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DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE MULTICULTURAL PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY OF EXPLORING A TEACHER'S UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICES

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Abstract

The United States of America is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. The cultural, racial and ethnic composition of US schools has become increasingly diverse. Diversity within societies and an increasing percentage of people who speak a second language has made multicultural education crucial at all levels of education, and now, more emphasis exists for integrating a culturally inclusive world-view into all areas of the curriculum. Early childhood educators have also responded this social change and have a commitment to fostering respect for diversity and to providing equal educational opportunities to all children. Since children begin to notice differences and construct classificatory and evaluative categories very early, early childhood educators need to affirm and foster children's knowledge and pride in their cultural identities. The purpose of this case study is to explore a preschool teacher's understanding and implementation of best practices of multicultural education. Face-to-face meetings were arranged with preschool teachers in their classrooms at a daycare center. After providing brief information of the intent of the research study and giving a synopsis of the study, teachers who with minimum 10 years experiences in the Early Childhood Education were pre-selected, and based on this criterion of eligibility, the most experienced teacher was selected for this study. Qualitative data is collected through observations, interviews, classroom observations and artifact collection. The teacher in this study appeared to have a very positive understanding regarding multicultural education and showed that she preferred anti-bias multicultural education approach.

Key Words: Early Childhood Education, Multicultural Education

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Since the United States is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, the cultural, racial and ethnic composition of the United States schools has become increasingly diverse. Over 30% of the American school-age children are ethnic minorities, with 18.6% of school age youth living in homes in which English is not the native language (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). As the demographics of the United States change to include growing numbers of people from Mexico, Central and South America, Central and Southeast Asia, Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Middle East, the need for effective cross-cultural interactions increases (Bennett, 2003). This brings new opportunities as well as new demands (Maxim, 2006). For example, all races of people do not look the same, in terms of features and skin color. People of different cultures will have different kinds of interaction styles, languages, and traditions. Unfortunately, many people tend to discriminate against one group or another, leading to incorrect assumptions about members of group, unfair treatment of people in those groups, and closed attitudes toward those differences. Such attitudes cause many problems in the world's varying societies. The purpose of this study is to explore a preschool teacher's understanding and practices of multicultural education.

In U.S. schools, multicultural education aided teachers and school administrators to design programs to facilitate cross-cultural understanding among children. However, the existing practices of multicultural education in U.S public schools have failed to completely address intercultural learning (Bull, Fruehling & Chattergy, 1992). According to Pattnaik (2003, p.205), "many people do not understand the true scope of multicultural education. It is important to reflect the diversity of society so that students are "living diversity" rather than "doing diversity."

Young children are not born with attitudes that cause them to discriminate against others. However, they quickly learn such attitudes as they watch and learn from what others do and say (Ramsey, 1982). Thus, an attempt to encourage children to view others as individuals, without preconceived notions, is through developing multicultural competence in early childhood education. Therefore, this research study explores a preschool teacher's understandings and practices regarding multicultural education. It focuses on the value of multicultural education in Early Childhood Programs.

Need for the Study

This research study addresses two needs: (1) to understand the significance of multicultural education in early childhood programs and, (2) to explore a preschool teacher's understanding and implementation of best practices of multicultural education in an early childhood classroom.

By investigating the value of multicultural education in Early Childhood Education, this study addresses one of the significant problems in today's American education system (Banks, 1991a; 1993; Bennett, 2003). Since American society has become more heterogeneous, multicultural education has emerged as an essential component of the education system (Banks, 1993; Bennett, 2003). Derman-Sparks (1989) stated that little

attention has been paid to examining what early childhood teachers do in their classrooms with regard to multicultural education, Also, most of the research on the teachers' understandings and practices has been done with public school teachers(e.g., Castagno, 2006: Gates, 2006; Pimentel, 2006).

Early childhood teachers must help children be aware of diversity and cultural differences so that children can appreciate being in a multicultural environment (Davidman & Davidman, 1997). The implementation of multicultural education requires teachers to examine their own values, knowledge, and teaching practices about diversity to avoid biased multicultural education (Brown & Marchant, 2002). This creates the essential need for this study, which is to explore a preschool teacher's understandings and practices regarding multicultural education.

In sum, while concern exists for multicultural education in recent years, not enough attention has focused on early childhood teachers' understandings and practices regarding multicultural teaching practices. Therefore a strong need emerges for a study which would provide an understanding about early childhood teachers' perceptions and practices regarding multicultural education.

Purposes of the Study

"Case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research"(Yin, 1984, p.23). This particular research is a qualitative case study focusing on a complex issue by exploring an experienced teacher's understandings and best practices of multicultural education. Qualitative data is collected through observations, interviews, classroom observations and artifact collection in a daycare located in Centre County, Pennsylvania. At this stage in the research, the preschool teacher is one who organizes and provides developmentally appropriate early childhood education programs, plans and implements curriculum and education for three to five year old children in a culturally diverse classroom setting (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Educators today suggest infusing multicultural content into the entire curriculum and school programs. Since children begin to notice differences and construct classificatory and evaluative categories very early (Derman-Sparks, 1989), multicultural learning opportunities need to be provided to children from an early age. This allows children to develop positive attitudes toward people from other cultures. Integrating anti-bias, multicultural curriculum goals into the educational program of all children is, therefore, relevant, reflects the needs and interest of the children, and builds upon what children already know.

