).

Having a multicultural or multiethnic identity could be a source of strength or confusion for an individual. In some cases, it could be a combination of both a source of strength and confusion, this can depend on their experiences with their group memberships (Navarrete & Jenkins, 2011). Multiethnic individuals may have difficulties in identifying and sorting their group membership status and their cultural attitudes, values, perspectives, and behaviors (Navarrete & Jenkins, 2011). A study by Colon and Sanchez (2010) on Latino students suggests that maintaining aspects of Latino culture serves as a protective factor for academic outcomes in Latino adolescents regardless of their relationship to the main culture. Zarate and Pineda (2014)

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suggest that because Latino parents of elementary school students teach their children their cultural values of the merits of hard work, the value of education, character development, respect, and social responsibility, this could explain why immigrant adolescents have been shown to have more success than more acculturated adolescents. This idea shows the importance of cultural values on the students' performance and worldview.

According to Navarrete and Jenkins (2011) individuals belonging to a minority group in the United States can experience feeling different and underrepresented within American culture. This could lead to feelings of isolation, discrimination, misunderstanding, and a sense of rejection by the dominant culture. An individual's exposure to experiences of discrimination can lead to feelings that the individual's uniqueness and differences are wrong and can create an increase in depression, feelings of rejection, and feelings of isolation (Navarrete & Jenkins, 2011). Trauma experienced from oppression and discrimination can cause the individual to question their sense of belonging in the mainstream culture and their sense of a collective identity (Tummala-Narra, 2014). Furthermore, childhood exposure to multicultural experiences and multicultural or multiethnic identities can result in a greater risk of internal confusion as a result of various conflicting frames of reference, behavioral scripts, and group membership loyalties. These factors can cause an impact in an individual's group identification, group attachment, and identity integration (Navarrete & Jenkins, 2011).

Bicultural adolescents and parents of Mexican origin were interviewed by Bacallao and Smokowski (2009), they described their experience as one of "living between two cultures" (p.438). They reacted to this experience of feeling as if they were living between cultures by "living two lives", (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2009, p.440) adjusting their behavior based on the environment they were in. Some of the challenges reported with biculturalism were confusion in

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regards to which language or cultural values to portray in different situations and confusion regarding the impact of the two cultures in their lives. Memories of their country of origin, their culture's customs and holidays and memories of family members from their country of origin increase adolescents' connection to their culture of origin (Bacallao, & Smokowski, 2009).

Another factor that affects cultural identification is language. "Language use is commonly taken as a proxy for measuring acculturation because English acquisition facilitates the incorporation of norms and values of the majority culture" (Becerra, 2012, p. 168). An English language learner classification during elementary school may lead to academic marginalization and negative consequences in high school due to this classification being associated with negative externalizing behaviors and segregation during elementary school as well as with having less qualified teachers throughout their school years (Zarate & Pineda, 2014). According to Zarate and Pineda (2014) being born in the United States and speaking Spanish at home during elementary school increases the probability of the individual completing high school. "Home language use is a 'package of variables,' potentially reflecting multiple factors, such as acculturation, biculturalism, and language proficiency," (Zarate & Pineda, 2014, p.2).

Zarate and Pineda (2014) suggests that schools with a greater amount of English language learner (ELL) students may be better adept at academically mainstreaming these students as research has shown that first-generation ELL students scored poorly on academic measures at schools with a small concentration of immigrants. Becerra (2012) suggests that the school system's labeling of Latino students as having behavioral or learning problems could be due to their Caucasian teachers' lack of understanding of Latino culture and of how to engage them in their classroom which could lead to poor academic achievement. "Income, level of

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education, and higher levels of linguistic acculturation of the participants were related to the perception of barrier to the academic success of Latino K-12 student” (Becerra, 2012, p. 173).

