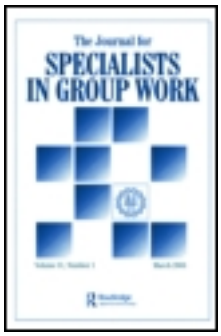

The Journal for Specialists in Group Work
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/usgw20

Fostering Success Through Group Work with Children who Celebrate Diversity

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Published online: 21 Jun 2010.

To cite this article: Bogusia Molina , Greg Brigman & Angela Rhone (2003) Fostering Success Through Group Work with Children who Celebrate Diversity, The Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 28:2, 166-184

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/714860218

Fostering Success Through Group Work With Children Who Celebrate Diversity

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A multicultural model for children in Grades K through 5 to foster skills needed for success is presented. The learning, living, and working (LLW) group work model focuses on three skill sets identified by multiple researchers over the past 30 years as necessary for success in school, relationships, and work. These three skill sets—learning skills, social skills, and cognitive strategies—can be strengthened by participation in the LLW group sessions. The 12-session group uses role play, stories about diversity, and service learning to increase success skills and understanding of diverse cultures. Listening, attending behaviors, cooperative work and play, and the use of story structure are embedded into each session. The goal of group participation is increased academic achievement and positive peer relations. The model was developed to be used in a school setting and may be appropriate for other settings as well.

Keywords: *diversity; children's success; group work; storytelling*

Over the past 30 years, researchers have consistently identified learning skills, social skills, and cognitive strategies essential for success. Listening, attending, and following directions are examples of learning skills. Social skills include working and playing cooperatively with others, forming and maintaining friendships, and empathy. Inte-

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Bogusia Molina is an assistant professor at Fairfield University. Greg Brigman is a professor at Florida Atlantic University. Angela Rhone is an associate professor at Florida Atlantic University. The three authors of this article come from three different cultures and three unique specialties. Yet what interconnects them is the shared value of deconstructing hierarchies, constructing collaborative teams, and creating opportunities for children's talents to unfold. This article was written with the collaborative spirit and talents of all the authors. The order of the names does not imply a hierarchy of author's contributions. The authors would like to thank Dr. Don Ward and the editorial team for encouraging and constructive feedback during the writing of this article. Correspondence concerning this article should be directed to Dr. Bogusia Molina, Fairfield University, Graduate School of Education and Allied Professions, Canisius Hall, Room 111, 1073 N. Benson, Fairfield, CT 06430; e-mail: Bmolina@mail. fairfield.edu.

JOURNAL FOR SPECIALISTS IN GROUP WORK, Vol. 28 No. 2, June 2003, 166-184
DOI: 10.1177/0193392203252190

gration (identifying similarities) and differentiation (identifying differences) represent cognitive strategies (Cartledge & Milburn, 1978; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Meyers, Atwell, & Orpet, 1968; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). Furthermore, recent reviews of the research literature conclude that learning skills, social skills, and cognitive strategies have a strong positive correlation with positive peer relations and academic achievement (Bushweller, 1995; Eisenberg et al., 1997; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Werner, 1996).

Successful approaches for teaching learning skills, social skills, and cognitive strategies and the effect of these approaches on increasing school success for children have been widely researched (Cobb, 1970; Fad, 1990; Ladd & Mize, 1983; Strother & Harvill, 1986; Wooster & Carson, 1982). The importance of providing instruction in learning skills and social skills has been documented. The strategies for teaching these skills have been reported. Nonetheless, children still lack these skills. More than 30 years ago, teachers cited the lack of prerequisite skills, which include social skills, as the main reason for poor early school performance (Cartledge & Milburn, 1978). Similarly, in a survey of 7,000 kindergarten teachers, the National Service-Learning Cooperative/ Clearinghouse (1995) reported that the teachers surveyed estimated that 35% of children in the United States are not prepared to enter school.

In addition to the general struggles that teachers experience as a result of children not being prepared to enter school, the classroom has become more diverse. Since the 1960s, the number of interethnic, interfaith, and interracial families has increased significantly.

