

The Power of Harmony: Insights from a Korean Children's Community-Based Chorus

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Abstract

This study examines a Korean children's community-based chorus within the US context. Through an in-depth examination of group musical activities and interviews of Korean early childhood educators and Korean immigrant parents within the sociocultural framework, this study makes visible the meanings of engaging in a community-based children's musical experience. Findings indicate that both groups of early childhood educators and Korean parents found that engaging in a community-based chorus provided developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive experiences for young children and their families. These findings suggest that the nature of group musical experiences can be harmonized with early childhood curricula, and provide more comprehensive understandings about the Korean culture, relating how culturally relevant teaching can lead to positive effects for immigrant children and their families.

Keywords: Korean, community, sociocultural, music

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Introduction

One summer day, I was lucky to visit a Korean children's chorus in New Jersey, and I have since been captivated by the beautiful harmony the children created both in singing and in building social relationships. I met the director of a Korean children's chorus at a workshop on music education for young children, and since then I have had a close relationship with her. As a result, I was able to gain access to this group and hear stories about the chorus from an insider. From the director's descriptions as well as several brief visits, I found there is something different in the philosophy and values that this group has been pursuing from the egoism, elitism, and product-oriented learning that have commonly characterized our modern society. Such differences are also obvious when compared to the chorus I experienced in my childhood as well as to Korean culture as typically characterized by achievement and competition (Kang, Okazaki, Abelman, Kim-Prieto, & Lan, 2010; Kim & Hong, 2007; Zhou & Kim, 2006). My experiences with music-related activities during my childhood and of the Korean community in the United States as an immigrant have shaped my inquiry on the significance of music and community engagement within Korean immigrant families, and how I, as a researcher, position myself and approach the research participants. I believe that my experience of learning music in my childhood and living in a new culture enabled me to better understand and relate to my participants.

Based on the observations, I assumed that the differences versus my own experience are rooted in the fact that the director and staff are early childhood educators and that they are managing the program based on child-based, developmentally appropriate, and culturally relevant teaching approaches of early childhood education. The positive changes in the children as well as in their families' lives through this chorus struck me most. I came to wonder what the meaning of this musical activity in an out-of-school setting was to the young children and their families as well as to their communities.

The limited music in U.S. early childhood classrooms is one of the problems that the Korean immigrant parents in this study addressed as an educational inconsistency between U.S. and Korean schools. In spite of general agreement regarding the importance of music in early childhood education (Raver, 2002), music has been deemphasized in recent years because of the increased emphasis on academic achievement (Genishi & Dyson, 2009). Such

limited music in early childhood is also problematic since an academically oriented curricula may not provide practices related to children and their families' diverse sociocultural contexts, overlooking the fact that music is not just an addendum in the children's lives, but an important part of their development and of who they are as members of particular communities (e.g. Korean).

Thus, through in-depth examination of one successful group musical model that was developed and managed by early childhood educators, I aim to show in what ways young children, especially second generation immigrants, and their families can benefit from engaging in musical activities out-of-school context, and how musical activities may be implemented with success in early childhood education. The examination of the value of group activity through music can, in turn, suggest a new model that encourages early childhood educators to adapt curricula to promote children's development and learning in diverse domains as well as to think about how to implement what different families value in a more authentic way.

The following question framed the focus of the study: *In what ways do Korean early childhood educators and parents consider the community-based group musical experiences to be effective for their second generation children and their families?* This research question will lead to a better understanding of the role of music in children and their families, the values of group activities from early childhood, and the nature of Korean communities. In defining the meaning of *effective*, the Oxford English Dictionary (Effective, 2012) includes in its multiple definitions "powerful in effect," and/or "successful in producing a desired result." Using this definition as a guideline, how early childhood educators and parents describe the chorus' effectiveness in their children's and family's lives—what positive results or changes the chorus experience has brought into their lives—will be analyzed. Since I found that the chorus I am examining includes a lot of group activities with music besides choral singing, the terms *chorus* and *group musical activities (experiences)* are used interchangeably in this paper.

