



Background

Problem: Research has pointed to cultural oppression as a factor contributing to mental and social health problems in the First Nations communities (Kirmayer et al., 2003).

Suggestion: Group singing and dancing has been found to increase self-esteem, confidence, and co-operative behaviour (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010). Learning the music of one's culture may promote cultural identity and a sense of community, which can be protective factors for wellbeing (Berry, 1999).

Activities/The program

Singing and Dancing

Children from a Northern Tutchone First Nation community participated in an 8-week program in which they learned about their traditional culture through song and dance. Students were taught a total of 5 traditional songs.

Language/History/Culture

Students learned the pronunciation and meaning of the lyrics during native language class. Students were taught the history of the songs and why each song is important to their culture.

Elder/community Participation

Elders were invited to the school to help teach the history, language, and dancing of the songs. The elders provided students with a deeper understanding of the culture and traditional knowledge.

Final Showcase

The final gala event allowed the students to present their new skills to the community. Each class of students performed one song and all grades participated in the entrance and exit songs.



Program Evaluation/Methods

The song and dance program was evaluated to determine the impact of the program on the students. The evaluation employed a pre-post design using a variety of questionnaires, observations, and open-ended interview questions.

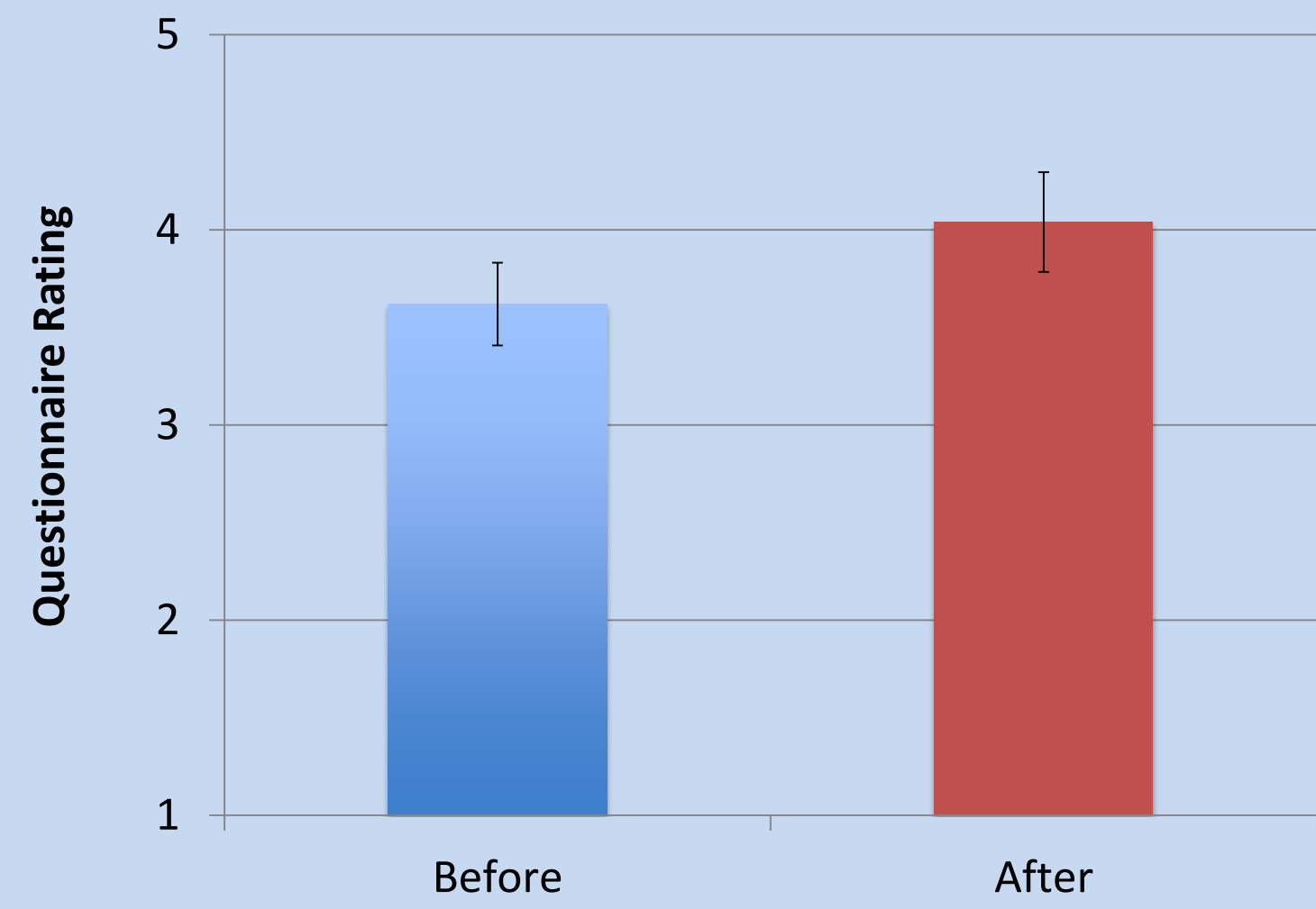


Impacts/Results

1. Students learned new skills

- ✓ Music (singing, dancing, drumming)
- ✓ Language (lyrics)
- ✓ Culture/History (sewing, beading)

