

## **Dancing with Ethnic Identities: An Aboriginal Dance Club in a Taiwanese Middle School**

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**ABSTRACT:** Research in Taiwan has shown that aboriginal students often have low self-esteem and a negative view of their life due to their heritage. This research studied 14 Taiwan aboriginal students to understand how the experience of an aboriginal dance club influenced the development of their ethnic identity. The result showed that the experiences of socializing with other aboriginal group members and learning about traditional tribal culture created a more positive ethnic identity. Moreover, through international performances, they gained self-confidence and diverse perspectives. The study suggests that a safe environment where students can learn about their ethnic cultural practice would help aboriginal students develop a more positive ethnic identity.

**KEYWORDS:** ethnic identity, aboriginal dance club, aboriginal students, folk cultural practice, middle school in Taiwan

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In 2003, based on the shifting diversity and equity needs in education, the Taiwanese government began encouraging schools to incorporate folk cultures and local languages into the curriculum. According to studies of Taiwan education, aboriginal students, when compared to non-aboriginal students, often have low self-esteem, are unable to fit in mainstream school culture, and have a negative view of their lives related to their cultural heritage (Chen, 1997; Chen & Liu, 1999; Executive Yuan, 2012; Lin, 2010; Ling, 2000; Tan, 2006; Wu & Hwang, 2009). There is also research showing that Taiwan aboriginal students have low

academic achievement. Lin (2012) analyzed the 9<sup>th</sup> grade Basic Competence Test scores of 2,714 students and found that the scores of aboriginal students were 45.29 points lower than those of non-aboriginal students. Studies in the United States with Native American students also have shown that Indian students did not do well in academic performance in school (Aud, Fox, KewalRamani, & NCES, 2010; Brandt, 1992; Cummins, 1992; James, Chavez, Beauvais, Edwards, & Oetting, 1995). These studies suggest that aboriginal students often have more difficulties in schools than cultural majority students. This trend seems to demand an inclusion of a more culturally relevant curriculum, especially for the aboriginal students.

In this study, a Taiwan middle school formed an aboriginal dance club so that aboriginal students could learn about their diverse tribal folk dances. Ching-Shing (pseudonym) Middle School organized the Aboriginal Dance Club (ADC) as an extra-curricular activity specifically designed to draw out the students' confidence and ethnic identity through learning about their culture. In 2007, one of the researchers went to the school to supervise the student teachers and heard about the ADC. She observed that the members of ADC practiced their dances with passion, concentration, and confident smiles. We wondered what made these students dance so well and confidently. To address this question, the aboriginal middle school students became our research participants in this qualitative research exploring if and how the ADC influenced students' ethnic identity.

### Historical Context

Historically, since the Kuomintang party came from Mainland China and dominated Taiwan in 1949, the Chinese have been the majority ethnic group and, while in power, prescribed the values and norms for Taiwanese society. People were educated within Chinese values, which excluded minority group values and cultural practices. Taking into account different voices, such as those of the Taiwanese aborigines, was considered a potential threat to cohesion within the dominant society. As the result, Taiwanese society in general was disinclined to accept the idea that diversity could enrich society. All students in schools were expected to assimilate into the majority culture (Liu & Kuo, 2007).

This situation of schools began to change with the 2001 education reform that encouraged attention to multicultural education (Ministry of Education, 2001). Since then, schools have begun to integrate folk culture and heritage languages into the curriculum. However, in 2012, there were 527,250 Taiwanese Aborigines (2.26% of the total Taiwan population), and aboriginal families usually have lower income than non-aboriginal families (Executive Yuan, 2012). Research in Taiwan (Chen, 1997; Chen & Liu, 1999; Lin, 2010; Ling, 2000) has shown that Taiwanese aboriginal students encounter prejudice because of their ethnic group minority status and often have difficulties assimilating. In general, Taiwan aboriginal students have lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates

than the ethnic-majority students (Executive Yuan, 2012; Lin, 2012; Wu & Hwang, 2009).