Literature Review

Music in Early Childhood Education

As early as the 19th century, Froebel (1887) recognized the value of music for preschoolers; however comprehensive research regarding music and young children did not occur until almost 100 years later (Berger & Cooper, 2003). With the growth of music instruction for young children, a large body of literature has emerged that relates to music's significant function in children's learning and development in the cognitive, social, and emotional domains (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 1995; Nardo, Custodero, Persellin, & Fox, 2006). The research indicates that musical experiences enhance perceptual skills, which influence children's language learning and the subsequent early childhood literacy development. Children's participation in musical activities with the guidance of teachers and in collaboration with peers stimulates the children's developmental processes and fosters learning growth (Flohr, Miller, & deBeus, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978); however, empirical studies on this issue are extremely rare—most of the research was quantitative studies based on correlations comparing experimental and control groups to prove the effects of musical activities.

Research on the impact of participation in music on social and personal development has received less attention than the impact on language development, though several studies revealed that music can be used to support emotional development, foster mathematical skills, encourage physical development, and teach personal safety, autonomy, and mastery (Broh, 2002; Freshwater, Sherwood, & Mbugua, 2008). Like some studies on language, the research methods also tend to be limited: self-reported, either through questionnaires or interviews. Young (2008) used narrative methodology to investigate children's musical engagement in play, and pointed out that these quantitative methods provided only glimpses into music practices. A number of studies called for the use of alternative methodologies to extend understanding on the role of music in children's lives (Custodero, Britto, & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Young, 2008).

As the ethnicities and cultural backgrounds of students vary, a new area of research on the role of music on children in the multicultural classroom and families has been developed. The

research focused on using music to facilitate children's English language acquisition (Fisher, 2001), promote a sense of unity and social bonds among children from different cultures (Larson, 2000), deliver their ideas and feelings (Baker & Jones, 2006; Igoa, 2005), and maintain their home country's tradition and identity (Custodero, 2006; de Vries, 2007). However, relatively little research was found which specifically examined the role of music in immigrant children and their families' lives compared to a large number of studies about the immigrants' successful adaptation to a new country and culture. So little is known about the role of music for second-generation immigrant children who may be experiencing in a subtractive process in terms of losing their culture and identity (Valenzuela, 1999).

The Nature of Group Musical Activity

A chorus has diverse features that come from group-based activities. Social skills such as teamwork and collaboration can be central concepts when discussing a chorus. Understanding the nature of chorus can have meaningful implications for teachers and parents in terms of the value of group musical activities. However, given the assumptions that chorus activity might be more eligible for older children and adults due to its professional musical requirements for performance (Demorest, 2001; Rao, 1993), only a limited number of studies focus on the field of music education. Thus, research including a chorus in any fields of study was reviewed to examine how the natures of the chorus were defined.

A range of small scale qualitative studies using ethnographic, interview, and focus group techniques with diverse samples have shown that singers commonly report a wide range of social, psychological, spiritual, and health benefits associated with singing (Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Silber, 2005). Rao (1993) examined the chorus at elementary schools and described the essential features of choral singing in music education, which can be found beyond the concert stage in the development of musicianship, the experience of enjoyment, and the psychological benefits of self-esteem. Hallam (2010) also pointed out that group musical experiences promote collaboration, which is a significant feature of a chorus. Chorus America's annual report (2009) showed how children, families, and communities can benefit from this musical group activity regardless of their ethnicity. Even though the research methodology follows a quantitative approach based on self-reports different from other

studies reviewed here, I reviewed this report due to the large number of participants and striking results on the benefits from chorus participation, not found in prior research.

In spite of its apparent potential benefits, a large number of educators and parents still reported that there is no choral program in their schools (Chorus America, 2009). To strengthen their assertion, more empirical research on this issue, especially, for younger children is required.

The Nature of the Korean Community

As I will discuss, cultural differences affect children's experiences in a community-based chorus. Cultural differences in defining what is "good for children," based on the values, beliefs, norms, and ideology embedded in each culture, can bring out different parenting attitudes toward children's education (Kim & Choi, 1994).

Parents' strictness and pressure for academic excellence as well as parental limitations in verbal communication of affection were often perceived as characteristics of Korean immigrants. According to Zhou (2004), 31% of Korean children experience language barriers in their families, a proportion higher than Japanese, Asian Indian, and Filipino Americans. Kang et al. (2010) found that the participants of immigrant parents who spoke in different languages with their parents had little communication with their parents growing up. The parents' lack of English fluency eventually leads to emotional gaps between immigrant parents and their children.