The point of this research is to present the importance of multicultural education in early childhood programs in the light of a case study. The findings of the study could provide significant understanding about multicultural education for young children.

Research Questions

A- Central Question:

How does a well experienced preschool teacher implement her understandings of multicultural education into classroom practices?

B-Sub Questions

1. How does a preschool teacher define multicultural education?
2. How does a preschool teacher perceive her role in attaining multicultural goals?
3. To what extent does a preschool teacher implement multicultural education effectively in her teaching practices?
4. What practices are described as barriers in multicultural education?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

After explaining the purpose of this research and the need for this study in the previous section, we will now provide a brief analysis of the available literature regarding multicultural education. This section has four parts: first, an examination of the definitions of multicultural education; second, an exploration of the goals of multicultural education, third, an exploration of multicultural education approaches, and finally, suggestions for guidelines for developing effective multicultural practices in early childhood programs.

Definitions of Multicultural Education

Numerous definitions of multiculturalism and multicultural education have been proposed by scholars, researchers and organizations. The following is an examination of various definitions proposed by several authors. This analysis is important because it gives a theoretical base for this study. According to Bennett (2003), "Multicultural Education is an approach to teaching and learning that is based upon democratic values and beliefs and that affirms cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies in an interdependent world" (p.14).

Gorski's (2001) definition of multicultural education provided a strong foundation on which curriculum should be developed.

Multicultural education is a transformative movement in education that produces critically thinking, socially active members of society. It is not simply a change of curriculum or the addition of an activity. It is a movement that calls for new attitudes, new approaches, and a new dedication to laying the foundation for the transformation of society (p.1).

Banks (1999) suggested a parallel view:

Multicultural education is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse, racial, ethnic and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school (p.1).

According to Nieto (2000) multicultural education is also a process of school reform and it is for all students. It permeates whole curricula as well as the all school

organizations. As Sleeter and Grant (1988) defined, multicultural education is not one subject matter, but is education itself.

Banks (1997) also stated the components required for ensuring a multicultural education are: content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social culture. Apparently, each element relates to the others, and each requires considerable attention.

Finally, across these numerous definitions, the main similarities are: multicultural education is a process, and a transformative movement. Its content should be infused into entire curricula and school programs in order to build educational equity and social justice.

Goals of Multicultural Education

In the past, multicultural education was a term that considered differences. The term “melting pot” characterized a single American culture by combining the strengths of many cultures into something new and unique (Bennett, 2003). Today, “cultural pluralism” has emerged as an alternative to the melting pot. Maxim (2006) described cultural pluralism as how all the parts of society contribute to an American whole.

Banks (1999) provided an interesting description of cultural pluralism:

The metaphor of the melting pot is no longer functional. We have to switch to either the toss[ed] salad or the stew. It allows us to focus both on the differences in the ingredients while at the same time the beauty of the whole. A good salad does not have a bunch of components that look, taste or have the same texture. The success of the salad depends not only on its looks but also on a lot of other factors including the taste, the freshness of the ingredients, the smells, the textures and the mixture itself (p.43).

Since schools represent community, importantly, schools must reflect the diversity of society. “If children frequently observe ethnic conflict among different minority groups in their neighborhoods, their behavior in school may mirror that conflict” (Pattnaik, 2003, p.207). Schools can make a significant difference for respect for diversity. The key factor is to help children construct an understanding of different cultures, respect for differences, and at the same time, overcome racial and ethnic barriers.

Bennett (2003) argued that educational excellence in schools cannot be achieved without educational equity. Equity in education means equal opportunities for all students to develop their fullest potential. Banks (1992) proposed that the goal of multicultural education is an education for freedom that should help students to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to participate in a democratic and free society. He stated that “multicultural education promotes the freedom, abilities, and skills to cross ethnic and cultural boundaries to participants in other cultures and groups” (p.23). According to Banks (1992) multiculturalism is a way of thinking and it appreciates and respects other perspectives. Kendall (1983) has parallel thoughts with Banks; she also states other goals for multicultural education:

. . . first, to teach children to respect others’ cultures and values as well as their own, second, to help all children learn to function successfully in a multicultural, multiracial society, third, to develop a positive self-concept in

those children who are most affected by racism-children of color, fourth, to help all children experience both their differences as culturally diverse people and their similarities as human beings in positive ways, fifth, to encourage children to experience people of diverse cultures working together as unique parts of a whole community (p. 3).

Educators today suggest infusing multicultural content into the entire curriculum and school program. Since children begin to notice differences and develop racial/ethnic biases at a very young age (Derman-Sparks, 1989); multicultural education should be implemented into curriculum in early childhood programs as well. Therefore, multicultural education needs to be provided from an early age so that children can develop positive attitudes toward people from other cultures. Integrating anti-bias, multicultural curriculum goals into the educational program of all children is, therefore, relevant, reflects the needs and interest of the children, and builds upon what children already know. Derman-Sparks (1989) provided four objectives of multicultural education to be fostered in each child: construction of a knowledgeable, confident self-identity; comfortable, empathetic interaction with diversity among people, critical thinking about bias, and the ability to assert ones own rights and the rights of others in the face of bias.

In sum, to build a rich multicultural program, educate children effectively, and build good relationships with families, the need is for learning how to respond to cultural and ethnic differences. This means that integrating multicultural curriculum goals into the educational programs help children to respect and understand diverse cultures.