### Theoretical Framework

The theory of ethnic identity is central to this research. To enable us to understand this study, we reviewed the concept of ethnic identity and the relationship between aboriginal dance and ethnic identity.

#### Ethnic Identity

Because people are cultural beings, we live within a culture even if we do not recognize it. As people learn most about their culture from their families and community (Pang, 2001), different social groups develop specific ways of talking, behaving, and thinking. That is, when people share the same culture, religion, geography, origin, and language, they have a shared ethnic identity (Hsu, 1989; Phinney, 1990). Based on Tajfel's (1981) definition, ethnic identity is a part of an individual's self-concept. People use their group memberships to understand the world. Ethnic identity provides a way of understanding oneself. It not only defines who we are but also helps us acknowledge "others" in separate ethnic groups. It is a concept of the self and others (De Vos, 2006; Phinney, 1990).

For this study, we used Phinney's (1989) description of different levels of ethnic identity development. In identity diffusion, individuals are initially confused about their identity. In identity foreclosure, individuals are socialized into their parents' ethnic identity without too much conflict. The first two levels are not relevant to a study of middle school students. At the third level, identity moratorium, individuals question their ethnic identity and hesitate to engage within in their ethnic group. At the last level, during identity achievement, people appreciate their ethnic roles and identity. They devote themselves to ethnic activities (Phinney, 1989; Phinney, Jacoby & Silva, 2007; Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Gay (1985) defines a three-stage paradigm for ethnic identity: pre-encounter, encounter, and post-encounter. The first stage is the pre-encounter phase, in which individuals stay within their own ethnic group and have limited knowledge of the majority group. The second is the encounter phase in which individuals encounter prejudice and inequity regarding their ethnic group when participating in the dominant culture. Here they begin to question their ethnic identity. In the post-encounter phase, the problem of one's ethnic identity is solved. People become conscious of their ethnic identity as part of their self-identity and are proud to belong to their ethnic group. If this positive self-identity does not develop, individuals stay in the second stage and struggle with giving up their ethnic identity. Hornett (1990) found that when minority ethnic group children go to school they learn the mainstream culture and may deny their ethnic group, trying to pass as members of the dominant culture. As a result, minority children may develop negative attitudes toward their own ethnic group. However,

Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) believe that adolescents who are confident in their own ethnicity and proud of their ethnic group may be better able to deal constructively with discrimination.

Phinney (1990) argued that people partially define their ethnic identity from people's attitudes toward their ethnic group, their sense of belonging, their cultural values and beliefs, and their cultural practices. When people have positive attitudes toward their ethnic group, they feel more attached to their heritage and are inclined to be involved in cultural activities. Berry et al. (2006) suggest that when all people living in the society can find their culture represented in the classroom and their heritage cultural practice maintained in public, it may lead a successful acculturation. Portes and Rivas (2011) also point out that children could overcome struggles through learning the mainstream culture while preserving their home country language, value, and customs. That is, if children learn to appreciate their cultural roots and affirm their ethnic identity, it would lead to successful acculturation adaptation. Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billing (1995) assert that when ethnically diverse students can be taught through culturally relevant teaching, their academic achievement improves.

### **Relationship between Aboriginal Dance and Ethnic Identity**

Citro and Cerletti (2009) argue that aboriginal dances are cultural forms. When people dance, the musical sounds and body movements function as signs of cultural experience. Therefore, aboriginal dances can affect the identity of performers. Sun (2010) points out that the purpose of aboriginal dance is to pass down ethnic culture and to strengthen the relationship among an ethnic group of people. It can be viewed as an acculturation mechanism. For Taiwan's 14 aboriginal tribes, dance is an important component of culture because it represents each tribe's key cultural practices. Since aboriginal dance is connected with the tribes' ways of life, the dances show their music, costumes, ceremonies, and taboos, as well as the individual participant's status within the group (Chao, 2005).

