

**Colourful Wishes:
Advancing Cultural Understanding through Colour Theory among Early Childhood
and Elementary School Students in Tokyo, Japan, through a Tanabata-themed Art
Lesson.**

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Keywords: art education, colour theory, cultural understanding, early childhood education, elementary education, Japan

Abstract

This presentation discusses the opportunities to advance cultural understanding and literacy among early childhood and elementary school students, mediated through colour theory embedded as a core learning outcome within a Tanabata-themed art Lesson. Cultural understanding and literacy are key to advancing global citizenship and higher-order critical skills in a world of globalisation (Gibson et al., 2008). This is particularly relevant within the Japanese context, although a highly ethnically homogenous society comparable to other major countries and economies continues to be embedded within the globalised society. As such, students, at a young age, are actors and consumers of global knowledge and culture driven by globalising forces based on their exposure to domestic and global culture (Cvetkovich, 2018), known as global consciousness (Mansilla & Gardner, 2007). Through this framework, colour theory is a unique perspective of building capacity for cultural understanding and global consciousness among young elementary-level students, which is age-appropriate for their cognition and learning. In addition, colour theory and the meanings assigned to colours reveal numerous values and nuances among cultures (Nhi, 2024; Gage, 1999a; Gage, 1999b). This presentation will look at the outcomes and findings from a Tanabata-themed workshop; where Tanabata is a cultural holiday, and part of the customs include creating wishes on tanzaku, which are small pieces of decorated paper to be hung on bamboo. Children were advised to think and reflect on the colours they chose for their tanzaku tanabata wishes and relate these to the meanings behind their colour choices. The context of the cultural practice during Tanabata provides appropriate timing to advance understanding of other cultures beyond the Japanese context. Through a 90-minute workshop during the Tanabata holiday, elementary-aged students and their parents learnt about the meanings of colour and how colours can have assignments of varying meanings within Japan and other countries such as the West. A survey aimed at parents and short interviews with student participants were conducted at the end of the workshop to gauge students' reflections on their understandings associated with colour through aspects such as their own emotions, the reasons for their selection of colours and the broader meanings of colours, and how they are culturally situated.

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