Multicultural Education Approaches

Advocates of multicultural education generated approaches for how to accomplish multicultural education in practice. Bennett, Banks, Gay, Sleeter, and Grant are among the leaders in the field who have developed models for implementing multicultural education. For example, Banks (1993) identified four approaches to multicultural education, each increasingly more significant and comprehensive: teaching about contributions of culturally different groups and individuals, an additive approach in which multicultural lessons and units of study are supplements or appendages to existing curricula, a transformational approach in which the basic nature of curriculum and instruction change to reflect the perspective and experiences of diverse cultural, ethnic, racial, and social groups, and a decision-making and social action approach that teaches students how to clarify their ethnic and cultural values and to engage in socio-political action for greater equality, freedom, and justice for everyone.

Sleeter and Grant (1988) generated five common approaches: (1) teaching culturally different students to fit into mainstream society; (2) human relations that emphasizes diverse peoples living together harmoniously; (3) single group studies which concentrates on developing awareness, respect and acceptance of one group at a time; (4) focusing on prejudice reduction, providing equal opportunities and social justice for all groups, effects of inequitable power distribution on ethnic or cultural groups; and (5) multicultural and social re-constructionist for teaching students to become analytical and critical thinkers and social reformers who are committed to redistribution of power and other resources among diverse groups.

Since other proposed approaches to multicultural education are variations, Gay (1988) generalized three general approaches that can be extrapolated from these more specific approaches: teaching content about cultural pluralism, teaching culturally different students, and using cultural pluralism to teach other academic subjects and intellectual skills.

Teaching content about cultural pluralism is the most traditional and common approach. It is primarily content-centered, with an emphasis on developing units of instruction (lessons, modules, courses) about the history, heritage, contributions, and social issues of ethnic groups (Gay, 1988).

Teaching culturally different students is more process-oriented than content-oriented. Its center of attention is establishing more effective instructional relationships and rapport with students from different ethnic, cultural, and racial backgrounds as a basis for improving educational opportunities and outcomes. Teachers, administrators, counselors, and supervisors learn about the cultural values and experiences of different cultural groups to determine how they may affect attitudes and actions in teaching learning situations (Gay, 1988). Whereas teaching about cultural pluralism emphasizes materials development and curriculum design, teaching the culturally different gives priority to teacher education, staff development, and classroom instruction (Bennett, 2003).

The third approach to multicultural education combines content and process, and is often referred to as infusion. In practice, it means using culturally pluralistic content, experiences, and perspectives in teaching other knowledge and skills. Ethnic and cultural materials provide the contexts for students to practice and demonstrate mastery of more general academic and subject matter skills (Gay, 1988).

In the early childhood programs, educators usually adopted Sleeter and Grant's (1988) human relations approach and education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist in technique. But today, early childhood educators accept that anti-bias multicultural education is the most appropriate approach for young children. Because anti-bias multicultural approach encourages the development of positive attitudes towards others while seeking social justice, and it considers multicultural education in terms of the totality of the child's education, not just a part of education. It becomes essential to all aspects of daily classroom life (Derman-Sparks, 1989).

In sum, this section focused on various approaches to multicultural education on both the general education and the early childhood perspective. The next section provides guidelines for developing effective multicultural practices in early childhood programs.

Guidelines for Developing Effective Multicultural Practices

Teachers play an important role in children's lives, and they affect children's views, conceptions, and behaviors (Ming & Dukes, 2006). Young children's perspectives on diversity are influenced by the beliefs and behaviors of family members and teachers. (Ramsey, 1987; Seefeldt, 1997). These people have significant power in guiding children's learning about cultural differences, either positively or negatively. Active intervention by teachers through all aspects of daily classroom life can change children's negative concepts about another group. A more global perspective involves influencing the environment in

which children's daily classroom lives create an anti-bias culture in their classrooms, thus preparing children for a diverse world.

In order to have an effective multicultural and anti-bias curriculum, teachers must examine their own knowledge and teaching behavior; and second, they must examine the values, beliefs, and perspectives of the cultural groups, who are the subjects of their teaching (Seefeldt, 1997). Advocates of multicultural education must ask the question, "What is the importance for teachers to know themselves, to examine their own attitudes and values toward other people?" According to Ramsey (1987), one answer is that challenging and exploring habitual attitudes and beliefs creates a state of cognitive dissonance that can lead to growth and development of thought. A person can either justify the preexisting points of view or explore the basis for beliefs and gain new knowledge. When done in a group setting, this self-reflective process is most effective in a safe and supportive environment.

Also important is that teachers' beliefs, values, and perspectives of the other cultural groups affect curricula and teaching practices (Garmon, 2004). As teachers examine and realize their biases and stereotypes, they begin to recognize how these biases influence their teaching and relationships with children who are culturally diverse. Ming and Dukes (2006) pursued the examination of beliefs and values as introspection. "During this time of self-reflection, teachers analyze their own feelings toward those who are culturally different, determine how it relates to the dominant culture, and think about what frame of reference influences these feelings" (Ming & Dukes, 2006, p. 44).

After this self analysis, teachers must learn about cultural groups that they are teaching. "They should also acquire the skills needed to translate that knowledge into effective instruction and enriched curriculum" (Banks et al., 2001, p.197). Building a global understanding between dominant and minority culture(s) in their classroom by using culturally responsive strategies, and activities is essential. According to Banks et al. (2001) and Ramsey (1987), teaching should be culturally responsive. Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of children's cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally responsive teaching strategies bring home and community culture into classroom practice. "Effective teachers use knowledge of their students' culture and ethnicity as a framework for inquiry and they organize and implement instruction" (Banks et al., 2001, p.198). Those are the teachers who understand, accept, and adopt multicultural perspectives.