It is important to understand that the individual may not have had many options when they made the decision to move to another country, according to Lewis (1997),

When the therapist is working with refugees, recognition and sensitive attention need to be given to whether they may have wanted to come to the host country. Consideration should also be given to their process of recovery from loss of family, from trauma and the devastation they left. Their capacity to find community and their desire to reside or return to their country of origin should be explored. (p. 124)

This is an important factor to keep in mind when working with any immigrant population especially children and adolescents who may have had no choice in the decision to move to another country and in some cases may not even understand the reasons behind the decision their caregivers made. Another important factor to keep in mind when working with an immigrant population, particularly with younger immigrants is how any losses or traumas associated with the move affect their development of identity, this is highlighted by Rousseau et al. (2005):

Although the culture gap between migrants and the host society is obvious and forces young people to negotiate between different ways of behaving at home and at school, in the street, or elsewhere, contextual aspects of the migration experience also directly influence the construction of identity: in particular, premigration losses (trauma due to organized violence), and the separation and reunification associated with migration itself. (p. 14)

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Biculturalism has been shown to serve as a protective factor for assimilation stress while also promoting socio-cognitive functioning, academic achievement, and well-being (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2005). “Bicultural individuals appear to benefit from the ability to shift their socio-cognitive perceptual schemas in order to fit situational demands” (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2005, p. 490). This ability allows bicultural individuals to effectively navigate various cultural situations effectively and appropriately for the situation. According to Bacallao and Smokowski (2005) interventions addressing acculturation and bicultural skills training for adolescents should focus on encouraging a bicultural identity integration, encouraging empathy for parents and family cohesion, and teaching coping skills for managing discrimination.

Arts Based Explorations of Identity

Ridley (2015) explored the concept of identity through an arts-based intervention that consisted of participants decorating mirrors based on the question “Who am I?” (p.33). Prior to the art making process participants discussed how culture, life experiences, and the media can influence the formation of identity.

Identity can be formed around many aspects of self, including physical appearance, spiritual belief, roles, and values in life. Reflecting on identity required the participant to look beyond the surface image in the mirror and to articulate what was most important to them as a reflection of self. (Ridley, 2015, p.33)

The arts-based experiential presented by Ridley (2015) provided individuals with an opportunity to explore their identity through the arts.

Wright and Wakholi (2015) utilized a festival as their research method for exploring how the arts could alleviate the tensions and challenges that come with balancing between two

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cultures. Participants were young individuals of African descent who were either born in Australia or moved there and who came from homes where African culture was valued. Participants partook in diverse performative workshops consisting of activities such as singing, painting, dancing, storytelling, journaling, drumming, and acting (Wright & Wakholi, 2015). In the first phase of the research project participants discussed various topics such as what it means to have African cultural memory and began to bond and build relationships with each other. Participants also brainstormed ideas regarding performance and what that would look like. In the next phase of the project participants planned, rehearsed, and performed a theatrical event with music and dance (Wright & Wakholi, 2015). In the final phase of the project participants presented the results to the creating two additional performance pieces and reviewing their experience.

The findings of the study highlighted both the commonalities in the participants' experiences and the uniqueness of their experiences. The festival allowed individuals to express themselves, be witnessed, and build connections with each other (Wright & Wakholi, 2015). The arts based experience, in the form of a festival, allowed individuals to express themselves, be witnessed, and build connections with each other (Wright & Wakholi, 2015). Wright and Wakholi (2015) suggest that developing bicultural competence, which entails developing and maintaining competence in two cultures, can alleviate the psychological distress an individual experiences when living between two cultures.

Narrative identity theory examines an individual's life experience and how they construct meaning from their experiences based on the stories they tell (Thomas, 2015). Through embodied narratives individuals can use movement to express their stories. Thomas (2015) explored gender and racial identity with adolescent girls through embodied narratives and a

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choreographed performance created by the participants. Participants were seven eighth-grade students between the ages of 12-14 from diverse racial backgrounds. The project was constructed over a 10-week period concluding with a performance piece that was co-created by the participants and the researcher. Verbal discussions and movement explorations were used as material from which to construct the performance. After each session the researcher coded the data collected and those findings were then brought into the next session for open discussion with the participants. During these discussions participants were welcome to add any insights or ideas to the data presented.

The audience for the final performance consisted of 200 middle school students, a space was provided after the performance for the audience to ask any questions that came up for them. Participants reported feeling empowered, supported, and reflective of their experience after the performance. Answering questions about the project allowed participants to develop a deeper understanding of the findings of the experience. The performance itself allowed the participants to share their narratives through an embodied narrative experience with the audience serving as the witness. “The final performance demonstrated how choreography can pull together fragmented parts of an individual’s identity and present a unique representation of their lived experiences” (Thomas, 2015, p.191). It is important to note that the researcher did not impose any movement for participants to use for the choreography but rather asked questions about the movements the students presented to increase their understanding of their dance piece.

