A Study of Experience and Meaning of Mentors Participating in Intercultural Youth Mentoring Programs

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Abstract

Youth mentoring programs became popular and have been applied in various fields related to adolescent care counseling work in Korea. In many cases, university students and high school students are preferred as mentors, because they tend to build rapport more easily with their younger mentees. Especially intercultural youth mentoring, as described here, is currently courting increased interest and participation. This paper explores the meaning and experience that mentors gained through their participation in intercultural youth mentoring programs. 16 mentors were interviewed and the interview data thus collected were analyzed to fulfill the above objectives. Findings show that the meaning of mentorship and the comparison of participants’ experiences in intercultural youth mentoring programs between university and high school mentors. Mentors came to open their eyes on children who they had different cultural background and they got positive influences on their life in common to both of them. There are however some differences between the mentors such as the way of thinking about integrity and accountability in mentoring. This study attempted to introduce experience and the meaning of intercultural mentoring participation that mentors came to develop. So, this study is expected contribute to the participation of intercultural youth mentoring programs and further interaction between intercultural youth groups.

Keywords: Intercultural Mentoring, Multicultural Children, Qualitative Research, Youth Mentoring

1. Introduction

Youth mentoring provides a model for be the kind of people teenager mentors want their younger brothers or sisters to become (Garringer & McRae, 2008). Youth mentoring includes different positions for teenagers that participate, which means young people who were mentees also participate in mentoring programs as a mentor. Adolescents are agents for primary socialization and are relatively older and wiser than children; therefore

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mentoring activities can be helpful for gaining a variety of experiences (DuBois & Karcher, 2005). Adolescence is an important period during which one's future is largely influenced and a time when youth establish their identity. Teenagers can play a very important role in giving advice on how to learn about themselves and what direction they will take in the near future, such as school admission, transfer, exams and so on. Thus, youth mentoring programs provide opportunities for growth and learning to both mentors and mentees, so a relationship for mutual development can be fostered. Especially intercultural youth mentoring, as described here, is currently courting increased interest and participation. Intercultural youth mentoring includes activities between mentors and mentees from differing cultural backgrounds.

This paper explores the meaning and experience that mentors gained through their participation in intercultural youth mentoring programs in Korea. This study may have practical implications for ways intercultural youth mentoring programs can be made more effective by comparing both mentors' experiences of university students and high school students.

2. Children of Multicultural Families and Intercultural Mentoring

In Korea, the number of minor children of multicultural families requiring care exceeded 190,000 people (as of July 2013). As they experience different socio-cultural environment misfit and discrimination, solving the problem of caring for them is causing a big impact, socially. The current problems for our society in facing the matter of caring for the children of multicultural families are separated into four different ways as following. First, there is assimilating the children into Korea, which means 'Koreanizing' by learning Korean culture focusing on language, food, song, dance, and so on. Second, there is the support of a top down method that does not take into account the children, which is a one-sided approach to the child's needs from the perspective of parental care. Third, the children are represented othermization as the special minority for the caring of dispensation. Fourth, the problems for children of multicultural families are considered part of the marriage immigrant women's issues. In the long term, multicultural families caring for children undergoing structural conflicts and deepening inequality may raise passive citizenship issues. Therefore, the purpose of multicultural children's care should not be treated just in consideration of emotion, attention and attitude. The caring for multicultural children should be considered as a way to protect, maintain and improve human dignity. The mentoring may be more effective in allowing multicultural children to develop a broad view on society as it is a man-to-man mentor-mentee relationship. Intercultural mentoring for multicultural children has risen continuously in Korea starting with a pilot project in operation with 70 elementary and secondary schools in 2006, and expanding in 2011 by the National College of Business to 42 universities, 52 colleges in 2013.

3. Methodology and Study Context

This paper draws on qualitative material collected during three months in Korea from February to April 2014. Sixteen mentor interviews were conducted: 8 with high school students and 8 with university students. I interviewed university students in cafes and (a smaller number) in my residence, whereas interviews with the high school students took place mostly schools. Other material was collected through participant observation at the place for intercultural youth mentoring activities.

The data sources allowed for triangulation, thick description, referential adequacy materials, peer debriefing (Guba, 1981) and commonality in themes. I read and examined through the entire corpus of data for themes that responded to the research questions. Then the data was analyzed and coded into categories and themes. I examined the pattern of the interview data to find the concept of extraction for research purpose, and then compared the similarities and differences between the analyzed data as a constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During data analysis, I continuously reflected on the influence of my role as researcher to ensure that my voice was not the dominant voice in this research (Lather, 1993).