According to Derman-Sparks (1989) implementing anti-bias multicultural curriculum requires sensitivity and respect for individuality. She maintained that while implementing multicultural aspects into daily classroom programs, teachers should challenge children with practical critical thinking and activism. "The point to remember is that an anti-bias approach is integrated into, rather than added onto, existing curriculum" (Derman-Sparks, 1989, p. 8). Banks (1991b) suggested a parallel view that multicultural education is, holistically, an integral part of the total curriculum.

Meyer and Rhoades (2006) stated that programs that consist of food, festival, folklore, and fashion may not be multicultural in focus. According to Meyer and Rhoades (2006):

These studies emphasize a skewed view of ethnicity, gender, and minority cultures. Rather than produce multicultural relationship, they emphasize the differences, which may teach some level of tolerance, but not understanding (p.84).

Like Meyer and Rhoades, many researchers shared a parallel view about this issue (Pattanik, 2003; Aldridge, Calhoun, & Aman, 2000; Derman-Sparks, 1989). According to Pattanik (2003), this particular viewpoint reflects a tourist approach:

In such an approach, minority cultures are not integrated into the school's total framework; rather, the cultures are relegated to certain times during the year. Therefore, children of the majority culture may perceive minority cultures as trivial; minority children may feel the same about other cultures and sometimes even about their own (p.206).

Derman-Sparks (1989) highlighted that tourist curriculum emphasizes the exotic differences between cultures and does not deal with real life, daily problems:

Children "visit" non-White cultures and then "go home" to the daily classroom, which reflects only the dominant culture. The focus on holidays, although it provides drama and delight for both children and adults, gives the impression that is all "other" people –usually people of color- do. What it fails to communicate is real understanding (p. 7).

Derman-Sparks (1989) argued that early childhood teachers can avoid the dangers of the tourist approach through anti-bias curriculum:

Anti-bias curriculum provides a more inclusive education: a) It addresses more than cultural diversity by including gender and differences in physical abilities; b) it is based on children's developmental tasks as they construct identity and attitudes; and c) it directly addresses the impact of stereotyping, bias, and discriminatory behavior in young children's development and interactions (p. 8).

Jones and Derman-Sparks (1992) and Ramsey (1982) highlighted other problems of inappropriate approaches found in early childhood programs:

1. Focusing on giving information about other countries. For example learning about China. An appropriate approach would be learning about Chinese-Americans or their culture.
2. Being colorblind. This approach ignores the children of color and their cultural background, and establishes the dominant culture experience as the norm.
3. Assuming that multicultural education is necessity if diversity exists in the classroom. Implementing multicultural curriculum into whole school programs is also an issue for teachers in totally Caucasian classrooms.

Jones and Derman-Sparks (1992) and Ramsey (1982) argue that multicultural education often fails to its mission because of the above unexamined beliefs held by teachers and administrators.

Creating a diverse environment is another important step in implementing a multicultural curriculum. In her book, Derman-Sparks (1989) highlighted ways that

teachers can develop an anti-bias curriculum by focusing on the visual aspects of the classroom environment, toys and materials, and classroom practices. Other authors also have identified developmentally appropriate anti-bias skills and tools to help young children recognize and criticize stereotyping (Hall, 1999; Copple & Bredekamp, 2006).

Based on the aforementioned studies, posted images (photos, posters) should show various cultural backgrounds of people (children, families) in the classroom. Dramatic play equipment and objects should reflect cultural diversity. Cooking tools, clothes, personal objects, and objects used for holiday celebrations should reflect a variety of cultures. Art materials should include skin tone (tan, brown, and black) paint, paper, markers and crayons. Baby dolls should represent various racial and ethnic backgrounds. Manipulative materials (puzzles, little people figures, and games) should depict diversity in race and ethnicity. Music is the universal language, so teachers should have various musical instruments and CDs in their classrooms. Singing and teaching songs in other language reflect various cultural styles. Teachers should use music from other cultures for a background, movement, dancing and nap-time lullabies.

The classroom environment should also provide opportunities for children to experience other languages. Teachers should reflect spoken and written language represented in the classroom. Teachers can teach children other languages (common words, colors, numbers, food names, family names, months of the year, days of the week, greetings), and display different writing systems in the classroom. Labeling classroom materials in different languages provides awareness of cultural differences and similarities.

The use of multicultural children's literature is a key ingredient in the early childhood programs. Pattanik (2003) stated that designing a literature-based curriculum can help young children develop understanding and respect for other cultures. According to Pattanik (2003), "Children's literature is a critical component in an intercultural curriculum, because it conveys difficult and sometimes abstracts concepts in a simple yet effective manner to young children" (p. 210). Children books should present real images and information, and reflect different languages and cultures. Books should show people from around the world living their daily lives, and they should contain settings in the United States that help children build an accurate conception of the culturally diverse nature of the country (Meyer & Rhoades, 2006). Teachers should choose books that represent different ways of living. Books should contain different people from different cultural backgrounds solving similar problems.