Initially, participants were only able to define their identity as females through describing their relationship to males (Thomas, 2015). These findings raise the question if this could perhaps be the case for individuals from minority or marginalized groups. Perhaps minority individuals also define their identity in terms of their relationship to the dominant culture.

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Participants in this study had more difficulties embodying their racial identity than their gender identity,

when asked to create shapes or movements for their understanding of their own race, the participants either moved hesitantly in space, or did not move at all, before reverting to verbal dialogue. When it came to examining personal feelings and relationships to race, their embodied narrative was one of hesitation and confusion. (Thomas, 2015, p. 189)

This response could be in result of how society views discussions about race as uncomfortable or perhaps participants were not ready to discuss race in that space in which the discussion had focused primarily on gender issues.

Rousseau et al. (2005) conducted a drama therapy workshop in a high school to provide immigrant and refugee adolescents a space to explore identity issues and promote school adjustment.

The goal of the drama therapy program was to give young immigrants and refugees a chance to reappropriate and share group stories, in order to support the construction of meaning and identity in their personal stories and establish a bridge between the past and present. It was hoped that this would alleviate the distress associated with the losses suffered in migration or the tensions of being a minority in the host society, and attenuate associated interpersonal and intergroup conflicts by addressing the negative perceptions of cultural differences and increasing collective self-esteem. (Rousseau et al., 2005, p. 16)

Participants attended 10 weekly sessions of the drama therapy workshops, a topic was presented in each workshop and participants were invited to present stories to be acted out by the group.

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The stories presented did not necessarily have to be experienced by the storyteller but could also be stories they have heard or seen that related to the topic (Rousseau et al., 2005). The storyteller would have the opportunity to choose how they would like the story to be told and which participants they would like to act certain roles. Participants were invited to alter the situations presented in the story in a way in which the participants and storyteller felt empowered. Rousseau et al. (2015) noted that although participants were invited to use their native language many participants chose to use the foreign language at times “to create a distance from the emotional experience and decrease its intensity” (p. 18).

The drama therapy workshop was well received both by the students who participated and by the school. Some factors that influence the formation of identity for immigrant adolescents are the cultural gaps present in their lives that encourage adolescents to behave differently in different settings such as at home, school, or in the streets (Rousseau et al., 2005). “Young people’s identities are formed through an interplay of their personal stories and the stories they share with or borrow from the groups to which they belong” (Rousseau et al. 2005, p.15) The drama therapy workshops served to “provide the teens with an opportunity not only to explore a wide range of values, making use of a multiplicity of references” and “grieve some of the losses associated with the migration journey” (Rousseau et al., 2005, p. 25).

Through personal or collective stories they begin to see the overlap between their distinct identities and to question the dichotomy between their host country and home country identities. The workshops also empower the teens by emphasizing the strengths that stem from adversity, fostering creative resistance through a repertoire of diverse strategies, and creating an active network of solidarity among peers. (Rousseau et al., 2005, p.25)

Dance Movement Therapy

Despite a lack of research about dance movement therapy and the arts as a means for exploring cultural identity in particular, past research has shown both dance/movement therapy and the arts as interventions for exploring identity (Ridley, 2015, Rousseau, 2005, Thomas, 2015, & Wright and Wakholi, 2015). Chang (2009) discusses how a dance movement therapy based intervention that consisted of participants embodying an ancestor through dance could help individuals identify with their sociocultural background and reflect on how their culture has impacted their perceptions. Dance/ Movement therapy can be an appropriate therapeutic intervention for culturally diverse populations (Pallaro, 1997). “Dance/movement therapy offers a laboratory in which adaptive or maladaptive behaviors are brought to awareness, in which the demands of the self and those of the dominant culture are embodied, amplified, nurtured or challenged” (Pallaro, 1997, 228). Dance/ movement therapy can enable the process of cultural integration through movement, symbolism, and the embodiment of their personal experiences. Dance/ Movement therapy can provide the container for the client to explore and ground their cultural identity (Pallaro, 1997).