In this study, the ADC mostly performed the dances of six of the tribes, the Amis, Bunun, Atayal, Paiwan, Tao, and Puyuma. There are typically three types of Taiwanese aboriginal dances—ceremonial, social ritual, and daily life dances that are mostly practiced at the ADC (Chao, 2005). The ceremonial dances are for annual events such as celebrating the harvest, honoring warriors, or remembering ancestors. The social ritual dances are for events such as births, weddings, or growing up. The daily-life dances are just for enjoyment. Every aboriginal tribe has its own distinct dances, and tribes can be identified by their dance. For example, the "Harvest Festival" is the most important traditional ceremony for the Amis tribe; the "Ear Shooting Festival" (Malahtangia) is considered the most important ceremonial ritual for the Bunun male's passage into manhood; and the "Hair-Dance" is a social ritual dance performed by Yami women.

### Mode of Inquiry and Data Sources

This study aimed to understand how the ADC's experience influenced the aboriginal students' ethnic identity. The Ching-Shing Middle School is located in an urban area in Taichung City, Taiwan. Most of the students come from working class families. During the research period, there were over 1,200 students in the school, but only 50 of them were aboriginal students. The tribes to whom these aboriginal students' families belong are located in the mountain areas, but the families moved from their tribal homes to an urban area in order to make a living. We use the term "plains aboriginal people" to distinguish these families from those who still live in mountain areas. The aboriginal students at the school were identified as "plains aboriginal people." Since they live in cities and seldom go back to their tribal villages to visit, the students do not have many opportunities to learn about their ethnic cultures.

In 1999, the school recruited an aboriginal dance instructor who organized the ADC for aboriginal students. In 2007 and 2008, when this study was conducted, there were 32 aboriginal students (14 males and 18 females) who joined the club. The dance club members generally practiced various Taiwan aboriginal dances and songs after school once a week. However, when practicing for an out-of-town dancing contest, the ADC members had to practice intensively and skip some classes. Over time they attended many contests, built up a reputation, and were invited to do performances around the world.

This study used qualitative methods (Berg 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) to understand how the ADC influenced the students' ethnic identities. Although Taiwan did not require an Institutional Review Board (IRB) review during the time we conducted this research in 2007, we explained our research to all 32 ADC members including confidentiality and freedom to withdraw. Fourteen out of 32 members decided to participate in the research study and signed the consent form, 10 females and 4 males (see Table 1). Eight of the students had been in the group for three years, five had participated for two years, and one was in her first year of participation. The participants were from four different indigenous tribes.

Table 1

*Participant Information*

Pseudonym	Gender	Tribe	Grade	Duration	Form of Interview
A-Li	Male	Atayal	9th	3 years	Individual Interview
A-Mei	Female	Amis	9th	3 years	Individual Interview
A-Wu	Female	Bunun	9th	3 years	Individual Interview
A-Ze	Female	Bunun	9th	3 years	Individual Interview
EiEi	Female	Bunun	9th	3 years	Individual Interview
Siao- Ai	Female	Paiwan	9th	3 years	Individual Interview
Siao- Jen	Male	Amis	9th	3 years	Individual Interview
Siao-Tan	Male	Amis	9th	3 years	Individual Interview

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Hey- Nu	Female	Paiwan	8th	2 years	Focus group Interview
LuLu	Female	Amis	8th	2 years	Focus group Interview
Miao- Miao	Female	Atayal	8th	2 years	Focus group Interview
Siao- Bi	Male	Amis	8th	2 years	Individual Interview
Siao- En	Female	Paiwan	8th	2 years	Focus group Interview
Siao- Ren	Female	Amis	7th	1 year	Focus group Interview

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The data for this study were collected through observations and interviews. In order to understand the process and activities of the ADC, the researchers attended nine ADC meetings from October 2007 to May 2008 to observe and write field notes. The observations focused on what the aboriginal students did while practicing aboriginal dances. In order to more fully understand how the experiences in the ADC influenced the students' identity, a five-person focus group interview and nine 90-minute individual interviews were conducted. The interview questions asked about students' experiences of participating in the ADC, how the experiences affected the students' school life, and how the students perceived their aboriginal identity before/after participating in the ADC.

