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Teachers’ Efforts to Facilitate the Social Development of Multicultural Children

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of elementary teachers in multicultural children's social development. The data were collected from eight teachers (female 6, male 2) who had multicultural children in their class. For collecting data, teachers were asked to write reflection notes and daily reports based on their observation of a multicultural student in his/her class for one week. The documented data were analyzed using content analysis. Procedures for line-by-line analysis were followed in order to extract core categories. According to the results of this study, social development of multicultural children was influenced by teachers' positive perception and acceptance on multicultural children, their understanding through first-hand experience with multicultural children, and their experience of multicultural training for getting rid of teaching stress. Finally, it was proposed that future research should investigate into specific mechanisms of how each helpful factor affects multicultural children’s adjustment.

1. Introduction

Once a predominantly single-race society, Korea has been changing into a multi-racial country due to industrialization and globalization. Since 2000s, a rapid increase in interracial marriages has been producing more multicultural children. Statistics show that the growth rate of multicultural children (with at least one ethnically non-
Korean parent) has reached to be more than 30 percent each year since 2007 (Ministry of Education and Science Technology, 2010). Consequently, helping these multicultural students to adjust well in the society has become an important national agenda. Various studies have been conducted to facilitate understanding of multicultural children, so that they may be better helped to settle well in their surroundings. Recently, these efforts have been labeled as “social integration,” and various social integration movements targeting multicultural families have been started at the national level (Kang, et al., 2013). Healthy social development is a core prerequisite for an individual to adjust well in his/her society. Unfortunately, children from multicultural families are faced with various difficulties within and outside of their family boundaries that can hinder their social development (Sue, Ivey & Pederson, 1996; Sue & Sue, 2008). Internally, confusion and conflicts exist among family members of different cultural background. Outwardly, multicultural children experience various stereotypes and prejudices. There is growing empirical evidence that the internal and external vulnerabilities of multicultural families negatively affect their children’s social development. In fact, the biggest challenges faced by multicultural children in South Korea has been reported to be in the social relationship domain (Cho, Yoon, Park & Choi, 2006; Gao & Hwang, 2012; Hwang, Gao & Kim, 2010; Oh, 2005). Current Korean school environment is not well-prepared to teach and guide multicultural children (ethnic minorities). According to a recent study, multicultural children showed similar levels of behavioral problems when compared with regular Korean children, but multicultural children appeared to have lower levels of social abilities than regular children (Kang, Yeo, Kim, Kim, & Im, 2013). Multicultural children’s relative lack of social abilities does not directly bring about their behavioral problems, but it can hinder them from reaching their full potential. Thus, to help multicultural children cope with their difficulties and lead happier lives at school, we need to identify helpful mechanisms of social competence. This study sought to take an approach in leading the discussion by identifying factors that positively affect the social development of multicultural children. In particular, this research focused on teachers’ influence on multicultural children since teacher-student interaction is known to be a very crucial positive factor (den Brok & Levy, 2005). In short, the purpose of this study was to understand the role of elementary teachers in multicultural children's social development. For this, teachers were asked to write reflection notes and daily reports based on their observation of a multicultural student in his/her class for one week. Here introduce the paper, and put a nomenclature if necessary, in a box with the same font size as the rest of the paper. The paragraphs continue from here and are only separated by headings, subheadings, images and formulae. The section headings are arranged by numbers, bold and 10 pt. Here follows further instructions for authors.

2. Method

Eight teachers (female 6, male 2) who had multicultural children in their class participated in this study. Their average teaching career was about 14 years, and they had taught multicultural children for about 3 years on average. Participants wrote up daily reports which consisted of open-ended questions regarding multicultural children’s social development and a section to record their observations on the children. Teachers were asked to record multicultural children's personality traits, behavior and appearance, social skills, as well as teacher’s and peers’ attitudes toward multicultural children. In addition, teachers were also asked to report their efforts or training experiences on understanding multicultural children. Teachers observed the multicultural children in their classrooms for one week and wrote the details of their observations in a journal. The documented data were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis may be useful in studying the intellectual and affective characteristics of individuals as it enables an in-depth analysis of the documented contents. Procedures for line-by-line analysis were followed in order to extract core categories.