Korean community churches are also central to the development of Korean communities. Korean churches have a long history of providing social and community services. From the newly arrived immigrant with a displaced support system to those who are somewhat established but still feel marginalized by the greater society, Korean churches serve as an anchor providing culturally and linguistically sensitive services (Boddie, Hong, Im, & Chung, 2011; Chong, 1998; Shin, 2010). Although the chorus of this study was not affiliated to one of those community churches and did not sing Christian songs explicitly, I found that the chorus also speaks to this characteristic of the Korean immigrant community. Since the director and the majority of participating families were Christians, it was obvious that Christian values and practices were embedded in the chorus' philosophy and activities even though it was neither

designed as a religious group nor limited to Christians. Like other Korean Christian churches, the chorus has served multiple functions, offering social emotional support and educational resources for immigrant children and their families.

Along with language barriers and Christianity, Korean's rich musical culture and parents' strong interest in music education for their young children are one of the characteristics for understanding the Korean community, which leads to a considerable number of children participating in musical activities and taking private music lessons as an extra-curricular activity. Since the director of the chorus taught young children in Korea based on these national early-childhood curricula and the parents of children in the chorus had themselves learned in these curricula during their school years, it may explain why Korean immigrants created and engaged in this musical activity in an out-of-school context.

Despite the large number of Korean immigrants in the US, however, they are still underrepresented in educational research (Yeh et al., 2005). The lack of research on the nature of the Korean community is problematic since it may lead the general public and educators to develop and embrace model minority stereotypes (Lee, 2009; Stires & Genishi, 2008) about Korean immigrant students. Without understanding complexity of the immigrant families' syncretic practices and breadth of their network of support, the children's learning and education in homes and community settings can be invisible and dismissed as irrelevant to school curriculum (Gregory, Volk, & Long, 2013; Volk, 2013). Thus, this study explores in what ways Korean early childhood educators and immigrant parents describe their experiences to provide a lens to better understand the Korean immigrants.

Theoretical Framework

Since the intention of this study is to examine Korean early childhood educators and immigrant families' community-based chorus experiences and other factors that may have guided their perception of themselves and the meaning of this experience, it is important to consider the interwoven nature of the personal, social, and cultural aspects of their experience. Thus, this study employed Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, drawing upon the idea of the social and cultural nature of experiences (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978).

Adopting a sociocultural lens, the researcher started from the assumption that Korean

educators and immigrant families have sociocultural experiences that are important building blocks for understanding their perceptions. The notion that different social and cultural contexts create and reflect different outcomes in terms of human behavior (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1987) resonated with this study's inquiry into Korean early childhood educators' and immigrant parents' beliefs, values, and actions related to the community-based group musical experience. Thus, it is important to examine how Korean immigrant families make meaning of group musical experiences in their lives and what they think is learned from the experiences based on their sociocultural experiences.

Methods

The Context

I conducted this case study with a children's chorus that was founded as a non-profit organization by a Korean early childhood educator. The chorus rehearses weekly on Saturday from 1 to 3 pm at a Korean church in New Jersey. The weekly rehearsal began with a greeting and was followed by vocal lesson, small group lessons, large group lessons, snack time (art and crafts), large group lessons, and a mini concert with the parents. The director's lessons were offered mostly in Korean. In the snack time, children were divided into small groups and did arts and crafts, having snacks together; they mostly spoke English during this period.

The chorus runs year-round from September to June, according to the public school schedule. The director of the chorus majored in early childhood education at her university in Korea and received a doctoral degree in the same field in the United States; she is currently working as a professor in the early childhood education program at a university in New York. Her main research area is music education for young children.

The chorus sings mostly Korean children's songs composed by the director. Many songs contain concepts regarding social skills such as sharing, waiting for their turn, and collaborating with others. Based on her teaching experiences as a kindergarten teacher, the director believes these to be important skills young children should develop. There are also two Korean staff members with advanced degrees in early childhood education; both have

teaching experience of more than three years in Korea. They came to join the staff through their personal relationships with the director and have each been working there for two years.

Twenty-seven children (24 girls and 3 boys) who range in age from 4 to 10 living in New York and New Jersey were attending. Most of the children live with their married parents while one child lives with her single father and a grandmother. All children are second-generation Korean: they speak mostly English to their parents and each other, though most of the parents speak Korean and a little bit of English. The majority of the families (21 out of 24) are Christian and participate in church-related activities such as Sunday school or choir.