Carmichael (2012) stresses that therapists working with cross-cultural populations should understand the trauma and duality associated with embodied racism as well as the “body metaphors associated with the client’s racial/ ethnic identity, and the socio-historical metaphors representing hierarchies of power” (p. 102). It is important to exhibit cultural sensitivity when observing or analyzing movement from minority clients and to keep in mind that these may be different from those of individuals with privilege. Carmichael (2012) proposes that therapists may need to move within their own identities when working with some clients and stresses the importance of the therapist participating in self-study, exploring their own identity. Therapists

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should maintain an awareness that “all learning about the client is done through the lens of oneself” (Carmichael, 2012, p. 106). In other words, anything we believe we have learned from the client is partially influenced by our own interpretations and observations.

Utilizing self-disclosure may be a particularly useful therapeutic tool to use particularly with marginalized populations as a therapist’s self-disclosure may promote a sense of safety and stability for the client (Carmichael, 2012). Carmichael (2012) suggests that “mirroring, recognizing congruence and incongruence, noticing movement patterns and styles, and connecting somatically” are important nonverbal skills for dance movement therapists to use with marginalized populations (p. 108).

Mirroring can be especially important when working with marginalized clients as the embodied cultural messages they carry may benefit from nonverbal witnessing in addition to verbal reflection. The classic themes of in and out, belonging or not belonging, are potentially more complex for the individual who has never experienced a life in which total authentic expression and acceptance is possible. (Carmichael, 2012, p.109)

Method

Much of the past research on cultural identity has focused on acculturation and their impacts on minority individual’s educational achievement and psychological adjustment. Research has identified the benefits of establishing a bicultural identity. Not much research has focused on specific interventions that can be applied to such populations to encourage the process of developing a bicultural identity. The present research focuses on providing a possibly transformative experience through a community engagement project. The focus question

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explored in this research was, how can dance movement therapy be used to promote cultural identity in immigrant children? The intervention applied was based on dance/movement therapy theories and arts based exploration. It was designed to promote the formation of a bicultural identity and encourage participants to explore their own cultural identity and its effect in their lives. The community engagement project would provide a therapeutic experience in which participants could explore the presented themes through the arts without thinking of the experience in terms of therapy.

The arts-based intervention would be more appropriate for this research project as it was applied in a non-clinical setting with no contract of therapy and the mention of “therapy” may carry certain stigmas or negative connotations for the population. A dance/ movement therapy based workshop was presented during the school programming in an elementary school classroom in the Greater Boston area. The workshop encouraged the exploration and discussion of cultural identity through movement exploration, symbolism, and the arts. A dance/movement therapy based intervention was used to provide a safe space for participants to shape their cultural identity through explorations and maintaining an inclusive environment that supports this. This intervention was presented as a workshop as this is more appropriate based on the setting.

The method was implemented with second graders from an English language learner classroom. The class consisted of 14 students (11 girls and 3 boys) from diverse cultural backgrounds (El Salvador, Vietnam, Nepal, Brazil, Kuwait, Venezuela, Haiti, Nepal, Albania, and Pakistan). The findings were tracked through journaling after the intervention as well as an artistic reflection done prior to the intervention and a movement reflection done afterwards. Both of these artistic reflections will be in the discussion section of this research project. The

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journaling focused on the content and progression of the group during the intervention as well as of my experience in leading the group while being careful to maintain confidentiality.

Chang (2009) discusses how a dance movement therapist's sociocultural identity can impact their ability to work with clients from different backgrounds than the therapist's own. It is important for culturally ingrained beliefs, habits, and prejudice to be brought to consciousness for the therapist to effectively work with clients who are from diverse backgrounds (Chang, 2009). For this purpose, I have completed a movement reflection on my own cultural background for purposes of understanding how my own cultural background would affect my role within this group as well as my perceptions of the participants and their perceptions of me. "Exploration of embodied identity and cultural self-knowledge are ways to critically examine how race, ethnicity, and class are first manifested in oneself and then influence the therapeutic milieu" (Chang, 2009, p.311)

The experiences through the dance/ movement therapy based intervention are expected to provide a container for the exploration of how one's culture impacts one's identity. This would allow individuals to reflect on the various cultures that form their identity and to examine which pieces of their cultures are important to them. It would also allow them to explore which pieces of their culture they would like to maintain as well as which pieces they fail to identify with or feel disconnected from. It was anticipated that this would be shown through the participants' group discussion and artwork as well as through my own artwork in reflection to the workshop. The workshop session plan will be presented below.