3. Result

3.1 Perception on multicultural background: “Accepting and perceiving positively”

When the classroom teacher accepts a multicultural child as he/she is, other children in class tend to accept the multicultural child as well. The way teachers accept and positively perceive multicultural children seem to affect not only the multicultural children but also other children in class in terms of how they perceive multicultural children.
When I first disclosed **‘s multicultural background, I objectively announced to class that “**‘s father is Korean and his mother is Chinese. ** was born and raised in Korea,” without making a big deal out of it. Students were amazed at first, but no one made fun of him. / I believe it is crucial to help children to understand and naturally accept their given situation. Once they perceive their reality as is, they can acknowledge their limitations in terms of interpersonal relationships or learning and can adjust more comfortably. (Case 1 classroom teacher’s observation log).

In addition, assisting multicultural children to accept themselves and acquire positive identity through emphasizing the strengths of multicultural families and boosting their self-confidence seems to have positive influence on their school adjustment and social development. Teachers who had highly social multicultural children in their classrooms exerted efforts to make these children proud of their multicultural background.

I told him about the benefits of having come from a multicultural family and helped him to gain higher self-esteem. For instance, I emphasized the fact that he would be able to receive greater benefits since there are various aids for multicultural individuals, and that he may get a head start in a career that links Korea and China in today’s global world. I encouraged him to live more diligently. I also told him about Korean Americans who are better liked when they are fluent in both Korean and English, and recommended him to learn Chinese harder through his mother. / In addition, I also think we need to help him understand the advantages of a multicultural family in this globalized world, and boost his self-confidence. (Case 1 classroom teacher’s observation log). In my case, I tried to instill self-confidence and pride in the multicultural child. Since I knew that this seemingly active and confident child had depressive feelings and anxiety inside, I talked with him a lot and provided counseling. / I put efforts into understanding the family environment of the multicultural child in my class. Also, I tried to help him live with confidence about his multicultural background. (Case 2 classroom teacher’s observation log)

Once a multicultural child is assigned to their class, teachers were aware of the fact that they need to take interest in the child and give extra efforts to help him/her adjust. With the help of their prior knowledge and experiences, teachers tried hard to understand and help the multicultural child.

3.2 Teacher’s first-hand experience with multicultural children: “Understanding through experience”

It appeared that teachers came to understand multicultural children better through their first-hand experience teaching or guiding multicultural children. When teachers view multicultural children objectively without perceiving the children negatively or with preconceptions, multicultural children’s school adjustment and social development can be well fostered.

I wasn’t informed that I would have multicultural children in my class. I learned of this in the middle of the school year, when I had already developed close relationships with them. It was like, “Oh, I didn’t know that this child is of mixed blood,” without any special feelings. I naturally came to perceive that multicultural children are just the same as other children. / It is a mistake to think that all multicultural children have issues regarding social interaction. Rather, these children understood their situations well, and I don’t think they need special education on sociality. (Case 1 classroom teacher’s observation log). I didn’t know much about multiculturalism before having a multicultural child in my classroom. In fact, I wasn’t very interested in children with multicultural background. However, once I received a multicultural child in my classroom, I became very much interested in multicultural families. I even became interested in the family atmosphere or environment of other multicultural children at our school. (Case 2 classroom teacher’s observation log). At first, I had a slight mix of curiosity and concern. But once I got to know them, they even look similar to other children and do not seem to have any special issues. (Case 7 classroom teacher’s observation log)
When assigned with multicultural children, teachers tend to feel burdened at first, but through teaching these children they were able to get rid of their preconceptions and burdens. Classroom teachers took interest in the multicultural children’s school and classroom life, and helped them to adjust well. They sought to reveal the characteristics and strengths of multicultural children naturally in class so that other children can also accept multicultural children with ease.

3.3 Experience of multicultural training: “Getting rid of teaching stress through multicultural training”

Teachers participating in this study varied in their experiences in teaching in general, teaching multicultural children, and multicultural training. Teachers who received no or little multicultural training appeared to have greater stress teaching multicultural children; they tended to be worried and burdened.