For example, it is estimated that between 41% and 52% of Jewish people marry outside their religious groups. Among Italians and Hispanics, 80% and 40%, respectively, choose a partner outside their own cultural group. At least 40% of all Asian children born in the United States have one White parent. Of particular note, the rates of marriages between African Americans and European Americans have tripled (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993, 2001). Finally, in the 10-year period between 1996 and 2006, the percentage of growth in the labor force is projected to be 41% for Asian Americans, 36% for Hispanic Americans, 14% for African Americans, and 9% for European Americans (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001).

Societal views of intercultural relationships have changed as the understanding of different cultures has grown. Yet, harmony in intercultural relationships remains elusive, and challenges are presented at numerous levels. Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological theory of development depicts the numerous influences that layers of systems place on individuals and families. For example, at the macrosystemic

level, Native Americans have experienced genocide, and their human rights have been disregarded for centuries (McLaughlin, 1994). At the microsystemic level (family, peers, schools, places of worship, neighborhood), stereotyping and miscommunication within and between the systems often occur and lead to intensified conflicts, isolation, rejection, and oppression (Falicov, 1995; Perel, 2000).

Children who come from diverse backgrounds experience stressors at numerous systemic layers. Take Maria, for example, who is bicultural, of Mexican American descent. At home, she may hear her maternal grandfather say, "Maria gets dark in the sun so fast; she looks nothing like us." Whereas her paternal grandmother may say, "Maria's hair is so light; she looks nothing like us." As a consequence, Maria may feel rejected by both sides of her family. Maria may also be subjected to stressors at school. She may overhear racial jokes about Mexican Americans.

Such microsystemic challenges can invite isolation and a sense of inferiority into children's lives. In response to the challenges experienced by children and in an effort to celebrate diversity, a group work model—learning, living, and working (LLW)—has been developed. This multicultural model for children in Grades K through 5 can foster skills needed for success in school, in relationships, and in work; that is, learning skills, social skills, and cognitive strategies.

GROUP WORK WITH CHILDREN

Research on the effectiveness of group work with children has increased over the past two decades (Boutwell & Myrick, 1992; Bowman, 1987; Brigman, Lane, & Lane, 1994; Coppock, 1993; Gazda, 1989; Golden, 1987; Morganett, 1994). A national survey of school counselors found that group work with children was viewed as a very effective means of teaching skills and providing support (Bowman, 1987). Group work with children has been implemented with a proactive as well as a remedial focus (Gazda, 1989; Gladding, 1999). Groups for dealing with social skills and life skills have been conceptualized. In addition, groups for resolving challenging situations, such as divorce and living with an alcoholic parent, have also been formed (Brigman et al., 1994; Homrich, 2002; Morganett, 1994; Riddle, Bergin, & Douzenis, 1997). Furthermore, Shechtman, Vurembrand, and Hertz-Lazarowitz (1994) discovered that school adjustment improved as a result of group experience. Children who participated in groups with a focus on successful learning skills significantly improved their academic achievement over control groups.

A variety of group experiences has been designed to promote the development of success in children (Campbell, 1991; Campbell & Bow-

man, 1993). The LLW model, an effort to foster children's success, adds another dimension. This model strives to enhance children's skills associated with long-term success in the areas of learning, living, and working in a diverse society. At the same time, the model attempts to increase children's cultural sensitivity and awareness. Anecdotal data from children who participate in groups and observations of group leaders suggest that an awareness of a strong diverse identity and an awareness and appreciation of others can be nurtured when children's learning skills and social skills improve.

GROUP WORK AND DIVERSITY AWARENESS

Using groups as an instrument for diversity awareness is not new. Jane Adams, in the late 1800s, initiated what one might now call psychoeducational groups for immigrants (Gladding, 1999). The purpose of these groups was to offer support to individuals who felt alienated from the majority culture. Lewin (1951) initiated groups with a focus on tension reduction and improvement of racial attitudes so that diverse individuals can work together in harmony. During the past 20 years, emphasis on cultural diversity and group work has flourished. For example, Merta (1995) described multicultural perspectives and stressed the importance of learning about the within-multicultural-group differences. In addition, DeLucia-Waack (1996a, 1996b) and DeLucia, Coleman, and Jensen-Scott (1992) identified the need for facilitating diverse groups in response to the increased diversity in society.