Cultural Identity Workshop Session Plan

Warm-up:

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Milling around the room participants will walk or dance through the space and when they hear the music stop they will find a partner and answer the given questions. We will spend a couple of minutes on each question given allowing participants to connect with different people in the group.

Questions:

Tell the person you run into...

your name, where you were born, where your parents born, places you have lived, languages you speak, your favorite food from your culture, your favorite custom/celebration from your culture, what is your favorite place in your country of origin, if you could travel anywhere where would you go

Next, I will read a children's book that relates to the topic to begin to introduce the theme of the group the book read will be "This Is Me: A Story of Who We Are and Where We Came From," (Curtis & Cornell, 2016).

Theme Development:

Guided Meditation: Participants will go through a brief relaxation exercise that will then lead them into the art project (See Appendix A for script)

Art Project: Participants will be given an illustration of a suitcase on a paper, they will decorate the inside with the things they would take with them. These could be abstract or physical objects. They have the option of writing words to represent the item or drawing them. Once they have selected a few items for their suitcase they will choose at least three things from their suitcase and add a movement that could represent this object or memory.

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Participants will mill around the room again with their suitcase and this time when the music stops they will share with them one item they put in their suitcase, its meaning to them, and movement associated with it.

Closure

Participants will form a circle. They will think about one of the things they will put in their suitcase. They will then share with the group what the item is and shape that item with their hands as if they were actually holding it and pass it on to the person next to them after telling the group why they chose that item. The next person would reshape the item to reflect their item and then share with the group what it is and why they chose it. This will continue until everyone in the circle has had a turn.

Results

At the beginning of the group we started with only 6 of the children from the class (2 boys, 4 girls), these were the students that had the highest English proficiency in the class. These children were identified by the teacher as having higher English proficiency based on their performance in her class as well as having been living in the U.S. longer. The teacher had selected these children to complete the workshop while the rest of the class was doing a lesson in a different classroom. With this smaller group we went through the warm up section of the workshop, milling around the room, reading the story, and went through the guided meditation. Participants were able to get to learn more about each other during the milling exercise and appeared to enjoy the “freeze dance” aspect of it. Participants were invited to share about their favorite food, custom/celebration from their culture as well as their favorite place in their country of origin. As the questions progressed the participants elaborated more on their responses and

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were able to provide more details. When asked about the languages they spoke all participants responded with their native language and only said they spoke English after encouragement from their teacher. This could suggest how these participants despite having the highest English language proficiency in the class still feel more connected and/or competent in their native language.

The music was able to provide a container for the participants to move through as well as provide a clear structure for when they should stop and find a partner. The music used was popular music selected by the teacher based on her knowledge of her students' musical interests. At first participants were somewhat shy when speaking to their partners but were then able to open up as more questions were asked. This increased comfort in sharing with others was mirrored in their movements throughout the freeze dance. At first they were moving with a sense of quickness around the space while the music was playing and as the music stopped they tried to look for their friends with a sense of urgency to try to secure them as a partner. As the questions progressed participants continued to move with quickness as the music was playing but were more at ease when the music stopped and were able to partner up with whoever was in close proximity to them, some even tried to seek out participants they had not had a chance to partner with.

During the guided meditation participants were somewhat energetic and had difficulties concentrating at the beginning but were able to settle in and reflect as the meditation progressed. As I was reading the meditation I began by reading through it a bit more quickly than I had planned as I was able to match the energy in the room but as I progressed I began to slow it down as the participants began to settle in. As they began to work on their suitcases the rest of the students in the class came in to the classroom and also received suitcases. The students had

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finished their classwork in the other classroom and were being transitioned back into their main classroom. These eight additional students were given the instructions for the art project. The original six participants continued working without showing any signs of disruption. The students that were coming in responded well to directives and began coloring as soon as they were told what to do. Participants worked on their suitcases for a few minutes and were then instructed to pick three of the items in their suitcase and think of a movement to represent them once they were finished with their art piece. During this time a few of the students asked me or the teacher for assistance in coming up with their movement. Even though they initially sought help because they could not think of a movement they were able to come up with one fairly easily after some prompting. Mainly, the prompting included statements such as “What movement reminds you of the thing you chose?” or “What movement do you make with this thing?”, after this, participants typically responded with some sort of gestural movement.

