

Promoting Cultural Diversity among First Year University Students during an Educational Excursion

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ABSTRACT This article focuses on promoting cultural diversity among first year university students from different backgrounds, using an indigenous game called *upuca*. Learning Outcome 3 of Life Orientation was used as a vehicle to promote cultural diversity. The aim of this study was to describe and promote cultural diversity among first year university students during an educational excursion in 2007. The research adopted a qualitative generic ethnographic design, where students were observed by the researcher during their game play interaction with an aim of seeing how they promote and embrace cultural diversity. Data were collected through using an observation approach and eighty first year students participated in this study. The findings of this study indicated that the indigenous game played was of value to the students because they became aware of the importance of friendship, respect, self-awareness, improved social interaction, improved relationships and reduced cultural and language barriers.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on the description and findings from the educational excursion undertaken by first year university culturally diverse students in 2007. An indigenous game introduced by the researcher was played with an aim of promoting cultural diversity through the students' interaction. In that year, some lecturers and the researcher accompanied the university students to Golden Gate in the Free State province with the purpose of amongst others, observing how they interact as they play an indigenous game called *upuca*. Educational excursion in this study is described by the researcher as a trip undertaken by a group of students to a place away from their normal environment/institution, with a purpose of gaining a specific learning experience. Rahman and Spafford (2009) add by defining educational excursion as a trip arranged and undertaken for educational purposes. The group of students was eighty in number as mentioned in the previous section with different cultural, political, social, racial, ethnic, linguistic and economic background hence diverse students. This composition of students according to Sen Gupta (2003) is understood to be people of different cultures. In the context of this study, this means that teachers, students and parents should understand and appreciate human diversity

irrespective of the socio-economic background of individuals as well as the demographic location. On this note, the researcher describes cultural diversity as the appreciation, understanding and respect for different cultures, thus overcoming ethnocentricity and discrimination.

The Purpose of the Educational Excursion

The purpose of the educational excursion is to explore and assist different students from different backgrounds (culturally diverse students) to work together in educational activities and games given by different lecturers from their modules. These activities are always planned before the commencement of the educational excursion and they are in line with the university module outcomes. The educational excursion is undertaken yearly at this university with an aim of enhancing cultural diversity among first year diverse students, coming from different backgrounds.

From the module of Life Orientation (LO) methodology consisting of four Learning Outcomes, that is, (personal well-being, citizenship education, recreation and physical well-being and career and career choices) as written in the National Curriculum Statement (NSC) of 2004, it was chosen to focus on recreation and physical well-being, Learning Outcome 3 which allows students to use various

skills such as collaboration, respect, communication, planning, time management, creative and critical thinking in solving the problems on different games given. Secondly, this Learning Outcome 3 is not taught in most of disadvantaged rural high schools, the reason given by most of the teachers is that their schools lack facilities and this creates a gap. On this note students should thus be made aware that even if some schools lack resources to implement Learning Outcome 3, teachers should be flexible and also improvise as this Learning Outcome 3 is equally important as other Learning Outcomes in LO. The outcomes and an example of the game played are described in the proceeding section.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is: to explore and describe the promotion of cultural diversity among first year University students during an educational excursion using an indigenous game called *upuca* within Learning Outcome 3 of LO.

Research Question

Research question for this study is thus stated as: How can cultural diversity be promoted among first year university students during an educational excursion using an indigenous game called *upuca* within Learning Outcome 3 of LO?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This study required a qualitative research method, which involves an engagement with the participants as stated by Merriam (2002). In qualitative research, Henning et al. (2004) add that phenomena are studied in their natural settings and in this study Golden Gate is the natural setting. That is the reason why the researcher firstly attempted to make sense in terms of students' interaction with others during the playing of the game. The design adopted is generic ethnographic because students were observed formally and informally by the researcher as they play with an aim of seeing how they interact with one another. This means that they were observed as they mixed with other students from different cultures, races, languages, ethnic groups and social classes. Secondly, the researcher acted as a participant observer in this educational excursion, with an

aim of studying the phenomena in depth. This is supported by DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) when mentioning that the researcher understands the contextual meanings of an event or events through participating and observing as a subject in the research. Interviews were not used because the educational excursion was only planned for two days with many activities and congested university timetable.