The importance of addressing diversity issues during group prescreening has been recognized by Donigian and Malnati (1997). Issues and strategies pertaining to the facilitation of diverse counseling groups have been identified by Johnson, Torres, Coleman, and Smith (1995). Gladding (1999) and Corey and Corey (1997) have addressed diverse group facilitation. Diversity competency standards have been delineated (Haley-Banez, Pack-Brown, & Molina, 1999). Recently, models depicting the richness of diverse approaches have illuminated group work practice. For example, Pack-Brown, Whittington-Clark, and Parker (1998) described group work based on the Nguzo Saba principles (principles associated with the African Kwanzaa foundation), and Garrett, Garrett, and Brotherton (2001) described the time-honored Cherokee Healing Circle traditions.

The authors have identified learning skills, social skills, and cognitive strategies essential for children's success. The societal changes resulting in a more diverse classroom population have been described. Group work practices with children have been highlighted. Group work

efforts that embrace the richness and the challenges of diversity have been delineated. Finally, we will now describe the LLW group work model.

THE LEARNING, LIVING, AND WORKING MODEL

The LLW model, made up of 12 sessions, can be implemented in school settings with children from kindergarten through fifth grade. The groups are consistent with the ASGW description of guidance/psychoeducation groups. However, based on the needs of the group members, the groups, at times, may take more of a counseling/interpersonal problem-solving focus (Association for Specialists in Group Work, 2000). Some school districts view this type of group as developmental in nature and part of the regular school curriculum and therefore do not require parental permission. However, we suggest that counselors using this model obtain parental permission. The process of obtaining informed consent is an opportunity to clarify the goals of the program and engage the parent in supporting the objectives. This model was developed to be used in a school setting and may be appropriate for other settings as well.

Although the groups are preventive in nature, proper screening and selection of participants are necessary. The LLW model is structured in three phases, implemented during the 12 sessions. Techniques for reading, discussing, role playing, creating diverse stories, folktales, and legends are embedded in each session.

Screening and Selection

Participation is open to any interested children. Teachers, children, and parents can be provided with an informational flier concerning group goals, expectations, and norms. Frequently, teachers and staff refer children who might benefit from group participation. However, it is imperative that each potential group member be interviewed by the group facilitator. Several guidelines are offered by practitioners and researchers (Brigman et al., 1994; Corey & Corey, 1997; Gladding, 1999; Morganett, 1994), which can be very helpful in determining appropriateness for group participation. Exclusion criteria encompass high levels of aggression, signs of personality disorders, or lack of interest. Inclusion criteria envelop interest in group participation and a willingness to learn from each other.

The LLW Structure

The LLW model is made up of 12 group sessions, 30 to 45 minutes long, for children in Grades K through 5. Usually, the groups include five to eight children who are no more than a year apart in age. Stories selected are developmentally appropriate for the age of the children who participate in the groups. The model has three phases: (a) creating a supportive group, (b) recognizing qualities in diversity, and (c) learning from each other.

A supportive group is created during the first three sessions. During the first session, the children develop norms and learn about each other. They also learn about the opportunity to help younger children in their school, which is available to them after completion of the first nine sessions of the LLW model. The children learn about specific encouragement skills and behaviors in the second session. In the third session, they learn cooperation skills in working with diverse groups.

Six sessions encompass recognizing qualities in diversity. During each of the six sessions, a different diversity story is read and processed with the children. Positive and enriching aspects of differences are emphasized. Creative arts, Gestalt techniques, and Adlerian approaches are integrated with the fundamental group facilitation skills (Adler, 1964; Carroll & Wiggins, 1997; Donigian & Malnati, 1997; Gladding, 1999; Oaklander, 1988; Perls, 1969).

Learning from each other, the third phase, is dedicated to service learning. Service learning is the blending of service and learning goals in such a way that both occur and are enriched by each other (Toole & Toole, 1992). This concept provides concrete opportunities for participating children to learn new skills, to think critically, to help others, and to test new roles in an environment that encourages positive risk taking and rewards competence. Service learning, like processing group activities, emphasizes reflecting on the service activities that promote helping others and at the same time can enhance higher level thinking skills. This concept also offers children the opportunity to experience social interest, a foundation of mental health (Adler, 1964).

