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Traveling Trunks: Enrich Curriculum with a Global Perspective

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Abstract

Traveling trunks as a delivery method for curricula have been associated with experiential learning and shown to increase learning (George, 2010; Shepherd, 2007; Lett, 1993). Students learn through real-life experiences, such as global social issues (Kister, 1992), and principal to the nature of learning is the relationship between experience and learning, a shaping force in the development of thoughtful, curious students (Loughran, 2006).

The embedded mixed method study showed learning gains occurred when experiential curriculum was facilitated by experienced teachers, and delivered in a traveling trunk. The study (N=58) showed that active learning about social issues engages students. Paired t-tests revealed a significant difference in learning for the experimental group. Qualitative findings suggest an enriched learning experience with benefits including student interest and curiosity, prepackaged curricula, development of process skills, and the topic of a global social issue.

This research adds to the body of knowledge in three areas: experiential learning, teacher facilitation of learning, use of social issues and resulted in the creation of Global Fusion Educational Resources™2009 to provide curriculum delivered in traveling trunks.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if an experiential curriculum about a social issue delivered in a traveling trunk through teacher facilitation, incorporating technology, improved student learning. Limited examination of traveling trunks has not clearly determined if the delivery method is associated with learning. Therefore, the study specifically addressed the utilization of the traveling trunk in FCS classrooms to determine how the trunk influenced learning.



Literature Review

Little research has been conducted on the traveling trunk delivery method and its connection to learning. The studies available suggest that the trunk delivery does positively impact students' learning and that teachers would use the prepackaged education resource. A curriculum that combines practical problem framework and experiential learning delivered a traveling trunk could be a valuable new tool for educators.

Evidence emerged indicating an increase in the use of traveling trunks as a method to teach students in a creative, hands-on format. The subject content of curriculum delivered in traveling trunks is both interdisciplinary and at times rather specific to a group, historic event, or location centered topic. Traveling trunks are inexpensive and offer many benefits to students and educators including low cost, easy access, entertaining, interactive curriculum modules. These studies suggest opportunities to build on the body of knowledge for FCS curriculum delivered in traveling trunks are apparent.

Theoretical tenants by philosophers and educationalists Dewey and Vygotsky serve as foundations, where the accent is on the learner rather than the teacher as they interact with the concepts and construct their own ideas (Williams, 1999).

Methods

Research Design: Embedded Mixed Methods

Conducted in six FCS classrooms in West Texas, where three experimental groups received the curriculum in each of the three schools, delivered in a traveling trunk while the other three control groups received the curriculum without the trunk. The quantitative strand included the global hunger assessment pre/post instrument to examine learning differences. The qualitative data, and its possible relationship to the learning process was the focus of the analysis as the embedded component.

Table 3.1. Student Sample by Experimental and Control Groups

Groups	Experimental (n = 34)	Control (n = 24)	Students (N = 58)
School 1	12	9	21
School 2	5	5	10
School 3	7	10	27

Table 3.2. Data Collection and Analysis Model

Research Questions	Data	Analysis
1. Are there gains in learning outcomes among the students who experience the trunk delivery of curriculum about global hunger, when compared with students receiving the curriculum without the trunk?	Global Hunger Assessment	T-Test
2. From the perspective of the participants, how does the experience with the traveling trunk enrich aspects of learning, e.g. feelings of active learning, Teacher/student interactions and relationships, and motivation to take action on the social issue?	Classroom observation Teacher Interviews	Emergent descriptive themes were identified and categorized
3. How do the qualitative outcomes explain the quasi-experimental results?	Classroom observations Teacher Interviews	Emergent themes from qualitative data sources were integrated with quantitative results

Results

The mixed methods embedded study conducted revealed that gains in learning about global hunger ($p < .05$) occurred when teachers facilitate learning using the curriculum delivered in the traveling trunk. Post test scores increased for both the control group and the experimental group, but the differences for the control group were not significant. The qualitative results support the increases in learning and indicate the curriculum experience enriched learning. Field notes from classroom observations and teacher interviews included positive comments and benefits associated with the integration of the experiential curriculum in the classroom including suggestions for improvements for teacher preparation and implementation of the curriculum.

Results reinforce identified enriched aspects of learning associated with the trunk delivery and curriculum about a social issue:

Student excitement and curiosity	Positive attitudes
Engaged student learning	Active learning
Topic of a social issue	Technology components
Standards built into the lessons	
Build student process skills such as critical thinking and problem solving	

Conclusions

- ✓ Significant learning occurs when experiential curriculum focused on global hunger is facilitated by experienced teachers and delivered in a traveling trunk.
- ✓ Learning may be related to the delivery method, the model of curriculum, teacher facilitation of learning and use of social issues.
- ✓ Teachers have an opportunity to enrich the learning experience for students as they prepare them for the responsibilities of work and life.
- ✓ FCS curriculum theories supported by the mission and vision of the profession include active learning leading to higher level thinking skills.
- ✓ A traveling trunk curriculum resource is a valuable educational tool for educators to utilize in preparing emerging generations to meet global issues of humanity and contribute to shaping the future through active learning experiences.
- ✓ This study adds to the body of knowledge in three areas: experiential learning, teacher facilitation of learning and use of social issues in learning.
- ✓ The innovative delivery method of the traveling trunk has implications for educational teaching strategies because the curriculum in the trunk is grounded in experiential learning theory, which has been shown to improve retention of content and critical thinking skills (Ives, 2006).
- ✓ This study provides further understanding of the components necessary to create optimal learning conditions to support all students, including curriculum design, teaching strategies, teacher preparation and active learning about social issues.

Recommendations and Future Studies

- ✓ Expand the study in sample and location
- ✓ Add additional curriculum topics
- ✓ Focus on the teacher facilitation component
- ✓ Compare with delivery methods
- ✓ Development of a model curriculum.

Use of technology with Global Fusion website



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