The data from the interviews were transcribed and coded using NVivo 7 software. To protect the participants' privacy, in the text the students' and the school's real names have been replaced with pseudonyms. The research data have been stored in a safe place and not shared with others outside the research community for maintaining the confidentiality.

## Results

The following discussion of the results focuses on the experiences of our 14 aboriginal students' participation in the ADC and its influence on their ethnic identity. In order to examine how the aboriginal dance club influenced the aboriginal students' ethnic identity, we organized our data analysis using Phinney's (1989) levels of ethnic identity development. The first two levels occur for individuals within early socialization, when they are first confused about their identity (identity diffusion) and as they are socialized into their parents' ethnic identity (identity foreclosure). The third and fourth levels of ethnic identity are relevant to our findings with middle school age students—identity moratorium when individuals question their ethnic identity and hesitate to engage in their ethnic group—and identity achievement when they come to appreciate their ethnic roles and identity. We saw a shift in our participants' identity descriptions when we compared how they described their identity before and after their participation in the ADC.

### **Identity Moratorium: “I was afraid to say I was an aborigine.”**

Phinney's (1989) concept of identity moratorium is in line with Gay's (1985) theory of the advancement of ethnic identity. For Gay, when minority persons first

come in contact with mainstream culture, individuals strive to identify with the majority culture. Our participants, however, spoke less about “fitting in” and more about hiding their ethnic identity in order not to be teased and discriminated against. The students were reticent in school to identify themselves as aborigines. Their avoidance was often rationalized in relation to the stereotypical views of aborigines (e.g., drinking and fighting) held by the majority culture. To avoid having these stereotypes applied to them, most of them tried to hide their ethnic background. During the interviews, the aboriginal students described how they thought people viewed them.

Non-aborigines always think that aborigines are not very well disciplined, they usually think that we’re dirty, calling us “raw” [ethnic slur].... When I was in elementary school...they mocked me because I am an aborigine.

They [classmates] said our [aboriginal] brown skin is disgusting. They also said we, aboriginal girls, are very shallow, don’t like to study, and are only good at singing.

People always say aborigines are poisoned by wine. But people don’t understand my tribal culture. Wine is necessary in our ceremonies...after a ceremony, people would dance and drink for celebration...aborigines are mostly portrayed as drunkards and like getting into fights on TV.

According to our participants, these stereotypical views of aboriginal people also were evident in their interactions with teachers. One participant heatedly recalled unfair incidents at the school:

A lot of the teachers at school call us “you Aborigines!” and they also say that we disturb other students in classes. Some even say all we do is to drink and cause troubles.

The stereotypical views of aborigines from classmates, teachers, and the media made the participants feel reticent about claiming their cultural identity. Because of the stereotypes about aboriginal groups, not all members of the dance club felt comfortable admitting that they were of aboriginal background.

### **Identity Achievement**

Identity achievement occurs when people come to appreciate their ethnic roles and identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007). We saw a strong shift toward identity achievement in the students’ behavior and in their interview/focus group data. The ADC experience appeared to strongly influence the move of students from identity moratorium to identity achievement. They became proud of their ethnicity identities as aboriginal tribal members and used music and dance as a way of learning about and sharing their cultural practices.

According to Phinney (1990), the four components of identity achievement used by researchers as indicators of ethnic identity are an individual’s ethnic self-identification as a group member, sense of belonging of the group, attitude towards one’s ethnic group, and ethnic involvement. We organized our

interpretations using these four themes for the data categorized to understand the participants' identity achievement.