The service learning component is incorporated during the 10th and 11th sessions of the 12 group sessions. During the 10th session, the older children who have completed nine sessions of the LLW model meet the younger children in their school. They are involved in an introductory activity, and ground rules for reading, discussing, and role plays are addressed. The facilitators bring a wide selection of appropriate stories for children to read. Children form dyads made up of a younger child and

an older child. For example, a kindergartner and a fourth grader are paired. Each pair selects a story that involves diverse people, creatures, and animals living, learning, and working together. The paired children know each other and know the story they will read together.

During the 11th session, the older and the younger children come together to share their chosen stories. The older child reads the story and uses a structured guide to discuss the story and to role-play the solutions to the identified dilemmas. The whole group comes back to process the reading. Sometimes each child adds a line to a whole group story. Other times, each child makes a part of a drawing that describes the richness of differences. The younger children then go back to their class, and the older children stay and share their successes. This creates opportunities for encouragement and coaching.

The 12th session is devoted to closure; children reflect on lessons learned from each other. They describe their similarities and differences. They create new endings and new beginnings to stories yet to unfold on their paths of successful learning, living, and working in a diverse society.

Stories selected are congruent with children's developmental levels. The content of the stories is diverse, enabling children to learn about cultural differences and similarities. For example, some of the stories shared describe children with disabilities; other stories are about children from various religious backgrounds. Many stories, folktales, and legends originate in different cultures and countries. Some stories, for instance, are from Australia, Cuba, Thailand, the Netsilik Eskimos of Canada, Russia, Poland, Brazil, Zimbabwe, and the United States (e.g., the Sioux tribe and the like).

The stories are different and depict a rich cultural fiber. The connection between them is the yearning to make meaning out of the fundamental universal experiences: friendship, belonging, contributing to family, peers, schools, and communities, and dealing with anger, love, isolation, inferiority, and power. Frequently, animals are the main story characters who grapple with existential issues. Each story has lessons for living. Each child may discover unique, yet unifying, lessons. Story sharing offers children an opportunity to creatively learn from each other. The process of creative learning seems to foster children's emotional and intellectual development.

During the group time, stories based on diverse themes are read. Group facilitators assist children in constructing a story structure. Each story has a lesson to be learned. The lessons to be learned help children find ways to live peacefully. Each story has a beginning, middle, and end. The facilitators strive for a balance between the content, the stories, and the process, making meaning out of the stories. Adequate processing is

imperative (Kraus & Hulse-Killacky, 1996). The facilitators strive to capture the "here and now" interactions so that the children can gain awareness of their in-group and outside-of-the-group interactions (Carroll & Wiggins, 1997; Kraus & Hulse-Killacky, 1996). Through the use of creative arts and processing (Gladding, 1999; Oaklander, 1988), children's awareness seems to increase.

Children discuss the themes of "specialness," the beauty in differences, the good in differences, the strengths in differences, and the wisdom in differences throughout story processing. The diverse use of creative arts, the use of animals to represent characters grappling with existential struggles, and the beautiful colors and illustrations are designed to capture children's imagination. The fascination they seem to experience as a result of their exposure to diversity appears to help them in their own creative thinking. Examples of children being exposed to diversity through story sharing follow.

Story sharing. One of the stories we have used in the past is *Fish Is a Fish* (Lionni, 1970). It is an excellent example of a story that depicts important life lessons. The story describes the challenges of a fish when the fish tries to be what it is not—a person, a bird, a frog, or a cow. Finally, the fish realizes that if he keeps trying to live out of water, he will die. The fish learns a very important lesson: He is what he is, and he cannot be what he is not. This story helps children reflect on "Who am I and who am I not?" As the story is processed, several questions can be asked:

1. How would you describe the fish?
2. How does it feel to try so hard to be someone who you are not?
3. Who do you know in your life who may feel like the fish out of water?
4. What are some of the qualities that they have?
5. What could you do to help others who feel like the fish out of water?

The processing illuminates the children's experiences.