In this study, purposeful sampling was further used because only a total number of eighty first year education students were selected from the total number of the University students. Each group consisted of diverse students with different backgrounds and was assigned to an indigenous game activity called *upuca* assumed to be known by the researcher.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through informal and formal observation by the researcher during the time when the students were interacting with one another as they played the game. The researcher thus constantly monitored and kept a detailed record of what he/she observed.

Mouton (2001) describes data analysis as the breaking up of data into themes, patterns and relationships. Data were therefore analyzed by means of content analysis where the researcher used observation notes. Content analysis is thus relevant to this study because Henning et al. (2004) describe it as the process of transcribing and coding themes that emerge from the categories. These themes were then described in detail.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework within which this study is based on, is Vygotsky's socio-cultural (social interaction) theory. This theory plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition through mediation as Vygotsky (1978) states that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later on the individual level, that is, (first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child, (intra-psychological). Bronfenbrenner's theory (1986) is also important in this study as it focuses on the interrelated systems such as the family, school, and society. These theories are, therefore, relevant to this

study and their relevance is seen when as a lecturer, mediates and interacts with the students from different families with different cultural backgrounds as they play the game. It can be once more emphasized that the preceding theoretical frameworks are relevant to this study, as we are in the currently changing education system that needs constant positive interaction between individuals and systems such as individuals, families, schools and communities.

The Context of Cultural Diversity in This Study

The widely held misconception about cultural diversity is that people think it is static. Some people think it deals with learning about all the historically under-represented groups in the society or community and ask teachers to show the type of teaching method they can employ to such a group. This is not the case in this study as students should be encouraged to explore their own culture and the changes that they have gone through as a result of changing contexts and societies. In other words, students should be taught to know that cultural diversity has been at a centre of debate in South Africa and achieving it remains a challenge because of South Africa's complex political, geographic and socio-economic factors. This does not mean that as researchers we should postpone seeking ways in which cultural diversity can be promoted in institutions of learning, hence the inclusion of the indigenous games in this study with an aim of promoting and developing students' competencies for recognition, cultural awareness, respect and acceptance of cultural diversity. Parla (1994) describes cultural diversity as the understanding of multicultural education for all children. This is further strengthened by Banks (2009) when pointing out that we should strengthen cultural diversity by shifting away from the traditional view. This implies that we should try not to work with culturally diverse students only but also co-operate and communicate with parents from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. This, according to Ranasinha (2010), means that it is necessary to uphold the identities of different social groups since that may give a feeling of acceptance and respect. In other words, we should also involve parents and communities in promoting cultural diversity and this can be through organizing cultural dances, games, story-telling, singing and debates.

The Concept of Indigenous Game

The indigenous game is defined by Ruddle (2000) as the unique traditional local knowledge existing within and around specific people at a particular area. In this study one can further add that indigenous game is a dynamic unique knowledge system which was ignored and neglected as it was being viewed as primitive. It is dynamic because now of late new knowledge is continuously added and stored in people's memories, games, dances and activities. One can further explain that indigenous games are games that are part of our heritage thus need to be taught to people and children with an aim of ensuring that they are not lost and also that the current and future generations can enjoy playing them too.

To support the above statements an indigenous game activity from Learning Outcome 3 of LO was designed in such a way that students were expected to use their communication, respect, planning, timing, team-work, creative and critical thinking skills in order to solve the problem in any activity given. As mentioned in the previous section, the game emphasizes teamwork with an aim of promoting cultural diversity. This is supported by the Minister of Sport and Recreation Rev Dr. Stofile during the official opening of the 4th annual National Indigenous Games Festival in 2007 when stating that indigenous games underpins... the common objective of building a better life for all. This means that indigenous games can promote cultural diversity because in it participants can learn to respect and work together as a team thus unity, with a common goal of winning the game. This was also seen in this study when the students who were spectators cheered up their participants and encouraged them to work harder in order to win the game thus enhancing positive competition among the students without looking at the skin colour, language, social class and culture of the individuals. An example of an indigenous game performed by the culturally diverse groups of students during the educational excursion is described in the proceeding section.

1. A Game Called Upuca

According to the Department of Sport and Recreation South Africa (2006), *upuca* is a game

where each player throws the stone in the air and catches it with one hand. The aim of *upuca* game according to Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport (Provincial Government of the Western Cape 23 October 2009) is to successfully be the first to scoop out all the stones and return them one by one to the hole. In this study the aim as mentioned in the previous section is to enable the first year students to socialize, enhance their critical thinking, compete positively, awaken their curiosity and promote cultural diversity through playing an indigenous game. This will, therefore, help them to accept and respect other students thus free from prejudice and racism. Banks (2009) supports this view by stating that a more comprehensive all-embracing approach is needed that addresses both racial, cultural, socio-economic and gender-based inequalities.