The closing circle was done in two groups, first it was done with the group of six children who completed the full experiential and then it was done with the group of eight children who came in during the art project. The first group got into a circle and placed their suitcase art project in the center of the circle so that we could view them. Each person then said one of the items from their suitcase, why it was important to them, and shared their movement. They then passed on their item to the next person so they could receive it and reshape it into their own item. Participants were engaged during this portion and were easily able to identify one thing they put into their suitcases along with the movement and meaning/ associated with it.

Some participants exhibited some shyness about sharing their movement to the group as opposed to when they shared their movement one on one with one of the teachers or myself when they were coming up with them earlier. However, as we went around the circle the first

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time most of them decided they wanted to share again and continue the conversation. This could be due to increased comfort in sharing their items and movements since everyone had already done so once. At the end we put in all of items in our group “suitcase” which was the middle of the circle, making sure to close out metaphorical suitcases and bring it with us. The children identified a wide variety of items some examples were: one of the girls mentioned she would bring her dog who she misses very much and she left behind in Brazil, one of the boys mentioned a phone that his father gave him so that he could call his mom with it, another girl mentioned flowers and butterflies from her country of origin.

The second group also responded really well to the closing circle activity despite having less understanding of the language and despite not having done the warm up portion of the group or hearing the story. They were very excited to share the items in their suitcase with the group and their movements. However, because they missed the warm up and the meditation they identified more everyday items such as clothes, toys, food, or money rather than specific items that remind them of their home, culture, or customs. It was difficult to know whether any of these everyday item mentioned had any specific meaning or memory attached because since this group had a greater language barrier they had more difficulty explaining why they chose their item or why it was important to them than the other group. The teacher and I did offer the three children who spoke Portuguese or Spanish to tell us about their item in their language as we would be able to understand what they were saying but they chose to just say what the item was in English even though they couldn’t explain much about in English. Because of the language barrier this group had they may have had difficulties following the meditation and story if they had been in the room earlier.

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Overall, the closing circle for both groups consisted of movements mostly in the horizontal plane as well as more relational shaping movements such as arcing and carving. The horizontal plane or table plane is associated with communication and more relational movement (Queyquep-White, 2009). Participants were encouraged to connect and move in the horizontal plane through the directives requiring them to pass their item on to the person next to them/ receive the items passed on to them before and after it was their turn to share their own item/movement. Nonetheless the individual movements that participants created to represent their items were more in the vertical plane. The vertical or door plane is considered to be the plane of presentation. These movements were intended to be more introspective and have a greater focus on the individual self, they were created by the individuals to share or present an aspect of themselves and their culture.

Many of the individual movements were fairly small and gestural movements taking place mostly in the near reach space of the children's bodies with some extension into the intermediate reach. This was expected as this was the first time these children were participating in any dance/movement based workshop/ activity. Gestural movements are movements that present themselves in solely one part of the body while the rest of the body remains constant (Queyquep-White, 2009). Near reach movements are movements that take place in "the area very close to the body" while movements in the intermediate reach take place approximately in the space between the elbow and fingertips (Dell, 1977). Participants were able to move more within intermediate reach when reaching out to others in the group particularly during the closing circle when passing on their objects to the next person.

Discussion

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This research sought to answer the question, how can dance movement therapy be used to promote cultural identity in immigrant children?

“Immigrant students’ adaptations to U.S. schools is a complex process, a delicate balance of losses and gains,” (Zarate & Pineda, 2014, p. 26). For the participants in this research, they are currently experiencing this process of adapting to the U.S. school system and identifying these losses and gains associated with immigration. Through the intervention, participants were able to identify some of the things they miss about their native country as well as things from their culture that are significant to them. Some of the responses included pets and family members that they have left behind. An example of this is the girl from Brazil who mentioned her dog.

Dance/ movement therapy and the expressive arts offer a means for an individual to explore their origin, their culture, and how these affect their identity.