Another story, *The Legend of Mackinac Island* (Wargin, 1999), about a turtle named Makinauk, offers several lessons. Themes relevant to diversity include (a) specialness, (b) strength and wisdom in differences, (c) beauty in differences, (d) kindness in differences, and (e) unique gifts that each person can offer. This story helps children recognize the specialness of each child in the group. Several processing questions can be used to help children make this story meaningful:

1. What was the earth like for all the animals before there was land?
2. What was missing from the animals' environment?
3. How would you describe Makinauk, the animal?
4. How was Makinauk different from other animals?

5. Tell us the qualities you have noticed in Makinauk.
6. What are some qualities that you see in people who are different from you?
7. What are some of the qualities that you will look for now in individuals who are different from you?
8. What are some of the ways that you can make individuals whom you perceive as different feel comfortable?

During the processing time, emphasis is placed on the strength, kindness, and thoughtfulness of Makinauk, even with his difference in age, physical ability, and structure from other animals.

A third story, *Metropolitan Cow* (Egan, 1996), was chosen because it too offers several important lessons and themes relevant to diversity, including (a) families, (b) differences and similarities, (c) prejudice, (d) friendship, (e) socioeconomic status, and (f) coming together in crisis. This story depicts the struggles of a cow named Bennet and a pig named Webster who want to become friends, despite their family's objections. The cow and the pig experienced a painful beginning to their friendship because the cow's parents felt that cows were much "too dignified" to be friends with pigs. The cow's parents were revolted by the fact that the pigs moved into an all-cow neighborhood. As the story is processed, children reflect on the following questions:

1. How was Bennet the cow different from other animals in the park?
2. How was Bennet similar to other animals in the park?
3. What does it mean to be "too dignified" for Bennet's family?
4. What qualities did you find in Bennet?
5. What qualities did you find in Webster?

While the children reflect on these questions, the struggles with diversity that they are experiencing begin to surface.

Sometimes fairytales and folktales are used. Bettelheim (1976) describes the profound meaning children can discover anew through fairytales:

> This is exactly the message that fairytales get across to the child in manifold form: that a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence, but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious. (p. 126)

The group offers children a chance to experience a supportive web, a sense of community that can be energizing, where opportunities for growth are encouraged. Based on children's feedback and clinical observations, it appears that indeed many children experience the group as a

web, a place for each strand's differences to illuminate and to strengthen the holistic experience of each child, giving each child an opportunity to thrive and mature. While children gain awareness of the beauty and the wisdom of diversity, their learning and social skills seem to be enhanced, and their cognitive strategies appear to be more sophisticated.

Learning skills. Multicultural story sharing gives children an opportunity to enhance their learning skills by practicing listening, attending, and following directions. One of the strategies used to enhance learning skills is called the "tell, show, do, and coach" approach. It is based on Bandura's (1977) social learning model. The "tell" component includes giving instructions and highlighting the important points of the story that will be read. For the "show" component, skills associated with listening and attending are demonstrated. For the "do" component, children have an opportunity to experiment with creative arts techniques (Gladding, 1999) that help them make meaning out of the lessons learned. Sometimes children in triads draw out their version of the stories. Other times, they play out the stories. They also create stories where each child adds a line. In other instances, the children put on skits or mock interviews that are later shared with the group. Techniques associated with Gestalt therapy (Perls, 1969; Oaklander, 1988) are integrated with the creative arts.

The facilitators attempt to help children increase their awareness so that their experiences can be fully felt. Gentle yet firm dialogues are invited. A here-and-now presence is encouraged. Perls (1969) noted that it is essential to "lose our mind so we can come to our senses" (p. 31). In these groups, children offer support to one another and learn through all their senses. Once children have an opportunity to experience their own feelings, the ability to assume another person's perspective and to understand that person's thoughts and feelings seems to improve. Perspective taking is crucial for respecting and appreciating diversity and for making contact with others, no matter how different they appear to be. Making contact with others offers children an opportunity to experience harmony.

To enhance children's learning skills, processing questions are used, such as

1. Who are the main characters of the story?
2. Where did the story take place?
3. When did the story take place?
4. What were the main events?
5. What was the problem encountered in the story?
6. How were the characters feeling at the beginning, middle, and end of the story?