2. The Preparatory Stage and the Actual Method of Playing Upuca Game

It should be borne in mind that the game requires good eye-hand co-ordination skills, that is, the skill to see, throw and catch the stones. The duration of the game is determined by the captain and players themselves. Equipments needed are two players for example, a boy and a girl of different ages, colour and background who compete each other whilst their friends / peers cheer them.

A round hole is dug on the ground and the small ten round stones should be placed in the hole. The judge or captain tosses by throwing up the coin to decide who will be the first to start playing the game. Firstly, all the ten stones are put in the hole and allow the first player to throw her/his round *ghoen* (a round stone) in the air and simultaneously should take all the small stones out of the hole before catching her/his *ghoen*. If she/he succeeds in doing so, she /he should try to keep one stone with her/him and has to get nine back into the hole. She/he should repeat the same procedure until one stone remains in the hole. In that way she /he wins the game and continues playing until when nothing remains in the hole. But if she /he fails to catch her/his *ghoen*, her/his opponent takes over and follows the same procedure. This means that the winner is the player without making mistakes.

The researcher discovered that the *upuca* game helped to bring together students who

were seeing others at first as strangers. This is evidenced by amongst others, later during the year Afrikaans students from the elite suburbs working in close contact with other students from different cultural backgrounds. As this game is different from the known games, the researcher also observed the following: that students were willing to learn, that those who took part had an opportunity to think out of their boxes and outside their familiar comfort environment.

3. The Outcome of the Game Activity

The outcome of the game activity was to achieve the ability to work together as a team hence diversity. The outcome was, therefore, successfully met because at the end of the game the following were achieved: the students were able to analyze the game process and different roles they were engaged in. They also analyzed their personal and group insights. The group winners were announced and this enabled them to gain also the positive competition skill.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was found that through the game:

Students were able to get out of their comfort zone and enter the unfamiliar surroundings. This implies that the game played enhanced their interaction as supported by Kirchner (2000) when mentioning that games help people to skills for succeeding in unfamiliar societies. While playing the game, the students laughed a lot and that broke the tension between diverse students but all in all, it became an enjoyable experience. During the game, there had been physical contacts thus closeness and togetherness. This implies that the success of playing games should result in working as a team as this conveys a sense of caring and compassion. Secondly, the game was mostly based on movement, verbal and non-verbal communications. The non verbal communication advantaged those students whose mother tongue is not English as they became freer to express themselves in actions. Pöchhacker and Shlesinger (2002) add by mentioning that people try to make sense of the non-verbal communication of others by attaching meaning to what they observed doing. There was thus the emergence of interrelationships between players.

They changed from being a group of strangers as mentioned in the preceding section, to a team. In any game played one expects collaboration as stated by Nakatsu and Hoshino (2003) that collaboration leads to 'rich' communication possibilities and an increase in forming coalitions. At the end of the game, the students enjoyed the educational excursion as they became a united group of students who ended up seeing themselves as the university students, as human beings with a common goal of scaffolding and helping each other in order to achieve the set learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

One could thus conclude by stating that these students at first lacked the richness and promotion of cultural integration. This emerged during *upuca* game activity provided by the researcher but at the end of the game their behavior and perceptions changed. Ever since the educational excursion and the game played in the 2007, those students are actively involved in initiating and driving cultural integration at the University.

The educational excursion and indigenous game played was therefore of value because students became aware of: different cultural and individual differences other students brought to the educational excursion. They also became aware of the importance of friendship, improved social interaction, improved relationships and reduced cultural and language barriers formed during the game from different modules offered at the University.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the preceding findings and discussion, it can be recommended that, the Department of Education should establish inter- high school sporting competition (mixing disadvantaged rural schools with advantaged urban schools during sporting activities, an approach which is not yet practiced), where different learners from different cultural backgrounds and different

schools will be mixing. This is what is currently been done by some of the universities during inter-university sporting activities.

Secondly educational authorities need to encourage cultural diversity in the classroom through the content of the text books as well as assigning teachers of different communities to engage with different children/learners.

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