4. Finding: The Meaning of Mentorship and the Comparison of Participants' Experiences in Intercultural Youth Mentoring Programs Between University and High School Mentors
4.1. The meaning of intercultural youth mentoring experience

In this study, participating mentors found the mentoring experience significant for various reasons. Most of the students were willing to participate in the mentoring program, it being a valuable opportunity to improve their communication skills, as well as experience growth for themselves. In particular, they liberated the mind from prejudice by looking back on existing prejudices as a reflection of contact with other cultures. In the case of university students, the mentoring was significant for reflecting on their relationship with other people's experience and the experience of globalization such as preliminary cross-cultural contact. In the case of high school students, it was significant in helping them achieve college entrance examination scores required and was a consistent and reliable means to participate in volunteer activities.

4.2. Caring and considering for mentee

Mentors showed their consideration in determining how to take care of the mentees respectively. Mentors deduced the environment and resources for mentees in everyday conversations and determined what is considered to be the most effective way to help mentees. Mentors also played the role of family members for mentees. University student mentors were ongoing mentoring voluntarily in cooperation with other mentors in order to provide social support.

4.3. Integrity and accountability in mentoring

Integrity and accountability are important for the relationship between mentors and mentees. The quality of education in multicultural mentoring was important, but the most important thing that influenced the quality of the mentor-mentee relationships was the attitude of mentors. Steady perseverance of mind, integrity and a sense of responsibility was needed for mentees to appreciate mentors as a role model and open the door. In particular, high school student mentors considered the individual relationship of mentor-mentee to be the most important factor. Unlike high school student mentors, university student mentors considered the role as a member of the mentoring agency to be significant factor. Besides, university student mentors thought that a good mentor should have a nice personality for mentees and make a positive impact on other mentors as well.

4.4. Countermeasure against difficulties and problem-solving

It could be faced with the possibility of premise that there are many variables during mentoring activities. In particular, intercultural youth mentoring have not accumulated data of practices enough. So it might need flexible attitude when an unexpected situation occurred. There might be situations that mentors could not afford alone. Therefore, taking advantage of the surrounding environment is the most important capability. In the case of high school student mentors might need for help, but the social environment is relatively closed for them because of space-time constraints that felt by the high school students in Korea. Most of them take matters into their own hands. On the one hand, the university student mentors were raised the problem of the 'falling into mannerism'. To be more specific, as they become familiar with mentoring activities, they experienced to boredom and even reached the point of aimlessness.

4.5. Self-reflection and introspection

Mentor's self-reflection and introspection are a substantial self-growth process through looking around the real issues and finding solutions to their own mentors. There was one thing in common to all participating mentors, which was a critique of the stigma effect about the multicultural children. This was to put a black mark against the children of multicultural families regarding the concept of 'multicultural' as an important element of all causing problems in society. This prejudice would justify the perspective that mainstream society must be improved a particular propensity of mentees (Colley, 2004). In the case of university student mentors revealed that communicating with other mentors could be facilitated reflection and introspection for mentoring.
5. Implications

My research seeks to add to discourse on ways that mentors can better respond to the needs of diverse mentees and become wonderful leaders. Based on my research, I argue that more needs to be done in intercultural youth mentoring programs to give all mentors and interested parties a greater understanding of what it means to strengthen necessary competence in their mentoring practice. Thus, I suggest some support measures for mentors participating in intercultural youth mentoring programs as follows.

- All participating mentors should be provided a variety of opportunities to communicate and exchange their experiences. The network of mentors can be a field of sharing and exchanging wisdom for intercultural youth mentoring and help them in their responsibility to improve.
- Supervising for mentors is necessary to provide a process of mentoring properly. Mentors also require support and should receive confirmation about direction of progression for mentoring by professional supervisors such. One of the major concerns for youth mentoring is the question of could teenagers being able to provide children with mature empathy and understanding of cognitive and emotional supports. In the case of this study, university student mentors that took advantage of various social resources for the mentoring experience. On the contrary, high school student mentors felt exhausted after the traumas of bad experience that they were hurt by their mentees. Thus, in the case of high school student mentors can be gained wide support to make their mind stronger and healthier.
- The active support of fellow mentors should be managed and developed. The fellow mentors include a diversity of social resources in a wide range of area, such as parents in family, teachers in school, teenagers of workplace and more. Support is needed for fellow mentors to maintain and increase the value as social resources for all mentors.

Intercultural mentoring can be a good tool to reconsider basic conception about other cultures, encourage natural multiculturalism, and raise the capacity for the children of multicultural families. Further research is encouraged on this kind of intercultural youth mentoring in many different fields.

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