7. How was the problem solved?
8. How many of you would solve the problem that way?
9. Has a problem like that ever happened to you?
10. How did you feel?
11. What did you do?
12. How did you feel about how it ended?
13. What are some ways you could handle the problem if it happened again?

Usually, the larger groups of children are divided into smaller groups of three or four, who are then invited to exchange answers through skits, drawings, and mock interviews that are later shared with the whole group.

Finally, during the coaching activity, supportive and corrective feedback is offered about the children's application of the learning skills. The facilitator checks in with the small groups and may say, "Maria, I noticed how you paid attention to Christopher by looking at him and matching his feelings when he was sharing his excitement about his favorite story characters." Many counselors experienced in this method use the sandwich approach: Point out something the student is doing correctly, give suggestions on how to change nonhelpful behavior, and finish with comments on student ability; that is, a supportive (bread), corrective (meat), and supportive (bread) sandwich. The coaching component is consistent with Vygotsky's (1962) notion of scaffolding. Furthermore, the coaching element is sustained by the Adlerian principles of encouragement and mutual respect (Adler, 1964).

While stories are processed, group facilitators strive to bring the content of the stories into the here and now. The facilitators assist members to look inwardly, and they link or join members together (Carroll & Wiggins, 1997). Some of the questions and statements that the facilitators may use include the following:

1. "Marco, tell the dragons in your picture how you feel right now."
2. "Marco, pick a person here in the group and talk to him or her about the meaning of your feelings toward the dragons."
3. "I hear you say it is hard to decide who you are because others get in the way."
4. "Tell me how they get in the way of your knowing who you are."
5. "Who else in this group feels like it is hard to know who you are?"
6. "Who here can help in understanding what Marco is saying?"

To further enhance learning skills so that listening and attending to diverse experiences can be recognized and validated, Gestalt techniques and creative arts are further explored. For example, a facilitator may ask children to form small groups and make drawings that will reflect

answers to the following two questions: (a) "If you were in this story, which character would you be?" and (b) "What ending would you want to create for the story?" By reflecting on these questions, the children have an opportunity to gain awareness of their current struggles. Awareness provides children with opportunities to make informed choices. The facilitators, through coaching, provide the needed support and corrective feedback.

For example, during one of the group sessions, the children read *Metropolitan Cow* (Egan, 1996). When the children were asked, "If you were in this story, which character would you be?" Marco, one of the group members said, "I'd be Webster." The facilitator asked Marco to be Webster here and now in the group and to talk to Bennet's parents. Two other group members offered to role-play Bennet's parents. The facilitators encouraged Marco to tell Bennet's parents how he felt about not being able to play with their son. As Marco proceeded with the role play, feelings of sadness and rejection emerged. He was invited to express those feelings. Then the facilitator asked Marco, "Who in your life reminds you of Bennet's parents?" Marco, with tears in his eyes, shared a story of neighbors who "always came up with excuses and would not let me play with their son." Marco was asked to pick two people in the group who could role-play his neighbors. Marco was asked to tell his neighbors how he felt. Marco talked about feeling sad and worried that he would never be able to be friends with his neighbors' son. He was scared that others would see him as a lazy, loud Mexican. He was unable to express those feelings in his real life. The group seemed to offer him an opportunity to recognize his feelings.

From an Adlerian perspective (Adler, 1964), Marco's need to belong and to make meaningful contributions was validated. From a Gestalt perspective (Perls, 1969), he needed to make contact with himself and with those around him. The facilitator validated Marco's feelings and asked group members to share with Marco the qualities they had seen in him that were different and helpful. As the children reflected on the important lessons of the story and the lessons learned from each other, one of the girls said, "We just do not know when kids who are different may feel uncomfortable and hurt." The facilitator asked the group members to think about people in their lives who were "different" and who may feel uncomfortable and, perhaps, even hurt. Next, the facilitator asked the children to devise ideas of what they could do or say to help someone feel more comfortable. Additional opportunities for making meaningful contributions were created. During the next group, the children began by offering examples of what they did during the past week that helped someone feel more comfortable.