In sum, the literature review indicates that just recognizing cultural diversity is not enough. Essential, in early childhood classrooms, is developing understanding and respect for different cultures. Teachers must realize their own beliefs, values, and perspectives regarding cultural diversity. They also need to be sensitive and knowledgeable about other cultures. For improving the quality of life for children, early childhood teachers need to create a diverse environment and implement an anti-bias multicultural curriculum in the classrooms.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

The main purpose of this study is to explore a preschool teacher's understanding and practices regarding multicultural education. Specifically, the purposes of this study are: 1) to examine a preschool teacher's understandings regarding multicultural education, and 2) to explore a preschool teacher's teaching practices regarding multicultural education. This chapter describes: 1) the participant in this study, 2) the procedure for data collection, and 3) the methods of data analysis.

Participants

The research subject in a case study is often a program, an event, an activity, a person, or a group of people. (Creswell, 1998) This particular study's subject is a preschool teacher in a daycare center. The research study focuses on the complex issue of exploring a teacher's understanding and practices in multicultural education. The qualitative inquiry seeks to obtain a more in-depth understanding of how a preschool teacher defines multicultural education and demonstrates or shows personal practices involving multicultural education.

An arranged face-to face-meeting occurred with preschool teachers in their classrooms at the daycare center. After providing brief information of the nature of the research study and a synopsis of the study, teachers responded to basic eligibility questions. Teachers who had less than 10 years teaching experience were excluded from this study due to the study's assumption that experienced teachers, likely, implement multicultural education into the curriculum more effectively than inexperienced teachers. Therefore, teachers who have a minimum of 10 years experience in the Early Childhood Education are pre-selected for this study. Based on this criterion of eligibility, the most experienced teacher was selected for this study, and since the participant disallowed use of her real name, a pseudonym is used.

To be able to understand and explore the teacher's understanding and practices of multicultural education requires description of the site and the classroom setting where the participant works.

The site is a day care which has 127 children enrolled to 4 preschool classrooms (3-5 years old mixed ages) and 4 infant- toddler classrooms (0-3 years old) and one Kindergarten classroom. According to the information gathered from the school administration, the diversity ratio of the center is: 44% Caucasian American, 27% Asian, 8% African American, 4% Hispanic, 6% Indian, 2% Turkish, 2% Egyptian, 5% Russian, and 2% German.

"The day care uses a curriculum that emerges from the children's interests. Topics for exploration emerge from the conversations of and with children, through community and family events, and through knowledge of individual children's particular interests. Each child is regarded as an individual. The day care values and celebrates each child's unique cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic background" (Information gathered from website of daycare).

Mrs. Megan is the preschool teacher who participated in this study. She is married and has three children. She graduated with a bachelor of science in Rehabilitation Education and began working at a local childcare center as a preschool teacher. She

functioned as a director of a childcare center for 12 years. Since February 2001, she has been working as a supervising teacher in the day care in which this current study occurred.

Mrs. Megan has a diverse classroom. The total number of students is 18 and includes 11 Caucasian Americans, 2 Africa-American; 1 Chinese, 2 Korean, 1 Russian and 1 German. The students' average age is 4. Two other teachers have roles in this classroom, and Mrs. Megan is the supervising teacher.

Effective multicultural education requires comprehensive efforts that integrate attitudes, values, content, and actions and involve all aspects of the educational system such as classroom setting and curriculum materials that teachers use (Banks 1993). In this particular study the classroom setting has divisions for centers: Science & Math Discovery Center, Writing Center, Reading Center, Art Center, Sensory Play Area, Wood- working Area, Dramatic Play Area, Computer Area and Block Area. Children are allowed to participate in these areas during center and free play time. Observation of each center area provided insight into the implementations of multicultural education practices.

Procedures

The in-depth investigation of the subject of the case study used a variety of data gathering methods to produce evidence leading to understanding of the case and answering the research questions (Creswell, 1998). The researchers used multiple sources of information including observations, interviews, physical artifacts and documents. The participant engaged in one-on-one, in-depth interviews for between sixty and ninety minutes. These interviews employed common, semi-structured conversational interview techniques.

Seven observation sessions of 60 minutes each are the basis of field notes. During these observations, the focus was on collecting data regarding classroom materials, props, artifacts, documents and activities which show cultural diversity. The length of each observation and the associated activity appear in Table 1.

Table 1: Observation Times and Activities

Date/Time	Length	Activity
1 st observation (9:30am - 10:30am)	60 minutes	Checked the classroom setting/ took field notes, took pictures, observed circle time
2 nd observation (10:00am -11:00am)	60 minutes	Attended center time and took field notes
3 rd observation (9:30am - 10:30am)	60 minutes	Attended circle time and center time/took field notes, took pictures ,collected documents/ artifacts
4 th observation (10:00am -11:00am)	60 minutes	Attended circle time and center time/took field notes, took pictures ,collected documents/ artifacts
5 th observation (10:00am	60 minutes	Attended center time

-11:00am)		and took field notes, took pictures
6 th observation (9:30am - 10:30am)	60 minutes	Attended center time and took field notes, took pictures
7 th observation (10:00am -11:00am)	60 minutes	Attended center time and took field notes
8 th observation (9:30-10:20)	50 minutes	Attended center time and took field notes, took pictures

Data Analysis

Classification and cross-referencing all evidence allowed efficient recall for sorting and examination over the course of the study. Based on observations, the collected, classified data organized according to three general groups and subgroups:

1- Activities to promote understanding and acceptance of diversity

- a) Cooking activities from different cultures,
- b) Celebrating holidays of different cultures,
- c) Varied cultural art activities
- d) Dance and folk Music of different countries

2- Diversity as part of routines and play:

- a) Ethnic foods served as meals or snacks
- b) Teacher use some words in different languages
- c) Music from different cultures is part of nap time
- d) Greetings in different languages
- e) Games played in different languages
- f) Art materials associated with different cultures
- h) Musical instruments representing varied cultures

3- Materials and props to show cultural diversity.