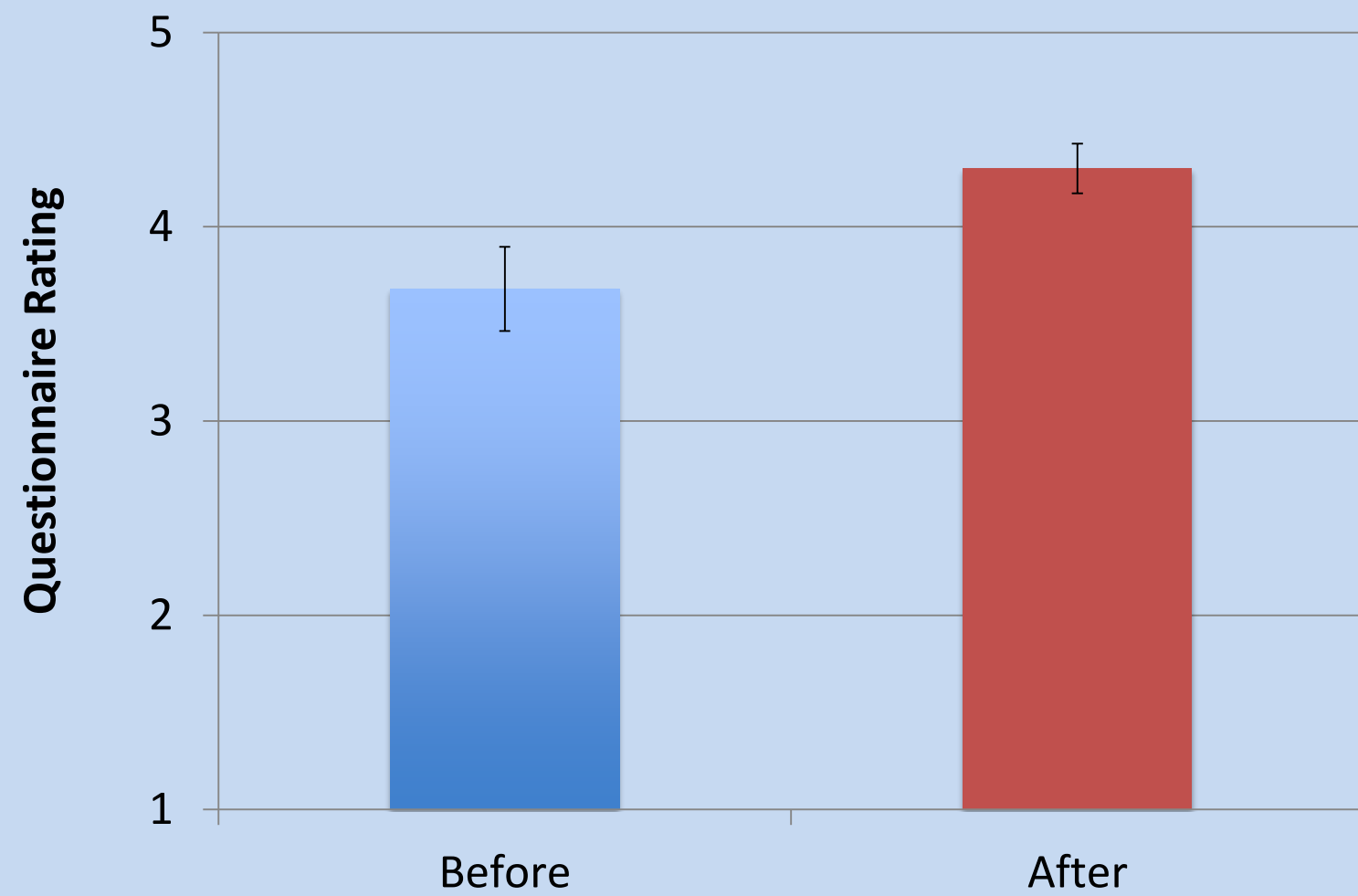
Figure 1. I can speak some Northern Tutchone
 $*t(19) = -2.604, p < .05$