**Ethnic self-identification: "I now can tell others I am an aborigine."**

The term a person uses to label him/herself is an important indicator of that person's ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990). In our data, the participants who had attended the ADC seemed not to be afraid to claim an ethnic self-identification. In the interviews, the students were willing to tell others that they are aborigines:

They [classmates] have so many questions and are very interested in the dance club. After performing, I feel popular in my classroom.... I know that it is good to be an aborigine; I like to introduce myself as an aborigine and say which tribe I belong to.

Compared to non-aboriginal students, the ADC members got the chance to perform both inside and outside of the country. This provided them with successful experiences and made them feel that being an aborigine was a positive thing. Through the ADC experience most of the participants not only felt more comfortable sharing their ethnic identity, but they also felt more confident about themselves as persons. For example, one participant said:

In class, the teacher would ask me about my experiences of performing overseas and ask me to sing. In the beginning, I was shy and afraid to do so. But now with so many experiences of performing on stage, I am not afraid to show my talent in front of my classmates.

Because of ADC, two participants even decided on their future study area; they said:

With the performances outside of Taiwan, my view has become broader. So, I am considering studying tourism management in the future.

ADC helped me understand my future goal.... I know that I am good at dancing, so I would like to do performance art in the future.... I want to be a star so that everyone will know me for my dancing talent.

As the participants' responses indicated, ADC raised their confidence and pride in their ethnicity. Some of them even identified future goals. However, participating in the club demanded a lot of effort and time. Two of the participants pointed out that because the ADC took up some classes to practice, they could not catch up with their schoolwork, and sometimes they had trouble concentrating on the studies in class.

Because of missing some classes, I fell behind in the class.... Sometimes I do not pay attention to the teachers' lecture, because my brain is full of dancing and rhythms during class.

Since some classes were used to practice dancing, I became delayed and even missed several periods, which lowered my grades.

Based on data analysis, it is evident that the participants were willing to label themselves as aboriginal people to others because of their participation in the ADC. They were more confident about themselves and were willing to

acknowledge their talents. Moreover, because of the positive recognition of their ethnicity, some of them identified future goals. Despite these positive responses, the time required for the ADC also led to a conflict between their school studies and their dance interests for some of the participants.

**A sense of belonging: “Aboriginal cultures have to be preserved.”** When an individual’s ethnic identity is strong, it seems to correlate with a sense of belonging to an ethnic group. In other words, the more connection that people have with their ethnic cultures, the stronger their ethnic identity will be (Christian, Gadfield, Giles, & Taylor, 1976; Phinney, 1990). The participants often noted a change in their sense of ethnic belonging because of their participation in the ADC and, further, they saw the dance club as a good way to preserve and pass down their aboriginal traditions.

The students felt that by participating in the dance club they were helping to preserve the culture.

I’ve heard that some tribes’ traditions are vanishing.... So I shouldn’t withdraw from the club, because I’m an aborigine, which should be enough of a reason to stay. If we stop dancing, our whole tradition will disappear.

They became conscious that this was part of being an aboriginal member of their tribe. They also were aware that the dance club was a means of preserving and passing down their culture. By learning the dances of their tribes, they could help to maintain aboriginal culture. Usually, the participants who are in the third year of the club teach the junior members to dance. For example, one student devoted himself to teaching junior members because he valued the ADC as a team where he belongs.

It is a team. I could not quit. I have to teach those juniors...most important, I know more about the dance than them. I should teach them.... Sometimes, even though I feel tired and do not want to go to practice and would rather go out and have fun like others do on the weekend, I know I could not do that.

For this student, it was his obligation to participate in the ADC to help pass down his aboriginal culture.

According to the components of ethnic identity that Phinney (1990) proposes, a sense of pride in belonging to a group is the fourth phase of establishing an ethnic identity, what he labels as identity achievement. Before participating in the dance group, the participants were not willing to self-identify as an aborigine, nor did they think about the preservation of their tribal cultural practices. However, after participating in the ADC, the members identified themselves as group members and were concerned with preserving the cultural practices of their tribes. They worried about these practices disappearing. A couple of the participants even thought about becoming a professional teacher to assure to preserve aboriginal tribe culture. Most of the participants indicated that this was a change in perspective. The change as a result of their participation in

the ADC to the final stage of identity achievement was strongly evident in our data.