Data Collection Methods

My data sources for this case study included fieldnotes of on-site observations during weekly rehearsals. Throughout 12 weeks' observation of these rehearsals for two hours a week, I jotted down brief observations when I found something interesting and completed my fieldnotes retrospectively after each visit. Additionally, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with the director and two staff members for 60-90 minutes, and asked about their experiences in the chorus.

For the parent interviews, the director sent an email that included the purpose of my research and plans for recording the interviews. Once I had their consent to participate, I recorded their interviews. 17 parents (whose children are younger than 8) were participated. The participating parents of this study were all first generation Korean immigrants who speak Korean as their first language, 15 out of the 17 participants were mothers, and 14 out of 17 were Christians. Regarding age, 16 out of the participants were in their 40s, and one was in her 50s. Their length of time in the US ranged from 11 years to 31 years. 16 out of the participants were mid-high SES, and 1 parent was low-mid SES. Regarding musical experiences, 7 out of the participants were professional musicians, and 10 mentioned that they have actively engaged in various musical experiences (mostly through their school experiences in Korea, and community churches in the US) since childhood.

As I have visited the chorus many times over the semester, I was familiar and comfortable with talking with the parents, and they were willing to share their thoughts and personal stories with me. The main three questions for the parent interviews were: 1) What do you

think about the chorus?; 2) What has changed in your child and your family since you joined in the chorus?; and 3) What would you suggest as improvement to the chorus? All interviews lasted from 20 to 25 minutes. I audiotaped these interviews and transcribed them.

Data Analysis Methods

Data sources for this analysis included my fieldnotes, transcripts of interviews with the director and two staff members, and transcripts of the parent interviews. I first transcribed the fieldnotes and recordings of the interviews in Korean since most of the parents and three early childhood educators spoke Korean during the interviews. After organizing the data, the initial step of the analytic process was immersing myself in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I read and reread the fieldnotes and the interview transcriptions carefully to get a sense of the whole (Creswell, 2007), writing down some comments and ideas relevant to my research questions as they came to mind (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). By using the fieldnotes and transcriptions, I tried to discover analytic connections in the data and categorized the themes that emerged.

In analyzing the parent interview transcripts and the notes of reflection from each interview data, I explored links to sociocultural theory to analyze contexts in which the children and families are situated (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1987). Thus, I examined the key features of the Korean community embedded in the chorus experience and how the families' behaviors, beliefs, and values were highly circumscribed by culture, history, and social contexts.

By reading the transcripts in the original language I found that I was able to analyze their original meaning more accurately. The translation to English did not occur until the initial analysis process. I asked two Korean American colleagues who speak both languages fluently to ensure the original meanings were preserved.

Findings

The findings are organized around two areas that correspond to the research questions:

early childhood educators' perspectives and Korean parents' perspectives on the effectiveness of group musical experiences for young children and families.

Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives

The image of the child-developing-in-context (Rogoff, 2003) provided for a more dynamic conception of learning and development during the process of qualitative analysis. Four themes emerged: (a) a powerful medium for development, (b) authentic learning, (c) family-oriented, and (d) collaboration with community. These themes describe how early childhood educators consider the value of group musical experiences and its appropriateness for young children and their families. Each theme is divided into various dimensions.

A Powerful Medium for Development

My analysis of the interviews with the director and two staff members (L and K) who are early childhood educators revealed that group musical activities promote children's development in social, emotional, and language domains. The early childhood educators expressed many opinions regarding social skills development through this group musical activity. The director emphasized that group work, a central format of the chorus, contributed to development of leadership and friendship through collaboration. She also talked about learning social skills through group activities including having a sense of belonging (membership) and learning to wait and listen to other voices to make harmony. The director considered various concert experiences children have as ways to promote social skills:

I believe that these concert experiences offer great opportunities for children to be able to learn how to interact with people through music. On the stage, they sing and are praised by others in response. They are sharing joy with the audience. Through these positive experiences on the stage, children can develop self-confidence and self-esteem.

During interviews with the early childhood educators, it became clear that they viewed this musical program as a social field within an educational boundary, which possesses a lot of possibilities for the facilitation of children's social development.

They also commented on the dimension of emotional development. They remarked that

music could be a medium for children as well as other people to deliver their ideas and feelings. Since music is closely linked to people's emotion, through listening to and singing songs with beautiful melody and lyrics, the director and two staff members asserted that children learn how to aesthetically appreciate music, which leads to emotional development.