- a) Books, puzzles, small toy people, posters from different cultures, maps, dress-up clothing representing different countries and customs
- b) Play food representing different cultures
- c) Baby dolls and equipment representing different cultures.

Interpreting the data employed the direct interpretation method and considered each single instance, and drew meaning from it without looking for multiple instances. Use of naturalistic generalization allowed developing generalizations that people can learn from the case (Creswell, 1998). Thus, establishing themes aided clearly representing the data.

Related the aforementioned fact , understanding that individuals view others and situations that uncommon or unique through “lenses.” That is, everyone views new situations according to experiences already encountered. All individuals have been shaped and molded through life experiences which provide a way of viewing the world or an inner structure, both of are unique and unlike anyone else's. Therefore, care in collecting unbiased data was a foremost criterion when observing the teacher. The following figure is to show how this study designed to look at the implementations of multicultural education.

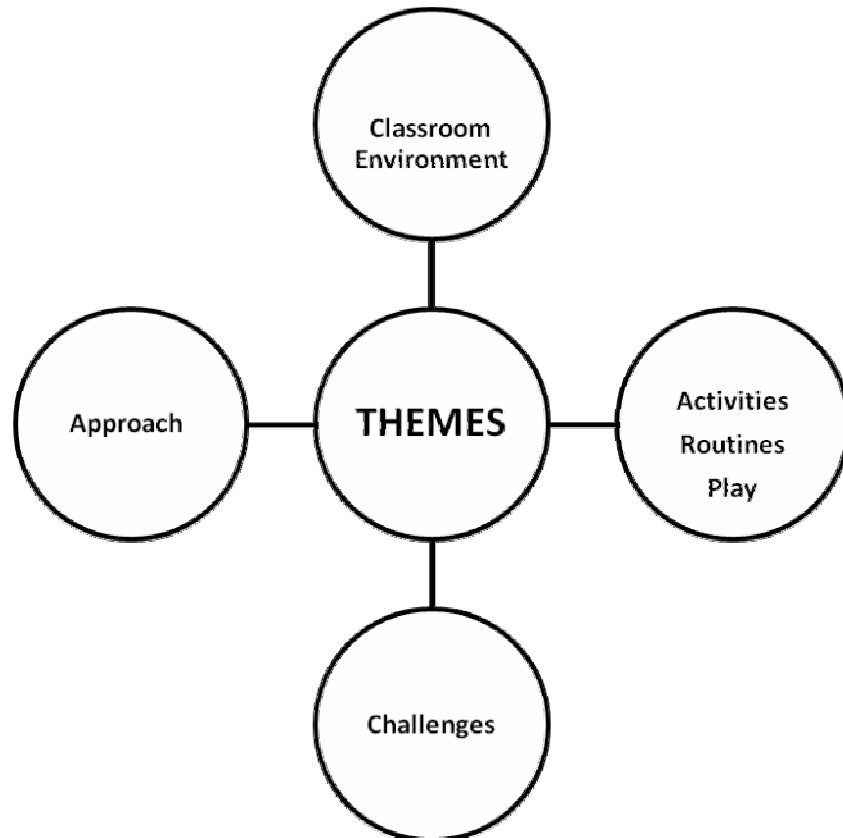


Figure 1: Themes

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of the data analyses appear in the following four sections. Organization of the conclusions are according to the research questions presented at the beginning of this study.

The first section describes the preschool teacher's approaches to multicultural education. The second section presents the teacher's practices. The third section examines the classroom environment. The final section gives the challenges and barriers that the teacher expressed.

1- The Teacher's approach about multicultural education

Teachers have really important role in integrating multicultural education into their classroom, and have influence over the curriculum with his or her values, perspectives, and teaching styles (Banks, 1993). A teacher's behavior in the classroom is a key factor in helping all students reaches their potential, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, religion, language, or exceptionality. Teachers might investigate and change to better meet the needs of a culturally diverse student population is that of teaching and learning styles (Ramsey, 1987).

The way how the teacher defines multicultural education reflects her approach to multicultural education. Mrs. Megan defined multicultural education as a means to help student become aware of their own culture and ethnics, and understand similarities and differences. She emphasized that seeing positive side of differences, rather than a negative one; and focusing on similarities rather than on differences.

In the subject-teacher's words:

I believe that multicultural education is incorporated into everything we do. It is an awareness of people's similarities and differences. It involves educating people (or young children) about the world in which we live and making them aware that there is no one culture that is better than another.

According to Mrs. Megan, multicultural education begins with an awareness of how teachers can and should incorporate into their programs the diversity of the world's people. This would include a variety of tools used in order to teach this concept. She describes three key areas to demonstrate this, including relationships, environments and curricula.

Since the United States is known as the "melting pot," its history details the uniqueness of the cultures that create this wonderful nation. It is essential that we begin educating children at a young age since they are more open to gaining an understanding of the cultures, ethnicity [sic], diversity [sic], etc.

She believes that a discussion of the similarities and differences of people's languages, clothing, foods, geography, celebrations/holidays/traditions, values, morals, beliefs, religions, etc. is necessary to fully gain insight into the existing world.

