

Children's Understanding of Racial Diversity through Role-Play: A Case Study of Kindergarteners in South Korea

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Abstract

In spite of the emphases on multicultural education and role-playing activities in early childhood classrooms in South Korea, there has been a startling paucity of studies examining the effectiveness of role-play in teaching kindergarteners multiracial and ethnic awareness. This qualitative case study examines how South Korean kindergarteners develop their perception and understanding of racial and cultural diversity through role-plays. 25 five year-old children and their parents and teacher were participated. The data were collected in a metropolitan city in Korea for three months through participatory observations, interviews with the participants, and written materials. We found that role-play activities functioned as a medium to foster the children's emergent understanding of racial diversity, equality, and social justice, and to reduce their racial prejudice toward different racial groups. The findings of the study suggest how teachers should prepare and what they should provide and implement in order to help young children develop unbiased attitudes toward different races and cultures.

Keywords: role-play, South Korea, early childhood, racial diversity, social justice, multicultural education

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Contrary to the myth that young children are colorblind or do not notice race (Husband, 2012), children notice racial differences during infancy and develop racial understanding by age three to five (Aboud, 2008; Hirschfeld, 2008). Children constantly construct meanings and understandings about race and their own identity as they interact with others, examining similarities and differences between themselves and others (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Ramsey, 2004). They internalize a superior social norm regarding the social status of different races and ethnic groups (Banks, 2004).

The development of racial awareness for preschoolers and kindergarteners does not always occur in a positive way. Young children display positive and negative attitude towards racial diversity (Mac Naughton, 2006). Young children's racial attitudes are strongly influenced by social and cultural surroundings that reflect racial inequities (Husband, 2012). Then children construct their own prejudicial knowledge through their perception of these inequities (Spencer, 1985). Mere exposure to diversity may be deficient to change the racial biases of children three to five (Brinson, 2001; Chang, 2000). Meaningful social exchange accompanying developmentally and culturally appropriate activities can help uncover and challenge children's assumptions and biases (Chafel, Flint, Hammel, & Pomeroy, 2007). Thus, early access to proper instruction addressing racial equality and social injustice is crucial to eliminating children's biases and constructing their self-identity. This is critical because prejudicial attitudes and beliefs prevent proper understanding of other racial groups and challenge principles of social justice (Seefeldt, 1995).

Role-Play for Multicultural Awareness

Role-play refers to the parts learners and teachers are expected to play not only in carrying out learning tasks but also in promoting social and interpersonal relationships (Richard & Rodger, 2001). Role-play as a learning activity helps to improve the learners' understanding and engagement in the cognitive, social, and emotional domains (Harris & Daley, 2008; Rabinowitz, 1997).

Role-play can be one of the most effective methods for teaching and learning diversity issues for several reasons. First, role-playing provides opportunities to empathize with,

understand and respect others more easily (Upright, 2002). While acting out a variety of roles in different social contexts during role-plays (Larsen-Freeman, 1986), children can experience negotiation of meaning, live vicariously and understand others' feelings (Rogers & Evans, 2006), which in turn helps them develop empathy. Second, role-play helps children develop proper social understanding and cultural competence because children have opportunities to experience and practice appropriate gestures and language according to different cultures (Gordon, 2012). Third, direct and active participation in role-play helps young children alter their attitudes and beliefs about race (Harris, 2000) and confront their own racism (Kolh, 2002). This process enables children to integrate emotion and thought: Initially, children's changing attitudes and beliefs are expressed non-verbally through appropriate emotional and social behaviors. Later these behaviors are replaced by an ability to use verbal explanation and other forms of symbolic representation that allow the discussion of race and culture. These characteristics make role-play a perfect medium to help young children understand other races and cultures without stereotypes and prejudices.

Underlying idea about how role-playing can change children's behavior is based on Festinger's (1957) dissonance theory. Dissonance theory argues a person's experiences of enough discord or dissatisfaction with a behavior or attitude can change the behavior or attitude. Role-playing can involve identification of members of the minority group who have received discrimination, which requires the ability to take the perspective of another person (Lee, Blythe, & Goforth, 2009). While identifying minority and inequality during the role-play, children can experience dissonance and disagreement, which can lead to change in their behavior or attitude.

A few studies have examined the relationship between role-playing and racial awareness, mostly with adult learners (e.g., Gordon, 2012; Lee, Blythe, & Goforth, 2009). These studies have shown the positive impact of role playing on developing racial understanding. Furthermore, in his meta-analysis study on effectiveness of role-playing and antiracist teaching, McGregor (1993) analyzed 26 relevant studies in which the subjects were school-aged children or college students in educational settings and found that role-playing and antiracist teaching significantly reduced racial prejudice. However, in spite of the effectiveness of role-play for young children and the importance of educating racial diversity at an early age, research on role-play for educating young children racial diversity

is very scarce.