**Ethnic attitude:** “I am more proud to tell others that I am an aboriginal person.” During the interviews, we found that the aboriginal students’ attitudes towards themselves shifted drastically because of their participation in the ADC. In the focus group interview, the participants shared how the club made them feel proud being aborigines.

Because it is the “Aboriginal” Dance Club, so you have to be an aborigine to join the club. It is wonderful that we can go out and win contests and be on the News. It makes me very proud to be in the club. I’m glad that I’m an aborigine.

The participants not only felt comfortable sharing their ethnic identity, they also learned to deal with discrimination in a positive way. One participant reflects back on how she dealt with these stereotypical views.

I know that we are a minority compared to other groups. But we are Native Taiwanese; we were the first one here. Before I joined the dance club, when someone said a bad word to me, I would just stomach it and say nothing. But now I say what I feel out loud, like, “Hey, you should not say that.”

The participants asserted that society should not discriminate against them based on their ethnicity. Most importantly, they believed that everyone deserves to be treated equally. People should have empathy and take into consideration that others’ culture is as valuable as theirs. The participants shared their learning in the interview:

Actually...no one is 100% perfect....We are all human; we live on the same land. We don’t want to criticize, but support and respect each other.

In our data, the aboriginal students became more proud that they were aborigines and became more assertive about their ethnic identity when confronted by majority culture students. Phinney (1990) argues that if we respect our own and other cultures, then it does not matter if we belong to a mainstream or minority group: we possess the ideal ethnic identity. From the results of research, the participants of the dance club came to respect their own culture and accept other cultures, showing that they had come to the point of ethnic identity, which is to say from a negative to a positive attitude.

**Ethnic involvement.** While participating in ADC, the aboriginal students had the chance to make friends with other students in their same ethnic group and to learn their own ways of talking, singing, and dancing. Because of this involvement in these ethnic activities, the participants became more willing to identify with their ethnicity and recognize their tribal cultural heritage. Within the ethnic involvement category, Phinney (1990) identified a number of other sub-categories found in the research. Our findings correlated with three of his sub-topics—friends, language, and cultural activity.

**Friends:** “I made some aboriginal friends.” One of the most profound

experiences of participating in the dance club was that it provided our participants with the opportunity to meet others with the same ethnic background. In the dance club, aboriginal students communicated with others by speaking their tribal languages. They could understand each other even though they spoke different languages because all were Austronesian languages with many similarities.

We, aborigines have our own language and I always feel that I'm more happy and more myself when I'm with aborigines, so . . . when I'm in the classroom I'm kinda more constrained, you know?

The participants seemed happier with aboriginal peers because of their shared ethnic identity. One participant thought the club was like a family to her. She said:

It is easy to make good friends in the aboriginal dance club. It is like a big family. In there, you can talk with each other when you are happy or sad, you can always share your feelings with them and they will understand you instead of criticizing you. Compared with my other classmates.... I don't feel safe in sharing my feelings because I am uncertain whether they will understand me.

The participants viewed the club as a place where they belonged. Because of their similar ethnic background, the aboriginal students could communicate in their aboriginal language and do things their way, making the dance club a more joyful and welcoming place for them.

**Language: “We have our own ways of talking.”** As people interact with each other, language is a marker of ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990). The participants mentioned the ways of talking that they have learned through participating in ADC:

Aboriginals are born with humor. If you're not humorous, then you're not an aborigine. Before, we didn't understand this humor because we didn't interact with aboriginals that often.... We have our own ways of talking. And, sometimes, we talk to each other using our mother languages.

I could not speak my mother language before joining the club. But now, I think in order to understand my culture I need to know my mother language, so I try to learn more about it.