In addition, the early childhood educators mentioned that this group musical activity contributes to the children's language development. The director pointed out that when children engage in singing, they come to learn how to express their ideas, emotions, and feelings better, which also develops their communication skills. In addition, since the children mostly speak English at home, these educators found how singing Korean songs facilitated the children's language learning, and the chorus fostered positive relationships for the immigrant children who may be experiencing in a subtractive process in terms of losing their culture and identity (Valenzuela, 1999); the chorus itself can be seen as a space that is additive.

Authentic Learning

Providing authentic and positive learning experience is a key premise especially for young children's learning. Three early childhood educators commonly stated that music was used to create a positive, meaningful, and emotional environment. During a rehearsal, the director used a play-based approach and taught singing, using various visuals and other materials (e.g. hand puppets, images, video clips, and role playing) to make learning of Korean lyrics more fun and enjoyable for the young children. The great dynamic that the director and the children created turned the whole rehearsal into a fun learning experience. It was obvious from the excitement in her facial expressions that the director was enjoying herself during this activity, which led the children to engage in the lesson with joy.

The director's aesthetic and positive comments on the children's singing, such as "I really liked how your voices gathered together and made fabulous harmony", served to get the children's attention and created a friendly learning environment. The director explained that such a positive learning environment was naturally created because she focused not on what is lacking, but on what worked well and what might work better. In this regard, the early childhood educators criticized the learning environment that only focuses on results rather than on valuing the process: "I want that these children are able to see that singing is joyful

and learning is exciting”.

For immigrant children who may experience the social, emotional, cultural, and linguistic disconnect from their families or school, musical activities with authenticity are necessary because they promote genuine interest in young immigrants as well as emotional and social interaction and communication with others who share the same cultures (Lindfors, 2008; Ro & Cheatham, 2009).

Family-Oriented

The director stated that parental support is a significant resource contributing to this group in terms of improving the quality of activities and increasing the children’s motivation. Staff member L’s family was one of the examples where all family members were engaging in the chorus:

I really like that this is not only my daughter’s thing, but it is a family thing. I am very glad that we have something we can share together. My daughter likes to see us to participate in this group with her every week. My husband and I feel satisfied with our engagement as we feel that we are doing something for our daughter as well as ourselves.

The director explained that it could have been possible through frequent casual conversations. During the parent interviews, all the parents expressed a strong trust toward the director’s way of teaching from her heart. The director pointed out what she liked the most about the conversations was that she could understand each child’s characteristics better based on the family stories the parents shared. She emphasized that this group musical activity has great potentials for early childhood educators to get to know and learn about the children and their families, promoting family engagement into their activities.

Collaboration with Community

Along with a close partnership with family, the early childhood educators designed diverse events to promote collaboration with the community. The community related activities that the chorus held were concerts at nursing homes and community churches in New Jersey, and fundraising concerts for the homeless. Through these experiences, the director mentioned that she expected children to be more interested in their community and to recognize that they

could contribute to their community through singing. The director pointed out the power of music, “I believe this close collaboration with the community developed easily because we are doing music. People love and need music.”

Community collaboration is an important key to developing sound early childhood education for children and their families and group musical experience can become a pathway for the children and their families to community engagement.

These four themes highlight the ways in which early childhood educators understand and practice a group musical experience, making it possible to consider how these activities can promote children’s learning and development, and family and community engagement.

Parents’ Perspectives

When parents were asked about their experiences of the chorus, they based their answers on their beliefs, values, experiences, and cultures. Their responses to the effectiveness of group musical experiences are: (a) meaningful learning experiences, (b) congruence with Christianity, (c) family bonding, and (d) a bridge to their home language and culture.

Meaningful Learning Experiences

Most of the parents (13 out of 17) responded that they sent their children for the purpose of developing their self-confidence through diverse stage experiences. It was interesting to hear a father mentioning that in the beginning he opposed sending his daughter to the chorus since he believed that learning sports rather than music might be more helpful for his daughter to enter college. However, this group musical experience, they confessed, has brought a lot of changes in their family lives and their thoughts about what is effective for their children. Parent A, who has a 6-year-old child in the chorus said:

In the beginning, I simply liked the fact that my child can be on stage! That’s why I chose this activity for her. But, now, I truly think that the process really matters to my child more than the product. After I stopped pushing her to do better, I found she came to enjoy learning.