Social skills. Reading and processing stories enhance children's social skills. Children have an opportunity to learn how to work and to play cooperatively, how to form and to maintain friendships, and how to foster empathy. Once again, the children are asked to reflect on the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story. Next, they are asked to describe how the story characters felt during each part of the story. Sometimes children form triads and role-play story characters who are encountering problems. The children are then asked to take on the role of a coach, a friend who offers feedback and support so that the problems can be solved with win-win solutions. Now and then, the children create their own version of the story. Each child is asked to add a line to the story; the next child continues on with an additional line or picture. Creating a story together gives the children an opportunity to work and to play collaboratively. On occasion, they play out their stories. They tap into their creativity. This seems to help them to develop effectively and cognitively.

At times, the children make group pictures. Oaklander's (1988) recommendations for using drawing and for processing the drawing experience support the children's struggles for gaining awareness of their current experiences. For example, during one of the groups, children described through picture-making their thoughts and feelings about the story *Chin Chiang and the Dragon Dance* (Wallace, 1984). Using a sheet of paper for drawing, two of the girls took a lot of space, leaving one boy, John, out of the group. On a little corner of the paper, John drew two huge dragons eating a small boy. The facilitator said to John, "Looks like you got forced out of the space." John nodded. The facilitator continued on by asking, "What does it feel like to be forced out of the space? Do you feel like that in your life?" The interaction patterns in groups frequently parallel experiences at home, school, and community. The facilitators asked John to share his feelings with the girls who "forced him" out. As John shared his feelings, the facilitators asked the girls what it was like to hear from John. Each girl was also asked what she could do differently next time. The focus is on the strengths rather than on the deficiencies.

At last, John was asked to talk with the characters in his pictures. The facilitator asked John, "If you were in the story, which character would you be?" John said he would be the little boy. John was asked to tell a story about the little boy. John proceeded,

> Once upon a time there was a little boy. His daddy was Chinese, and his mommy was American. Johnny wanted to learn the dragon dance. As Johnny was learning the dance, the dragon split into two huge parts, going apart, pulling Johnny in separate directions. The dragons were getting

> bigger, and Johnny was getting smaller. Johnny was getting pushed and pulled. Johnny was shrinking. One dragon was telling him to stop trying to dance like a brown dragon, as he is a black dragon. The brown dragon was telling Johnny to keep dancing because the festival was approaching, and the brown grandpa dragon was coming to watch his grandson dance. Johnny shrunk until he turned into a lightning bug and flew away.

The facilitators asked John, "How did rejection and getting bullied invite Johnny to give up? How did giving up solve the problem?" John was asked if the group could help him create a happier ending to the story. John agreed, and the children were asked to help create a different ending to his story. The children were asked to include in the story examples of Johnny's strengths and how those strengths would help him deal with the dragons. Once the children created the story, John's frowns and worries were replaced with smiles and laughter.

Next, John shared with the group how scared he was of a real festival that was coming up in his life. His Cuban grandpa was coming to visit, and his grandpa was going to watch him perform in a Latin festival. His mother was from the States and had no faith in Johnny's learning the Latin dances. His father did not want John to give up and insisted that he learn to dance like a "real" Latino.

The Gestalt drawing techniques of projecting led John to express feelings previously silenced. From an Adlerian perspective, the joint problem solving offered everyone in the group a chance to make meaningful contributions. Making meaningful contributions allows social interest to emerge. Social interest, from an Adlerian perspective, is the foundation for mental health (Adler, 1964). The encouragement expressed by the children pointing out John's strengths inspired John to recreate a story from discouragement to courage. John chose to dance and allowed his rhythm to guide his feet.

Cognitive strategies. Embedded in the group design are techniques that foster the development of higher level cognitive complexity via two processes: integration and differentiation (Kelly, 1963; Neimeyer, 1993). Integration encompasses identifying similarities among events, objects, and individuals. Differentiation includes describing differences among events, objects, and individuals. According to Kelly, in an attempt to make meaning out of life, people develop individual constructs or patterns, continuously trying them on for a "fit." Those constructs function as epistemological lenses through which individuals make meaning about life events. Individual constructs make up one's unique world views. Sue's (1992) notion of Worldview has roots in Kelly's personal con-

struct theory. World views then determine one's reality. While exploring reality, individuals view things as alike and different from other things.

