Bicultural Art Experience as an Innovative Approach in Intercultural Education

(Case study: 9 Years Old Brazilian Children)

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Abstract: *The aim of this research is study the role of intercultural education through bicultural art experience for improving intercultural competencies. For this, a phenomenological qualitative study designed aimed to introduce different aspects of Persian culture among 9 years old Brazilian children. It contained four steps: making interest (introducing target culture through media), comparing two cultures (managing Q&A situation), experiencing bicultural art creation (Drawing). The study was based on Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. Results indicate the influence of bicultural art experience on shifting from denial stage, decreasing polarization significantly, increasing the ability of minimization, particularly reaching to intercultural acceptance and also developing creative ability of adaptation.*

Keywords: *Intercultural education, bicultural art experience, intercultural experience and Brazilian children.*

1. Introduction

The aim of the study was exploring a learning experience among 9 years old children through art and biculturalism for improving their intercultural competencies specially their knowledge, attitudes and skills of interpreting and relating. We used biculturalism and art to make a situation that children see from different cultural perspectives and choose between them.

A person's affective response to intercultural difference is 'intercultural sensitivity' [1]. Bennett [2] defined it as the subjective (phenomenological) experience of cultural difference. It is also described as a person'sactive desire to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate and accept cultural diversity [3]. According to the DMIS [4], intercultural sensitive individuals have an ethnorelative orientation, while their less sensitive peers are ethnocentric. The model includes six stages moving from complete denial to complete acceptance of cultural difference. The stages are progressive and linear, with each stage moving to a deeper level of cultural sensitivity.

2. Methodology

For evaluating the bicultural art practice whether can develop, intercultural competencies, the intercultural development continuum model was selected. Each of the experience stage considered as leading issue for

progress in continuum. In order to obtain trustworthy data we used multiple qualitative methods for evaluating intercultural sensitivity which include observation, interview, written reflections and analyzing children's painting as art based research.

The experience was held amongCriativo elementary school[1] students in Florianopolis, Santa Catarina state (private school). Namely ages of students were between 9 years. Their genders were 51% female and 49% male. Brazil was selected as a case study because Iran in Brazil was not familiar and Persian culture was something completely new and unknown. They had no and sometimes superficial previous information, even misunderstanding about Iran, such as it is located in Middle East and all the Middle East countries are in the war. People speak Arabic or females should wear very strict Hijab.

This total intercultural experience got about 50 minutes. It contained 3 stages, each of them focused on specific orientations of Intercultural Development Continuum: monocultural, transitional and intercultural mindset:

2.1. Making interested (monocultural)

This section which was short introduction of target culture aimed to shift from denial stage took about 20 minutes. In a denial stage one's own culture is experienced as the only real one, and consideration of other cultures is avoided by maintaining psychological or physical isolation from difference. Usually people who are in this stage avoid the subject of diversity [2]. Denial is most reflective of dominant culture individuals who have rare experience with people from different cultural backgrounds. The resolution issue is to notice and confront cultural differences. This process begins to establish a set of categories for understanding cultural diversity [5].

The experience began with a short visual introduction which was about 10 minutes. It was started from Iran's flag and map, its natural and cultural diversity, cultural and national icons like famous towers or mountains, costumes, dances, rituals, particular art and architecture, some special kinds of handicrafts and souvenirs, traditional foods and special animals. After this explanation a short clip which was about 10 minutes played. It introduced different states of Iran with their natural, historical, technological and cultural aspects. This clip was selected because of these reasons: It supported wide range of different aspects of Iran from old time to now a day life, natural and wildlife to historical and cultural. It summarized ethnical and natural diversity in Iran. The video clip played along happy folk music of each area which was suitable for these ages.

2.2. Categorizing and Comparing (Transitional mindset)

In this stage, the trainer managed a discussion for comparison two cultures. It took about 10 minutes. In this stage kid experienced polarization (defense and reversal) and minimization. In the defense stage, one's own culture (or adopted culture) is experience as the only good one and cultural difference is denigrated [2].

The key resolution issue for passing from Polarization is to recognize the stereotypic nature of one's perceptions and experience of the other culture and to actively identify commonalities between one's own views, needs, and goals and that of the other [5], So in this stage we used Inquiry-based learning. It help students understand that people can hold different worldview. It help them to examine those views and respect them, although not to necessarily accept them [6].Inquiry-based approach help the children to makes the stereotypes clear and questionable and also encourage them to search actively for commonalities

2.3. Creating Bicultural Art (Intercultural mindset)

The last phase was 20 minutes free time for bicultural art practice, which was specifically drawing a picture, which encompass two cultures simultaneously. In this situation kids asked some questions for example they wanted to know more about some symbols. Sometimes they wanted to see the flag or other national symbols again.