She emphasized that "there is a need for focusing on the fact that in order to live in harmony, we must accept both people's individuality and their heritages".

According to Maxim (2006), the term "Education that is Multicultural" is much more significant than "Multicultural Education." "Education that is Multicultural" refers to the inclusion of Multicultural Education across the whole curriculum. No longer is Multicultural Education considered to be part of "Social Studies Education," thus, making it fit neatly into its corner of education as one would do with various other subjects. Mrs. Megan believes that multicultural education is to be included in every aspect of the entire curriculum. Language Arts, Music, Math, Science, etc. should all be part of an educational curriculum that is multicultural in nature.

Mrs. Megan perceives her role vital in attaining multicultural goals. As she

described her role during an interview:

Multiculturalism does not always involve a preplanned lesson, though this is done when we plan to recognize many of the celebrations/holidays that we observe, but is also done constantly and spontaneously throughout the day. It is necessary to take advantage of those moments when a topic may come up in which [sic] can lead into multiculturalism. So my role is to first educate myself then incorporate this knowledge into the classroom through discussions and providing a physical environment that is multiculturally-rich.

As an early child care educator, Mrs. Megan feels that she has an important role in creating awareness among her preschoolers:

At this age, children are very impressionable and as their teacher, they really look at me as a role model. As previously mentioned, it is important that I do not show any bias and that I create an environment that is conducive to learning and experiencing multiculturalism. It is captured in everything we do, say and feel!

According to Mrs. Megan, providing an environment/atmosphere in which all children feel accepted, loved and respected is necessary. She believes that teachers all play an important part in the education of young children:

I most definitely feel that my key role is promoting, in each child/family, a sense of positive self-worth. And most of all that we are all human and have a heart/soul with feelings and emotions.

As illustrated in this section, Mrs. Megan's approach is integrating multicultural and anti-bias multicultural education into the whole curriculum. She also sees great importance for her role as a facilitator to implement this approach in her classroom.

2. Activities, Routines, Play

Successful application of multicultural education into the classroom will not only teach the students about other cultures, but also will show them how they can use this information to make of themselves better people, and to make their families, their communities, their societies, and their world a better place for all to live.

Culture is not an abstraction to young children. It is lived and learned every day through the way family members interact, through language, family stories, family values and spiritual lives, through family customs and the work family members do (Bennett, 2003).

Multicultural education can be incorporated effectively into every aspect of early childhood programs. Many activities and materials can help young children to understand the many different ways of doing similar things (Derman-Sparks, 1989).

Ongoing communication with parents is an important aspect of culturally responsive teaching. When families share their funds of knowledge with the school community, teachers obtain a better idea of their students' background knowledge and abilities and how they learn best (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

For Mrs. Megan, considering each child as an individual with varying needs and capabilities is essential. This does not depend on culture or race, etc. According to Mrs. Megan, establishing a good relationship with parents and children is an important part of

multicultural education:

By forming a warm, caring and nurturing relationship with families, children feel free to express themselves in a more open fashion. They feel accepted as to who they are and not transformed into something that I have created.

Observations and artifact collection revealed the following as one of the activities that the teacher applied in her classroom. For the intended purpose, the children's families prepared "My family Book" to teach each child's culture and its uniqueness. This was very effective for learning about the heritage of each culture represented in the classroom.

According to the teacher, multicultural activities are ongoing, and therefore, they have constant implementation. As she described during the interview:

We plan for the coming months for special celebrations [from] throughout the world. We first read and discuss the holiday/event, then plan a cooking activity, a craft, a drawing, etc. We also seek help from our parents or co-workers, as being very diverse, to help contribute information they may have.

Mrs. Megan describes the curriculum that includes everything that they do as teachers.

From the minute that we say, "Hello," to a child in the morning to the time we say, "Good-bye," it can be either intentionally planned activities or during our daily routines and schedule. The importance of inclusion for all children can be seen and heard throughout our day. It can begin with our "Hello To All the Children of the World" song, to our discussions on skin color, to our favorite foods!

She states that the curriculum also revolves around the children's interests, which may stem from a group of children or an individual child.

Regarding curriculum activities, Mrs. Megan has questionnaires, related with their home environments that parents complete. Responses may include the languages spoken at home, celebrations, activities they like to do at home, etc. She also does a "Star of the Week" in which one child is identified as being special and unique. The parents complete a form and the child brings in items from home to share for the week.

Language is a basic element of culture. Providing opportunities for children to experience other languages is important (Pattanik, 2003). Displaying and labeling materials in different languages and teaching children basic words such as numbers, colors, days of week, and objects help children to develop cultural awareness (Derman-Sparks, 1989). During observations for the study, one of the circle-time activities related to different country's flags and saying "Hello" in those languages. After breakfast, the class participates in a circle-time and picks one country's flag and sings a "Hello" song in that language. This (using other languages) supports the idea of developing cultural awareness as several researchers addressed in the literature review section.

Music and dance are another way of sharing cultural heritage with others. The teacher has a variety of music CDs and instruments from different cultures. She provides many opportunities for children to sing and dance. The teacher stated that parents are invited to show their talents that are culturally specific. In sum, the teacher uses a variety of ways to implement multicultural approaches into the whole curriculum.