Yet, to understand the concept *different*, Huntsinger, Jose, Larson, Krieg, and Shaligram (2000) point out that the concept *same* must also be understood. One of the many contributing factors in the complexity of appreciating differences and sameness is that "each is partially true" (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992). Being able to recognize similarities and, at the same time, differences among diverse individuals requires a high level of cognitive complexity. One might view stereotyping as a byproduct of a developmental process of simplifying a complex world. Although categorizing can help organize thoughts, there are some risks attached. For example, individuals who say "they are not like us" tend to overgeneralize about the groups with which they do not relate.

The LLW model provides children with an opportunity to examine the assumptions about the differences and similarities among group members and story characters. While examining the assumptions, the group leaders model respect for differences and simultaneously identify similarities among group members. The process is similar to putting together a puzzle. Children need to know how the pieces of the puzzle are different so they can, for example, separate the sky from the grass. However, to make the whole picture, they need to know how the pieces interconnect.

Just as children learn to categorize oranges, mangos, and pineapples as fruits, they learn that although they are all sweet, they are also different in taste, color, and texture. In a similar process, children learn that individuals have a different way of celebrating holidays and birthdays, relating to others, and problem solving. Yet, all humans have a basic need for interconnectedness. The LLW model challenges children to engage in critical thinking skills by reflecting on how they are similar and, at the same time, different from each other. While describing the differences, group leaders emphasize the wisdom and the beauty of diversity. To prevent cognitive fragmentation and disorganization, which can take place when a high level of differentiation is present without integration, group leaders are encouraged to ask students to describe similarities between each other as well.

High levels of differentiation without integration can lead to stereotyping and a lack of cohesion, lack of harmony. High levels of integration without differentiation can lead to looking over and minimizing the unique experiences of diverse individuals. Universality is crucial for group cohesion to emerge (Yalom, 1995). Linking group members with their ideas, experiences, and feelings allows the universality to emerge. The following processing questions can promote increased cognitive complexity in light of integration and differentiation:

1. Who were the characters in the story?
2. Which was your favorite?
3. What did you like the most about your favorite character?
4. How is your favorite character similar to you?
5. How is your favorite character different from you?
6. Where did the story take place?
7. How is the place where the story takes place different and similar to the place where you live and learn?
8. What was the main problem the characters had to face?
9. How did the characters deal with the problem?
10. How could you solve a similar problem?
11. How are your problems similar to the ones encountered by the story characters?
12. How are your problems different from the ones encountered by the story characters?
13. How did the story characters feel about the problem encountered?
14. How do you feel about the problems that you encountered?
15. How are your feelings different from the story characters?
16. How are your feelings similar to the story characters?

These processing questions can help children increase cognitive complexity and empathy, which are a prerequisite for learning how to work cooperatively and in harmony.

CONCLUSION

The LLW model uses stories to focus on skills that are critical to success and to increase understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures. The goal of group participation is increased academic achievement and positive peer relations. Recent societal changes have resulted in much more diversity in the classroom. The LLW model was developed to address the challenges that face children from diverse cultures as they attempt to find acceptance and a sense of belonging and experience academic success in a new environment. The 12-session LLW groups celebrate diversity while strengthening learning and social skills and cognitive strategies. The LLW model incorporates service learning to increase success skills and understanding of diverse cultures.

The vehicle of multicultural stories that anchors the group sessions was described. Through the stories, children were provided opportunities to develop learning, social skills, and cognitive strategies. Practicing learning, and social skills along with the cognitive strategies, was built into each group session. Working cooperatively in small groups, forming and maintaining friendships, and developing empathy were three areas that were regularly practiced during the group sessions. Finally, the article described how the stories help children develop the important

prerequisite learning skills of listening, attending, and following directions.

A specific model for incorporating these three skill sets into the sessions was described. The "tell, show, do, coach" approach to teaching skills was presented as an important ingredient for implementing this model. Techniques for reading, discussing, role playing, and creating diverse stories, folktales, and legends were identified.

Although this approach is based on research-supported techniques and strategies and the authors' research on similar models has yielded positive results, there is a call for specific research on this model. Preliminary field testing has been encouraging. A systematic series of research projects using various groups of children representing different ages and cultures is needed to provide empirical evidence of the efficacy of LLW groups.

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