

# The Effects of Teaching Cultural Awareness at Crow Canyon Archaeological Center

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## Introduction

Crow Canyon was originally founded by alternative educators Ed and Jo Berger. They bought an empty plot of land near Cortez, CO and began offering innovative outdoor education programs. Ed and Jo also had a hand in the creation of Cortez's local Montessori school Children's Kiva. Crow Canyon's education department strives to provide child centered learning. Crow Canyon offers several experiential programs that allow students to have authentic engagement with the cultural history of the Four Corners Region of the United States.

An important aspect of Crow Canyon's current mission is its relationship with Native American groups, and we seek to teach programs that offer truly multicultural perspectives. Students are introduced to the lifestyle of the Ancestral Puebloans through hands-on experiential activities. Students often have the opportunity to learn about these ancient people by interacting with and talking to their descendants.

## Literature Review



Maria Montessori

*"In order to establish clearly the difference between war and peace, it is not sufficient to have a starting-point: to bring light into this field, as it has been brought into so many others, actual research is needed."*

Crow Canyon hosts several Montessori School Groups over the course of the year and has designed its programs to meet the various needs of diverse learners. In order to improve our programs, we began reviewing Maria Montessori's *Peace and Education* and Sonnie McFarland's *Honoring the Light of the Child*. Sonnie lays out 6 elements of Peace Education. One of these elements is cultural awareness. We decided to research and design an instrument for measuring how effective our school programs were at increasing cultural awareness.

## What is Cultural Awareness?

Cultural Awareness includes recognizing connections and commonalities among people, understanding and appreciating cultures, developing compassion for others, and encouraging commitment and involvement when necessary. (McFarland 2004, p. 7)

We came up with the following research questions and designed a survey to measure student growth in these areas.

### What are the effects of increasing students' cultural awareness through explicit instruction?

- Are students more likely to understand and respect other cultures?
- Are students more comfortable communicating and defining culture?
- Are students more willing to learn about other cultures?
- Are students more willing to make friends from other cultures and have compassion for people who are different from them?

## Methods



Seven school groups from 3 different Montessori schools were surveyed. The sample included 114 students from 2 lower elementary, 3 upper elementary, and one middle school class. The survey required students to rate their understanding and comfort level on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being the most comfortable and 7 being the least.



Students were given a pre and post survey. Additionally students were asked whether they felt they improved in each category. Data was collected from September 2016 to February 2017.

### Student Notes about different time periods in Puebloan History



Students participated in a variety of learning activities to increase their cultural awareness. Some of these activities included art projects to reflect on and express their own culture, analyzing artifacts and replicas from different Puebloan time periods, learning Puebloan stories and creating artwork to synthesize these stories, and trying out ancient technology techniques such as fire making and cordage making. Activities were varied and adapted to developmental age and time available to present the program. Different student groups did slightly different activities, but all students completed activities that were designed to increase cultural awareness of past and present Puebloan people.



## Results

The pre-survey revealed that students were the least comfortable communicating about culture with an average rating of 3.60 for describing other cultures and 2.94 when describing their own. The second least was understanding other cultures with an average rating of 3.38. The third least was learning about other cultures with an average rating of 2.09.

The students seemed the most comfortable having compassion for people who are different from themselves with an average rating of 1.86. The second most comfortable was respecting other cultures with an average of 1.98 which was followed by making friends with people who are different (1.99).



The students were surveyed again after their program was completed. When it came to communicating about other cultures, 65% of students felt they had improved with the average rising to 2.48 (+1.11). With communicating about their own culture, 69% of students felt they had improved with the average rising to 2.22 (+0.72). When it came to understanding other cultures, 75% of students felt they had improved with the average rising to 2.16 (+1.22). Overall 74% of students felt they had improved when it came to learning about other cultures with the average rising to 1.96 (+0.13).



When it came to having compassion for people who are different from themselves, 85% of students felt they had improved with the average rising to 1.64 (+0.22). With respecting other cultures, 82% of students felt they had improved with the average rising to 1.69 (+0.29). Overall 87% of students felt they had improved when it came to making friends with people who are different with the average rising to 1.63 (+0.36).

### Student Art Work depicting Ancestral Puebloan Culture and Modern Culture



## Discussion and Further Research

Students felt the least comfortable communicating about culture before and after the survey. Also the amount of students that felt they improved in this area was the lowest. This may be due to difficulty verbalizing about the subject. People may avoid the subject in general in order to not offend others. Talking about culture prompts us to be introspective about the similarities and differences between ourselves and others. Finding the right words to communicate those similarities and differences is difficult. Stereotypes or over-simplification of cultural values may promote misunderstanding. Cultures are ultimately made up of individuals who will have a wide range of preferences and values.

Students need to be provided with a framework, a glossary of terms, which will allow them to build a fluid understanding of the cultures they come in contact with. They need tools to reassess their assumptions and build more complex understanding with more exposure. They need a safe, supportive environment in which to clarify and improve their understanding. In the future, we would like to research and create a framework for students to use in the classroom, which will help students to feel more comfortable communicating about culture in the classroom.

In spite of a lower initial comfort level, the average growth in communication was second highest. One lower elementary student said when referring to what it is was like to share cultural experiences with others, "It's like their culture is in you, and your culture in them." An upper elementary student defined culture as, "Culture means what you believe in, food, clothes, activities, and your home, but still don't judge a book by its cover." Students in general were more comfortable discussing and sharing ideas about culture. It would be interesting to evaluate which educational activities have the greatest impact on students and if the amount of multicultural education programming has a positive correlation with student growth.



## References

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