Also, all the parents commented that they appreciated that their children came to listen to

beautiful children's songs, not popular songs that include inappropriate contents such as vulgar or violent language. They found that singing good songs for their age and learning in a joyful environment helps the children effectively develop their emotions, feelings, thoughts, and language, which cannot be accomplished in a product-oriented environment.

My husband and I have totally changed our definition on what is "effective" for our child through this chorus experience. We used to think about what program could help our child learn faster and become smarter. Now we think what could be more meaningful experiences for her and us (Parent B, a mother of a 5-year-old child).

The parents pointed out in common that the chorus experiences were deeply embedded in social relations and interactions since it involved diverse social interactions with peers, parents, siblings, and the director, promoting the sense of unity as a team and cooperation to achieve the shared goal—making harmony. Based on their prior musical experiences, Parent C (a mother of 4- and 6-year old children) emphasized that the chorus taught the children "the importance of consistent practice, perseverance, and responsibility as a member of a group to make the best out of it".

Parent D who has two children in the chorus pointed out that the musical group activities were effective for children to learn how to respect others since the children are learning how to make harmony; sometimes they need to lower their voices to make the sound more beautiful:

I am very glad that my son came to learn how to respect others in a very natural and authentic way. He used to like singing only by himself, but now he enjoys singing with others and making harmony. I am sure that it will be a big asset for his life.

Congruence with Christianity

Parents who were Christian (14 out of 17) expressed high satisfaction with Christian-based features that the group musical experiences retained. Parents, regardless of whether they are Christian, appreciated that the director's songs convey instructive and insightful messages to the children as well as the parents themselves.

The lyrics do not call out God directly, but they are very religious and have a good meaning, which touches my heart. I think you made the songs based on the important

messages from the Bible in a way that children can easily understand. I think that is very effective and strong (Parent E, a mother of 5-year old child).

Based on the director's Christian beliefs, she made songs that expressed implicitly about Christian's values for young children to understand, including love, forgiveness, patience, and sharing. All of the parents, who were Christians, recognized that her songs were rooted in Christianity, and appreciated the consistency with their families' values. Parent F (a father of 5- and 7-year old children) and Parent G (a mother of 6-year old child) also pointed out how these children's songs touched their hearts like a strong preaching, and helped them reflect themselves as a parent and wife. Thus, for these families, this chorus was in many ways an experience grounded in Christian morals and values.

Family Bonding

The parents considered this group musical experience to be very effective in terms of strengthening family bonding and enhancing their communication. Every parent also mentioned their appreciation to the director's family-oriented program, and her heartfelt and friendly way of teaching and interacting with children and parents as an educator. They strongly expressed their relief, comfort, and satisfaction with the activities that their children engaged in the chorus. Music, they described, facilitated the emotional bond between parents and children by making harmony together at home; "Singing became our family play that everyone can engage and enjoy (Parent H, a mother of 5-year-old child)."

Especially, Parent I pointed out "family" as one of important keywords to describe her chorus experience. Her husband who has a rich musical background played the guitar at the concert musical backgrounds and she decorated the concert venue while her two children were singing: "I was so glad to see all of my family members participating together for a common goal".

Through the group musical experiences, 8 parents also mentioned that a bridge to their children's grandparents was developed. Since the grandparents' generation mostly does not speak English well, the relationship with their grandchildren could not help but be superficial. However, as children came to learn and sing Korean songs including traditional songs their grandparents used to sing in their childhood, the parents found that family ties between the

three generations became stronger.

In addition, the parents noted that the inter-family bonds were strengthened through the group musical activities. The parents organized a chorus for the parents within this group and performed with and without their children in various concerts. They found that these experiences were effective not only in improving their children's motivation, but also for getting to know other family members more closely, which tightened their sense of unity as a community member. As Custodero (2006) noted, musical engagement was meaningful for many families in creating bonds and belonging within and across families.

A Bridge to Their Home Language and Culture

Many Korean parents (12 out of 17) were concerned that their children were losing their home language and culture. They expressed their struggle and frustration over teaching Korean to their children. However, the parents agreed that the chorus activities shed light on building a bridge to their home language and culture very naturally.