Art-based learning may contribute to the development of students' attitudes regarding respect towards different ethnic/cultural groups [7]. According to Forehand [8], one of the ways to enter the world behind the wall of presumptions which block our perspectives is to build the bridge and make experiential connections [9]. In this stage children created different ways for bridging the two worlds.

3. Results

3.1. Categorizing and comparing findings

After watching the clip, children keened to ask about the differences and searching for basic similarities of two countries. In this Inquiry-based learning practice they tried to categorize cultural items. They asked questions about foods (specifically bread, cheese and kebab because Brazilian ones are so famous and special), currency, local music and dance, ceremonies and language. They had freedom to ask anything about researcher's culture and researcher tried to explain it. sometime she search in Persian and find some picture or videos to make it clear.

Most of the children had no or very little past information about Iran. There were almost no memories, presumptions or bias. Neither defensive nor negative reflections were observed. Additionally because Iran was not famous in Brazil, no reversal reflection was observed. As a whole, these two stages supposed to shift children from mono cultural mindset to transitional one.

3.2. Creating bicultural art findings

In the last stage when children asked for drawing two countries simultaneously, they used the explored cultural categories. Through this stage, they specifically develop their skill of interpreting and relating through the process art creating. Analyses of their paintings upon their explorations yield five main themes of Intercultural development continuum [5]. Among all of the 53 gathered paintings, there were two ones, which seems obscure and so we cannot categorize them. The table below shows the main themes with one example for each of them:

1- **Denial:** There were not any picture which could be categorize as denial stage.
2- **Polarization:** In this stage the child seems to illustrate superourity of own country. Among all of the paintings there was just one painting that seems to show the defensive feeling. There was no painting which indicates the reversal feeling.
3- **Minimization:** Works under this category show the mutual or similar items of the two cultures. In this stage children showed their ability in finding the commonalities of the two cultures. For example, Sun and heart were some of global, unifying object. Furthermore, in our case football was the popular sport in two countries. Since, many children drew the football ground, a place that Brazilian and Iranian can meet each other and play game. All of these pictures emphasized on the equal scores of two teams. The other mutual item was cable car, which exists in both of the countries. In spite, it has some differences in two countries; children assumed it as a common or maybe a connector object.
4- **Acceptance:** Already the most of the pictures shows acceptance stage. Pictures, which categorized under acceptance showed that children can organize some contextual categorize that differentiate one set from another. They put the comparable items of the same category to show their difference. Some of their categories were greeting, people's appearance, climate and natural phenomena and elements, national icons (flags, towers) and musical instruments, architecture and so on. Most of these pictures have an obvious border, which separated the two nations.
5- **Adaptation:** The pictures, which sorted under adaptation theme show children's trying for fusing two cultural elements and design a new hybrid one. Of course, this shows their cognitive adaptation skills not behavioral ones. Combining two comparable icons and generate a hybrid like generating the new hybrid flags or other cultural icons and adapting some Brazilian cultural items to Iranian context and vice versa were two main children's strategies for illustrating the bridging between two cultural systems. This stage shows mostly the creativity of children.

TABLE I- Five main themes of painting based on Intercultural development Continuum

Theme	Examples	Note	%
Undefinable			3.78%
Denial	-	-	0%
Polarization		Football game of Brazil VS Iran: In this game Brazil wined. It seems he wanted to emphasize on superiority of Brazil in football.	1.89%
Minimization		The child tried to emphesize of similarity of both countires. Cable car was one of the item which exits in two countries and children tried to emphasizing in this similarity.	11.42%
Acceptance		Illustrating comparable items of two countries regarding to various cultural sets with obvious seperatation.	56.60%
Adaptation		Combining Iraian and Brazilian flags.	26.40%
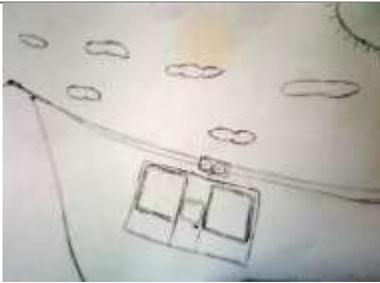
4. Conclusion

This intercultural art practice illustrate a journey from ethnocentric stages of DMIS to ethnorelative ones. It was a short practice for changing monocultural mindsets to intercultural ones. This practice tried to make the children curious and interested in cultural differences.

These results demonstrated bicultural art practice can facilitate intercultural development progress. It helps children to pass denial stage. Art and biculturalism as an intercultural learning practice emerged creative artistic ways that beside expanding children's intercultural knowledge and attitude, it specifically develops skills of interpreting and relating the other culture.

for further researches implementing such experience in other cultural contexts and among older children are suggested.

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