3. Classroom Environment

The classroom setting is a very important aspect for representing the teacher's understanding of multicultural education. "An environment that is rich in possibilities for exploring gender, race/ethnicity, and cultures sets the scene for practicing multicultural education" (Derman-Sparks, 1989, p.11). Environment also shows children what a teacher considers important or not important. Thus, creating a diverse environment is an important step for implementing multicultural education (Morrison, 2000).

According to Mrs. Megan, a wide variety of ways exist to incorporate multiculturalism into the classroom environment. She stated that since the day care center is approaching reaccreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the standards are very specific as to what needs to be included:

All though we have already provided many of the materials, we are also creating additional materials to merge into our classroom. This includes such items as more books, music/instruments, dramatic play, story tapes, pictures, labels, games of cultures that are represented in our room. (Chinese, Korean, Russian and German) We are actually recruiting the help of our families in creating these tools for us.

According to Ramsey (1987), early childhood classrooms should have materials representing the backgrounds of the families. The visual environment should reflect diversity, and eliminate stereotypic materials. Therefore, during observation, specific attention focused on discovering how the teacher designed her classroom with respect to multicultural education. The result revealed that her classroom reflects multicultural aspects and diverse structure. To enrich the diversity environment of the classroom, the teacher displays many of the symbols, signs, pictures, posters, maps, art work, and flags from around the world.

Also apparent are a variety of books, magazines, music CDs, songs, etc. from different cultures, as well as culturally specific puzzles, art materials, dolls, dress-up clothes, pretend foods, games, puppets, etc. This indicated how the teacher designed her classroom to represent different cultures and shows her approach to multicultural understanding.

4. Challenges

When teaching and implementing multicultural education in early childhood programs, some challenges may arise because of the complexity of its issues (Jones & Derman-Sparks, 1992). Sometimes finding right materials and activities that do not engage any stereotypical vision is difficult.

Discovering the challenges of implementing multicultural education in early childhood education is crucial for this study. Mrs. Megan stated that the first challenge is to educate her and colleagues about their own beliefs:

For early childhood educators, they must first be aware of their own beliefs regarding what "multiculturalism" means to them and how to explain and discuss without showing any biases or negative remarks.

The second challenge is to find the information and materials needed:

Teachers who are novices it can be difficult at first to find information and to become knowledgeable about the various celebrations and histories of the country.

She stated that families from different cultural backgrounds are really important resources who can be used to either gain materials or knowledge. At this point, she also emphasized that participating in cultural activities outside of the school is helpful for teachers' gaining cross-cultural understanding.

Teachers should invite parents to participate in their child's education in specific ways. Sometimes, cultural differences exclude active participation in school functions. Teachers' should find ways to establish good relationships with parents who are from different cultural backgrounds (Nieto, 2000).

Finally, Mrs. Megan faces another challenge: some families are not easily involved in school activities because of their different cultural backgrounds which influence their involvement in the school:

Since we do have so many families from diverse backgrounds, I don't want to leave any family out. I want all of them to feel involved in the program and unfortunately since some of them may be shy, I am not gaining the information that can be used to promote their own individuality.

A reasonable conclusion is that Mrs. Megan is aware of the fact that a teacher's beliefs about different cultures can affect the adopted approaches and practices regarding multicultural education. She also accepts the importance of discovering accurate sources for different cultures and their practices.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on observations and interviews; the teacher in this study appeared to have very positive understanding regarding multicultural education based on the anti-bias multicultural curriculum approach. The teacher showed that she preferred anti-bias multicultural education. The teacher's approach is education that is multicultural through culturally pluralistic content, experiences, and perspectives in teaching knowledge and skills of others.

The teacher involved in this study implemented teaching practices and created environments for multicultural education in her classroom effectively. She actively incorporates her children's daily life experiences into the daily curriculum. This daily curriculum incorporates diversity and issues related to ethnicity and culture. She tailors curriculum and teacher-child interactions to meet cultural, as well as individual needs of her children. She also actively uses parents' knowledge about their home cultures. She uses a variety of strategies to involve parents actively and regularly in the program

through special events, cultural and holiday celebrations. For her, building relationships with parents, including efforts to learn about families by asking them specific questions about their cultures, is important.

Her classroom environment shows cultural diversity. Materials show diversity in a positive way and give messages about people that are shown as humans who are valued. She had a wide variety of age-appropriate and culturally diverse books and language – art materials, and toys, equipment, props of dramatic area that encourage diversity play.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study presented the importance of multicultural education in early childhood education in the light of a case study so that early childhood educators will benefit. In this way, early childhood educators can facilitate intercultural learning among children of all races through designing appropriate goals, curriculum, and classroom environment. Practices could help teachers and administrators with implementation of multicultural education. But this study also had several limitations. These limitations could have implications for future research on multicultural, early childhood education.

First, this study was a case study focusing on one preschool teacher's understanding and practices regarding multicultural education; hence, the results should not be generalized. Further research with a larger number of teacher-participants, of various ethnic origins, needs to be conducted. Because of time restriction, limited observations were the result. Thus, similar observations may not occur throughout the school year. In the future, the teacher might be observed for a longer period.

Second, this research was designed as a qualitative study, using in-depth interviews and observations with the teacher. Adding a quantitative perspective, surveys and check lists, might provide further insight for examining multicultural practices in early childhood programs.

Third, the present study focuses on just one teacher's understanding and practices in a daycare. Future study might be conducted on a larger scale. For instance, the entire daycare can be chosen as a case study and each teacher and classroom can be compared and contrasted in terms of implementation of multicultural education.

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