2. Students enjoyed the program

- ✓ Satisfaction with program
- ✓ Engagement with program
- ✓ Fun in music class

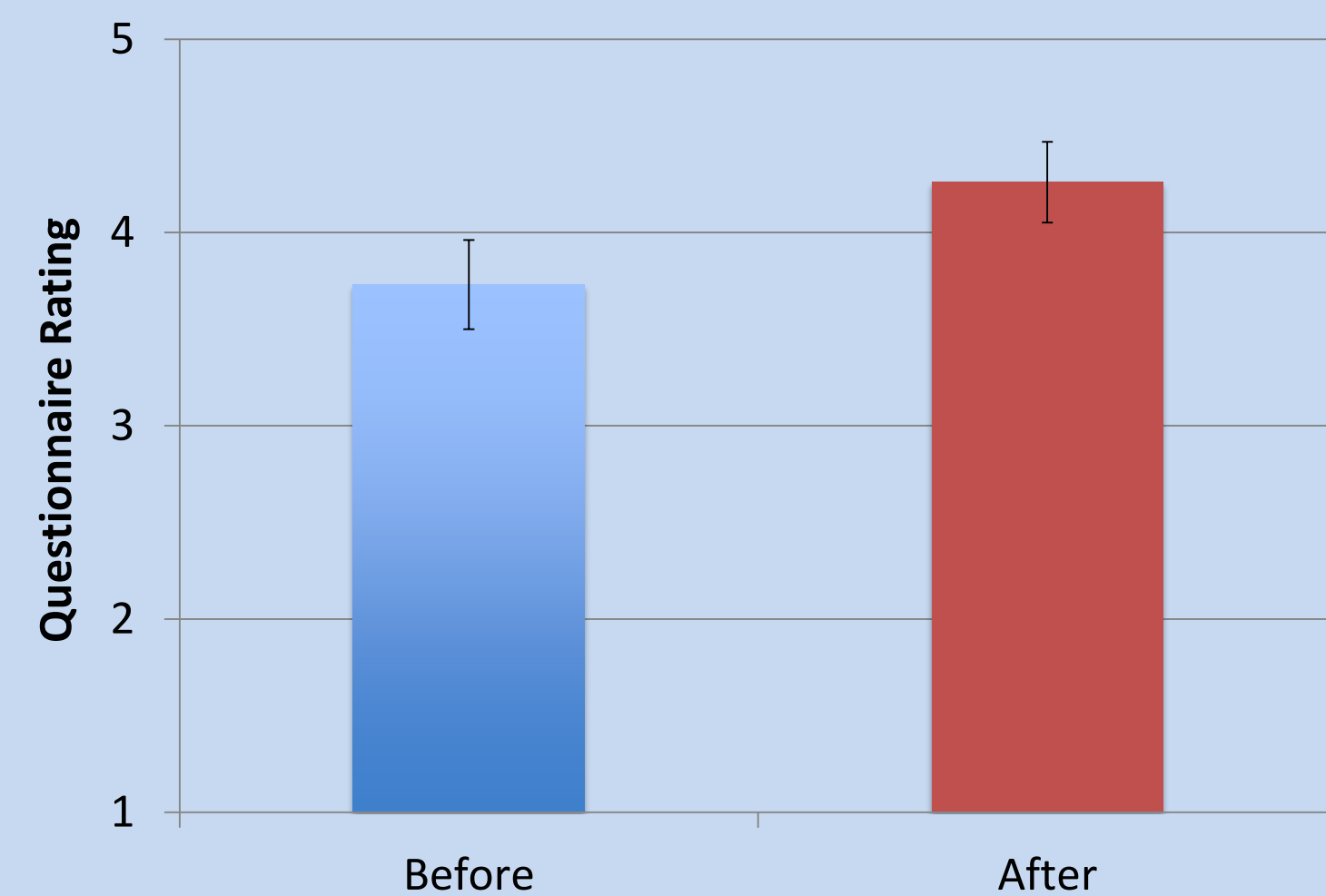
Figure 2. I enjoy what I learn about in school
 $*t(19) = -2.604, p < .05$



3. Increased sense of cohesion/togetherness

- ✓ Sense of community
- ✓ Togetherness in the school
- ✓ Bridge between school and community

Figure 3. I feel like I am part of a community
 $*t(19) = -2.668, p < .05$



Impacts/Results

4. Increased mental/social wellness

- ✓ Pride in culture
- ✓ Confidence/Self-esteem
- ✓ Pride in self
- ✓ Cultural identity

Sample Interview Quotes

"Until now, I didn't know anything [about my culture] and now I do"

- Elementary student

"I am happier after I'm dancing. I feel good about myself"

- High school student

"I felt proud, because I was representing my culture"

- High school student

"It's important to pass down until we are elders and we can teach the younger kids."

- High school student

"I learned that I am more Indian now than I am...I am more Indian now because I didn't dance or sing or anything, I feel more Indian now."

- Elementary student



Conclusions

Given this positive impact, more initiative should be taken to promote aboriginal traditions in rural communities using song. Long-term impacts of these initiatives may include:

- Deepening of cultural identity
- Passing down cultural traditions to future generations
- Development of a thriving culture that will continue to grow.