Honestly, I gave up teaching Korean to my second child because he had very strongly refused to speak it and I had such a hard time trying to teach Korean to my first child. But, since he has joined the chorus, he came to enjoy listening to Korean songs and asked me to speak Korean to him, not English (Parent J, a mother of 6 and 12-year-old children).

My daughter is getting very interested in learning Korean and about Korean culture these days, which is a miracle. She often asks me the meaning of some Korean sentences from a song and if she pronounced them correctly. She also asks me a lot of questions about what children do at school in Korea and was very excited to find the similarities and differences between here and Korea (Parent G, a mother of 6-year old children).

Based on their responses, it is clear that music, as one of their families' funds of knowledge, plays an important role in helping them maintain and value their home country's culture and identity.

Discussion

This study has educational importance by providing new insights about the merits of engaging in musical group activities for young immigrant children and their families, the viability of group musical activities in early childhood classrooms, and the roles of early childhood educators and the curricula.

The early childhood educators found that group musical activities facilitated children's development in diverse domains, which is in agreement with music education scholars' findings (Berger & Cooper, 2003; Nardo et al., 2006). It is noteworthy that musical activities have promoted children's development in various domains that early childhood educators consider in designing their curricula, which shows that the nature of group musical experiences can be harmonized with early childhood curricula. The director's philosophy on education was embedded in many activities of the chorus such as providing child-centered, play-based, and authentic learning experiences through music, which led to positive learning environments for the children. It implies that, with the power of music, teachers can turn learning into more friendly experiences. In addition, it was found that a strong relationship with families and communities developed through the group musical experiences. In early childhood education, to help children learn and develop most effectively, teachers need to understand the children in the context of their families and communities. By implementing this group musical experience model in the early childhood curricula, teachers will be able to find new ways to develop a respectful communication and partnerships with the families and communities.

In addition, most of the studies examined Korean's high zeal for education among many aspects of their cultures. By closely examining this Korean group as an insider (Korean) and outsider (observer), I found diverse facets that have not yet been emphasized in the research of the Korean community cultures. Thus, this study provides more comprehensive understandings about the Korean culture and how these cultural aspects and music can be compatible and lead to positive effects for the children and their families. This will eventually help Korean parents to be more equipped with raising their children in the United States in terms of building strong family bonds and maintaining their home culture and identity.

Also, this study shows that music may be one of the Korean immigrant families' funds of

knowledge. The parents expressed their concerns that music has become a field that has been deemphasized in school curricula due to social, political, and financial pressures. Thus, by tapping Korean immigrant families' and communities' funds of knowledge, early childhood educators can use them as resources to transform classrooms into more advanced contexts for teaching and learning (Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Souto-Manning, 2010b, 2013), and implement culturally relevant teaching related to children and their families' diverse sociocultural contexts (Ladson-Billing, 1995; Souto-Manning, 2010a, 2013). As Souto-Manning (2013) suggested, teachers should create spaces in the curriculum where personal and curricular spaces are merged, refining and redesigning what each child bring to the classroom.

The collectivist nature of the chorus can contribute to building closer relationships with other children and families, and strengthen children's social skills through multi-aged collaborative group activities. This implies that group musical experiences in a larger context can provide important insights into children living in a competitive and individualistic society, beyond the Korean immigrants. Considering that the research on diverse ethnic immigrant families (Custodero, 2006; Ilari, 2006) highlighted the similar roles of music in maintaining their home country's tradition and identity, immigrant children, families, and communities can benefit from this musical group model regardless of their ethnicity.

Although the present study has generated important findings, a number of limitations need to be noted. Even though careful cross-checking was done by two colleagues who speak both languages fluently, the issues of language and translation remained as a significant matter that needed to be taken into account. Also I conducted interviews with the majority of the parents living in an upper middle class socioeconomic background in New Jersey. Thus, the findings cannot be representative of Korean immigrant families in the New Jersey area, nor other Korean immigrant families across the U.S. The last challenge involved the possible absence of counterexamples. The interviews with the participants were not likely to reveal negative responses since this study examined participants of an extra-curricular activity in an out-of-school context, which required in the first place the families' willingness to contribute extra time and efforts. More positive responses were possibly expected as their continuous participation in the chorus implied the participants' general satisfaction with the chorus experience. Thus, the overall positive participants' responses might have been unavoidable.

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