I was very worried at first. I thought that I would need to study a lot. (Case 3 classroom teacher’s observation log).

I had taught him English when he was in 5th grade, so I wasn’t greatly worried but felt slightly burdened. (Case 4 classroom teacher’s observation log). First, I felt burdened. I was worried about his communication skills, socialization capacity, academic achievement level, and parental support level, etc. (Case 5 classroom teacher’s observation log). But in case of teachers with relatively greater experience with multicultural training, they appeared to treat multicultural children the same without preconceptions, and were equipped with knowledge and confidence about teaching multicultural children. I don’t think I have much preconception about multicultural children. I don’t treat multicultural children differently. I rather pay attention more to troublemaking children from generic families. (Case 1 classroom teacher’s observation log).

I don’t think that is true in case of the multicultural child in my class whose surrounding environment is not much different from that of other children from generic families. (Case 2 classroom teacher’s observation log). I treat them the same. I don’t perceive them differently just because they have multicultural background. I don’t think I need to treat them differently. But I believe I need to be cautious about opening up their multicultural family background to others depending on the sensitivity level of the children and their parents. I also think special help should be given if they are going through difficulties academically or socially due to their multicultural background. (Case 6 classroom teacher’s observation log). First, multicultural children are social minorities. So we need to give serious thoughts as to whether we can publically reveal their multicultural background. We also need to take their family situation into consideration. (Case 7 classroom teacher’s observation log)

As such, children who had no or little prior experience with multicultural children tended to feel burdened and worried, and had a difficult time figuring out how to teach them. Teachers who had gone through on-the-job training or other training programs seemed to have relatively greater confidence about teaching multicultural children, and understood the needed programs for teaching multicultural children.

4. Discussion

Teacher factors that facilitated the social development of multicultural children appeared to be “accepting and perceiving positively”, “understanding through experience”, and “getting rid of teaching stress through multicultural training.” Classroom teachers play critical role in children’s school and classroom life (Lee, Kim, & Hwang, 2012), and teachers’ influence on multicultural children’s adjustment has also been consistently reported. Ha (2011) pointed out that having first-hand experience teaching multicultural children serve as an opportunity to dispel any prejudice, and further asserted that teacher training and counseling programs that provide firsthand experiences of a direct, positive teacher-multicultural children interaction should be developed. This assertion is consistent with the “understanding through experience” factor found in this study. However, many teachers jump into teaching multicultural children without any prior knowledge or training. In such a case, inexperienced teachers desperately seek out advices from more experienced teachers, go through trial-and-error process in teaching, look for support programs, or try out individualized instruction methods (Cho, 2009). In describing teachers’ difficulties related to teaching multicultural children, Seol, Han, and Lee (2003) also pointed to the lack of educational support as the
primary barrier to providing individualized instruction to multicultural children. This phenomenon seems to be related to the “getting rid of teaching stress through multicultural training.” Thus, it seems vital that effective instructional strategies developed through firsthand experiences of experienced teachers and important findings from related research be transferred to teachers at the front line. In sum, since a teacher’s prior experiences have a direct, strong influence on the teacher’s perception, it would be important to make direct, positive teacher-multicultural children interaction experience as the core factor in designing multicultural training programs or anti-bias education for teachers (Ha, 2011). This research started from previous findings that report multicultural children are not always disadvantaged in adjustment (Kang et al., 2013; Abril, 2006; Leung & Chiu, 2008) and suggest that multicultural research should move from emphasizing negative aspects to revealing the positive aspects of multicultural experience (Kim, Kwak & Pae, 2009). In other words, the current research chose to observe multicultural children who are reported to be social in order to highlight the positive characteristics of multicultural children. Also, the study investigated the teacher factor as a major context that affects these children’s social development. As a result, this study identified specific cases of multicultural children who are positively adjusting in school settings, and verified teacher factors that have positive effect on children’s adjustment. Based on the findings of this study that took an interpretative approach on relatively few cases through observations and interviews, future research should investigate into specific mechanisms of how each helpful factor affects multicultural children’s adjustment. For this, a more robust research design should be used by controlling for multicultural children’s socioeconomic status and inserting control/comparison groups (Kim et al., 2009).

References