Knowledge of one’s own racial/ethnic/culture/class history is analogous to self-assessment of movement style; it can be explored through the tools of dance...Exploring through dance directives leads to introspection and finally clarity, or integrative awareness of how race, ethnicity, and culture are defined in one’s body and movement. Such physicalized identity, combined with the dance/ movement therapist’s movement preferences, can be integrated with social or environmental contexts. (Chang, 2009, p. 308-309)

The goal of the intervention was to use movement directives to allow participants to explore their cultural identity and achieve this integrative awareness of how race, ethnicity, and culture are expressed in the body. “Through the movement process, the individual can get in touch with his or her own feelings and thus be able to interact more meaningfully with the

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environment” (Levy, 2005, p.74). Movement was used in the warm up in the form of a freeze dance activity. The directives provided in the warm up and the meditation opened the space for introspection and exploration. “The person who has achieved a state of relaxation is beret able to discover and release their creativity and natural energy flow” (Levy, 2005, p.75), the meditation section of the experiential was expected to increase the participant’s creative energy flow as well as induce introspection. Participants were also directed to embody the items they identified as important to them. Pallaro (1997) highlights the importance of embodiment and symbolism in dance/ movement therapy interventions as a means for exploring and grounding cultural identity.

Although, participants did not provide much information verbally about their culture or how their answers related to it due to the language barriers, some participants were able to verbally state these connections while others gave minimal verbal responses when prompted. This does not mean that participants were not able to make this connection and think about these themes in their native language. Since the intervention made use of symbolic movement, embodiment, and artistic exploration of identity the experiential is able to target each individual participant despite any language or cultural barriers. According to Lewis (1997) “the use of the arts as a facilitator for growth and recovery is transcultural and profound” (p. 123). It is possible that these participants were still able to make these connections despite their inability to verbalize them.

Furthermore, Tummala-Narra (2014) suggests that because certain memories may be stored in the individual’s native language they may prefer to discuss these memories in their native language. This may explain why participants, even those with higher English proficiency, did not choose to vocalize much during the experiential. Some participants did express to the teacher that they would prefer to speak in their native language during the experiential. In fact,

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since there were two girls who spoke Portuguese in the class and two girls who spoke Haitian Creole, both pairs were seen discussing amongst each other about the experiential in their native languages. This language preference may present itself in the client choosing to switch languages through the course of the session when discussing specific memories (Tummala-Narra, 2014).

One of the girls who spoke Portuguese was actually in the original group of Higher-English proficiency children after completing her closing circle she decided to return for the second closing circle to translate for her friend who spoke Portuguese and was in the second group.

My personal reflection to the research will be described below.

Artistic Reflection



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I decided I would complete the same artistic exploration of identity that I would use for the cultural identity workshop on myself prior to running the experiential with the children. I chose to do it prior to running the workshop because I wanted to explore my own identity and how my own values and culture affects it without having any outside influences from others' responses. It was actually difficult for me to think of the physical things I would take with me because right now even though I am living in the Boston area I still have most of my stuff, particularly my mementos, back home in Miami. Therefore, it was difficult for me to think of collecting these items and of where exactly they were and deciding which "home" I should mentally search for these items. On the other hand, it was easy to think of the values and celebrations within my culture that make up who I am. Some of the more salient ones were humbleness, respect, loyalty, justice, ambition, and honesty. I also thought of how my culture's music and dance were something that is very important to me as well as our carnival celebration.

In fact, I have always felt a deep connection to the carnival celebration and the music and dance associated with it in particular since my birthday often lands during this time period. A couple of the items I chose were things that remind me of my childhood such as a Carnival tiara I received in preschool in Colombia and a tiny stuffed duck that I have had since I can remember and I was very attached to through my childhood. Some of the other items I chose to include were items that have been given to me by my closest family members and have sentimental value or in some way remind me of them. For example, my sister has made me various letters and drawings, my brother gave me one of his soccer medals before he moved to a different country, my mom has given me her earrings from when she was a baby, and my parents have given me a pair of bracelets, one for each of my graduations, and each one has a very specific meaning associated with it.

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It was gratifying to reflect on these parts of my culture and to think not only of the influence of my cultural values but also of the physical items I chose and the reason why I chose them. One of the things I found more interesting is that most of the items I chose aren't items I think about on a daily basis, they have always just been there, but when thinking of packing my suitcase with only the most important things they immediately came to mind because of the sentimental value associated with them. For my movement reflection I chose to use a Cumbia song that I heard often in childhood, Cumbia is one of the Colombian traditional dances that is performed during carnival. I decided to do this particular style of dance because I used to do it more often when I was younger but I have moved away from it and have not even thought about embodying it in a while.