From their responses, we learned that using their mother language built close relationships among them, which can be said to have strengthened their ethnic identity.

**Cultural activities: “I really learned a lot about our culture.”** The purpose of the ADC was to learn aboriginal dances, so the participants of the dance club practiced their culture through the dance process. As the participants came from different tribes, and the club practiced various tribal dances, they had to learn about each other's culture. For example, the participants shared that they learned a lot about tribe's traditional musical instruments, costume and cultural relics, and legends and folklore after participating in the club. They said:

After joining the ADC, I learned about Tai-ya tribe's instruments; Tai-ya girls play the bamboo jaw's harp while we [boys] play the wood flute. Women are not allowed to play or touch the wood flute.

Before, I didn't know what that griddle is for, but now I understand, it's for millet. And pestles! I never used or touched one before. But now, after practicing Amis dances, I know all about the cultural tools' functions. And I even learned that different tribes have different costumes! Like in Hwalien, the Amis costume has a more...feminine style.

Before, I didn't know the meaning of the dance of Malastapang. Now I know what it is...it's when the men return from hunting and rejoice alongside the women.

Like Malahodaigian [Ear Shooting Festival], it's about showing gratitude for a good harvest year to God.... And the pattern on our traditional clothes represents *Deinagkistrodon acutus* [hundred-pace snakes], it's because Bunun were descendants of snakes. We named the snake "Kaviaz" which is "friend" in our language.

In the data, the participants of the dance club learned about the legends and folklore, songs, costume, and languages of their tribes. Phinney (1990) argues that people partially define their ethnic identity from cultural practices. From the results of the study, the researchers found the participants of the dance club came to make aboriginal friends and practice cultural activities, showing that they had come to the point of ethnic identity, which is to say ethnic involvement.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

The findings of this study have shown that the ethnic identity of these aboriginal students increased as a result of their participation in the Aboriginal Dance Club. The ADC allowed them to meet peers of their same, and related, ethnic groups. They learned how to play traditional musical instruments, sing songs, dress in tribal clothing, and tell tribal stories. As they had opportunities to share their cultures with students from other tribes and to perform around the world, they developed an ethnic pride as aborigines. They developed a more positive ethnic identity. They were willing to claim their ethnicity publicly and share their tribe's cultural heritage. They were proud of their tribal customs, and some held future commitments to passing down their culture to the next generation. Using Phinney's (1989) stages to describe the students' change in ethnic identity, they moved from identity moratorium, when they were uncomfortable claiming their identity, to identity achievement when they were proud to say they were aborigine.

Aboriginal Dance Club activities, both dance performance and interactions among members, seemed to provide some insight on students' understandings and beliefs. The students attempted to compare certain roles and movements with who they were and whom they have come from. A safe environment played

a significant role for the students to develop this analytic tool. While we cannot generalize from this one study, it suggests that a safe environment where students can learn about cultural practices may help minority students develop a more positive self-identity. According to Castagno and Brayboy (2008), the knowledge, norms, values, resources, and epistemologies of local communities must be viewed as legitimate, valuable, and intimately integrated into schools. Other scholars also believed that culturally responsive ways could develop students' self-identity (Berry et al., 2006; Gay, 2010; Portes & Rivas, 2011). Having a designated group like the Aboriginal Dance Club, where students feel like they belong and their cultural practices are valued, may be important to the identity development of all ethnically diverse students.

The students in this study were initially afraid to claim their ethnic identity, and they felt discriminated against both by students and by some of their teachers. It is our position that all students and their ethnic backgrounds should be valued in schools. If schools are to create more positive environments for ethnically diverse students, teachers and administrators may have to question their assumptions about minority students and understand the importance of students exploring their ethnicity as part of their education. While this study did not explore the influence of ethnic identity on academic success, there is a need for future research to explore the relation between aboriginal students' ethnic identity and academic success, the association between aboriginal students' ethnic identity and health-risk behaviors, and how the parents are affected when their children affirm their ethnic identity.

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