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EVALUATING ATTITUINAL CHANGE IN A MULTICULTURAL SETTING

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Assistant Professor  
Western Kentucky University

and

Ric Brown  
Assistant Professor  
California State University

Toronto, Canada, March, 1978
Evaluating Attitudinal Change in a Multicultural Setting

LIVINGSTON ALEXANDER, Western Kentucky University
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The focus of this study was the evaluation of attitudinal change in a multicultural project. Essentially, the People Place Multicultural Center, operating within a district utilizing a magnet school concept to meet desegregation guidelines, involves students from predominantly one-race schools in a variety of cultural interactions. Some of the major objectives of the Center include reduction of group isolation, fostering cultural awareness, and increasing interracial understanding. Evaluation of attitude change in children was accomplished through the use of doll play simulation. Results indicated a more positive attitude towards ethnically different children by those participating in the People Place experience.
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The problem of evaluation of such a change is centered in the general
problem of evaluating attitudinal change, and, the more specific problem of evaluating attitudinal change in young children. Research by Piaget (1951), Mussen (1960), and Walls (1973) delineates at least four potential distractors involved in the measuring of attitudes in young children:

1. A narrow experience range exists, thereby connecting idiosyncratic meanings to certain phenomena.
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Acknowledging the difficulties associated with measuring children's attitudes, Erikson (1958), Sears (1947), and Walls (1973) found it beneficial to make use of the third mentioned distractor as a framework for developing a vehicle for assessment. All used doll play activities and found them to be a viable projective technique in the study of attitudes in young children.

The rationale behind the use of doll play activities is that the distinctions between reality and fantasy are not clearly established in young children; therefore, what they do with dolls represents the reality of the world as they perceive it. Over the years, the use of doll play in the assessment of attitudes has proven to be one of the more reliable indices of children's attitudes. For these reasons, a doll play methodology was selected for assessing attitudinal change in children as a result of the People Place experience.

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Two hundred and seventy black, Mexican-American, and white students,
grades 2 through 6, were randomly selected to visit People Place Multi-
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In this study, proximity was the dependent variable. Operationally, proximity was defined as a measure of overall distance between the doll before and after the People Place experience or the neutral school function. The difference between the pretest proximity score and the post test proximity score constituted a measure of the change in proximity. It was hypothesized that the students who received the People Place experience would place the dolls significantly closer together in the post test measure (and therefore have a greater, positive change score) than would the students in the control group. Confirmation of the hypothesis would mean that the People Place experience had the capacity to bring about greater interracial acceptance.

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The major concern here was the ability of the instrument to measure the specific changes in attitude which it was intended to measure. Follow-up
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Three independent variables, type of instructional experience, grade level, and cultural group membership, were arranged in a 5 x 3 x 2 factorial design. The first variable, grade level, consisted of five levels: second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade students. The second variable, cultural group membership, consisted of three levels: black students, Mexican-American students, and white students. The third variable consisted of the People Place experience and the neutral school function. A three-factor analysis of variance design was used to analyze the data (unequal n's).

**Results**

The analysis of variance which is presented in Table 1 reveals significant effects for type of instructional experience ($F = 47.83$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$), ethnicity ($F = 3.66$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$), and grade level ($F = 2.64$, $df = 4$, $p < .05$). So, the scores of those students who participated in the People Place experience were significantly different from the scores of the students participating in the neutral school function. On the average, these students placed the dolls eight centimeters closer to each other in the post test (greater positive change score), while the control group students placed the doll only .59 of a centimeter closer in the post test.
TABLE 1

Analysis of Variance Summary Table

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Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if involving elementary school students in multicultural instruction would affect their attitudes towards children from other cultures. It was hypothesized that students who participated in the People Place experience would have a greater positive change score on the doll play instrument than would students who participated in a neutral school function. Empirical evaluation of this hypothesis confirmed the expectancy that students participating at People Place would experience a favorable change in their attitudes toward children of other cultures.

The basis for inferring that change has occurred in the attitudes of the students derives from the previously discussed notion that children have a tendency to regard fantasy and reality as synonymous. So if, in directed play, they position the dolls at a particular distance from one another, it is assumed that there is a reason for doing this. Since they are fully conscious of the fact that each doll represents a different child from a particular culture, it is assumed that placing the dolls at specific distances from each other indicates their degree of acceptance of children from these other cultures. The fact that the change scores of students who participated in the People Place experience were significantly greater than the change scores of similar students who did not have this experience appears to be an indication that the People Place experience was responsible for this change.

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The general conclusion of this study is that involving culturally mixed elementary school children in multicultural instruction will result in favorable change in degree of acceptance of one another, at least on a short-term basis.
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