After embodying this Cumbia dance I decided to observe this dance style in my own body from the lens of Laban Movement Analysis. Colombian cumbia developed from the fusion of African, indigenous, and Spanish influences that existed in the Caribbean coastal region of the country during colonial times (Ochoa Escobar, 2016). The female dancer wears a long skirt which she takes into her hands to dance with. I noticed that there was a sense of quickness in the footwork juxtaposed with the more sustained movement in the arms with the skirt. There was a lot of arcing movement of the arms, this motion moved the skirt through the horizontal, vertical, and sagittal planes of movement. Most of the movements involved a far reach into the kinesphere extending, and showing off the skirt. There is an accented use of the thigh/pelvis and heel/coccyx connections used through the footwork as well as the use of the scapula/arm in the movements of the skirt. The movement of the feet is what causes the hips to move very naturally. A particular posture associated with this dance is for the female dancers to remain very vertical in their bodies as they are moving the skirt with their heads tilting slightly upwards. Revisiting the style of

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dance reminded me of the importance of embodying your culture through its dance form as a way of connecting to it from a different level, feeling it in your body.

Conclusion

Immigrant children have had the foundation of their identity shaken by the process of emigrating to a new country with a different culture. According to Rousseau et al. (2005) migration can raise questions about identity more intensely. Research has supported the idea that individuals who experience “living between two culture” whether this be due to immigration or due to mixed racial or ethnic identity can experience being bicultural as a negative experience if their bicultural endeavors are not supported by their environment (Makarova & Birman, 2015, Navarrete & Jenkins, 2011). Research has also supported positive benefits associated with biculturalism (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2005, Colon & Sanchez, 2010, Zarate & Pineda, 2014). “Biculturalism may be emerging as an equally important protective factor that can lead to increases in educational achievement, quality of life, and socio-cognitive functioning” (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2005, p. 401).

The experiential presented appeared to serve as expected, allowing the participants to begin to think about their identity and their culture. It provided participants with the space to think about these topics and explore them through the arts. This experiential could be adjusted to be used with different age groups and would be appropriate for any population of bicultural individuals. For the purposes of this project the cultural identity workshop was one-time intervention. However, the experiential presented only scratches the surface in this process of building on a strong cultural identity. The experiential could be expanded on and the participant’s cultural identity could be further explored with more sessions and further

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discussions. Further research should continue to explore how culture and biculturalism shape an individual's identity and how these factors affect their well-being.

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Appendix A

Guided Meditation Script:

Find a comfortable spot in the room

You are invited to make yourself as comfortable as possible, whether that be in your chair sitting down or laying on the floor. You can close your eyes or maintain a soft gaze whatever is most comfortable for you.

You may take this time to bring attention to your breath. There is no need to change it, just notice it. You can continue to breathe at your current pace, or you may try to extend the length of your inhales and exhales. Inviting a feeling of relaxation to wash over your body with each breath.

As you breath, you may feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed.

As you relax, you may start to create a picture in your mind.

Imagine that you have been told that you will be moving to a faraway place tomorrow

You must pack quickly and all you will not have the opportunity to take many things with you

You can imagine yourself in your home, this could be your current home or a previous home, whichever home comes to mind.

You can imagine yourself going through your home room by room searching for the items you will take with you.

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Since you will not have much space, you will really have to think about which items are the most important to you. Perhaps the items chosen will have a special meaning attached to them or a memory? Perhaps these items will remind you of your home or your culture?

What would you take with you? What meaning do these objects have for you?

Imagine packing these items into your suitcase

What about your memories, which memories would you like to carry with you? Perhaps there may be some you would like to leave behind.

Imagine packing these memories into your suitcase as well

What could you take from your culture? Which parts of your culture do you value? Perhaps this is a specific custom or celebration, or a specific belief or value from your culture? Is it a particular style?

Imagine packing these values, beliefs, or customs from your culture into your suitcase.

Which parts of your culture or cultures make you, you. How does your culture impact your identity? How do the items you chose and the memories you chose represent your identity? What do the things you have packed in your suitcase tell others about you? Your identity? Your personality?

Whenever you're ready you can begin to come back to the present moment, to this room we are in right now. And whenever you're ready you can slowly open your eyes.

THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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Expressive Therapies Division
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Dance/Movement Therapy, MA

Student's Name: Karen Alejandra Salazar

Type of Project: Thesis

Title: Promoting Cultural Identity through Dance/Movement therapy with
Immigrant children

Date of Graduation: 05/19/18

In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor: 