Multicultural Education in South Korea

South Korea has recently been experiencing numerous social and cultural changes due to a large influx of migrant workers, foreign brides, and refugees from North Korea. With the growing number of foreigners, the Korean government has been confronted with the question of how the country should approach the challenge of teaching a multicultural perspective (Lee, 2013). Their focus has been on assimilating the multicultural families into the mainstream society. Accordingly, multicultural education has targeted minority students, rather than mainstream Korean students (Chang, 2012). However, it is crucial to educate typical Korean children as well because Korean children have been reported to have negative perceptions and attitudes toward non-Koreans (Choi & Lee, 2010; Song, 1999). Since children acquire stereotypes and prejudice not only by direct observation or contact but also through media, it is crucial for children who are not necessarily surrounded by diverse racial groups to learn to acknowledge and promote tolerance of diverse people and perspectives (Sanders & Downer, 2013).

Therefore, there is an urgent need to provide developmentally appropriate multicultural education methods to help young children perceive diverse races and cultures, and to reconstruct their knowledge about races through direct, affective involvement; yet very little studies have been conducted about how role-play can be incorporated into young children's classrooms as a medium for teaching about race. In order to address the gap in the research, this study examines how Korean kindergarteners develop their perception and understanding of racial diversity through role-plays. Specifically, this study is guided by the following two research questions: (1) How does the role-play activity help the Korean kindergarteners develop their emergent notions of racial diversity and human equality? And (2) How do the children negotiate and represent their views on racial diversity, equality, and social justice through role-play? This study aims to provide insight into how children's participation in role-plays can develop their awareness and understanding of racial diversity, ultimately pursuing social equality and justice.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study approach in order to capture the complexity of children's role-play based on multicultural literature within their social and cultural surroundings, and to gain an in-depth understanding of children's interactions and thinking processes during role-playing.

Participants

25 five-year-old Korean kindergarteners (12 girls and 13 boys) who were enrolled in the Love kindergarten classroom at a Happy Child Care Center located in a metropolitan city in South Korea participated (all names are pseudonyms). The kindergarten class employed the Nuri-curriculum, which is the Korean National Curriculum for five-year-olds. Ms. Lee, the teacher, had a total of eight years of teaching early childhood experience and had worked at the Happy Child Care Center for two years. She had a bachelor's degree in early childhood development with a minor in library science, and an early childhood teaching certificate.

Only five-year-old children were selected purposely because available evidence suggests that children start to form racial prejudice and stereotypes at this age (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). Since this study involved young children, their verbal assent was solicited and parental consent letter was sent to the participating children's parents prior to the program: and 100% of the parents agreed to have their children participate in the project.

The participating children came from similar cultural, linguistic, social, and economic backgrounds: all of them were from middle to upper-middle-class families in Korea. Most of them were rarely exposed to Black people or other racial groups in their daily lives. Given this situation, they demonstrated the similar level of perceptions and understanding about racial and cultural diversity in different role-plays. Three participating children's parents were interviewed, followed by Creswell's (2015) sampling strategy. The purposeful sampling was chosen in this study since the purpose of the study was not to generalize the results to other contexts, but rather to learn from people who can best help to understand the specific interest of this research.

Procedure

A total of eight books containing racial diversity were selected according to the appropriateness of their contents for young readers and the accuracy of their descriptions and illustrations of the relevant topics and characters (see Table 1). After reading each book, the teacher led a discussion of the children's thoughts, feelings, and what they had learned from the characters and the story. As followed by Wee, Shin, and Kim's (2013) recommendation, the role-play included a warm-up, the main activity and time for reflection. The role-play activity in Ms. Lee's class usually followed four steps: (1) the teacher explaining the activity; (2) the teacher and the children preparing for the activity (e.g., deciding on roles, settings, and props); (3) the children performing their roles in front of their peers; and (4) the teacher and children reflecting on aspects of the drama. Role-play was carried out either in pairs or small group formats. The whole process, including the reading, discussion, and role-play, took approximately 40 minutes.

Table 1. *List of multicultural books and role-play activities*

Title of Book	Author(s)	Illustrator(s)	Main themes	Role-play
그레이스는 놀라워 [Amazing Grace]	Mary Hoffman	Caroline Binch	Stereotypes, discrimination	What I would like to become
정말 그런 인종이 있을까? [Do we really have such races?]	Silvia Roncaglia	Christiana Cerretti	Racial diversity, equality	Travelling outside and meeting various people
사라 버스를 타다 [The bus ride]	William Miller	John Ward, Rosa Parks	Racial segregation, discrimination	Becoming Sara and a bus driver
인종이야기를 해볼까? [Let's talk about race]	Julius Lester	Karen Barbour	Racial diversity, equality	If I have a friend from other countries
친구는 좋아 [Yo! Yes?]	Chris Raschka	Chris Raschka	Inter-racial relationships	Making interracial friends
헨리의 자유상자 [Henry's Freedom Box]	Ellen Levine	Kadir Nelson	Freedom, discrimination	If I were a slave
태어날 아기는 어떤 색깔일까? [Wonder what color the baby is born]	Adeline Isaac	Anne Claire	Racial diversity, racial equality	Where did we get our skin color?
컬러풀월드 [Colorful world]	CeCe Winans	Melodee Strong	Stereotypes, racial equality	If I were mistreated because of how I look

The selected books addressed issues of racial diversity, human equality, and social justice, especially in the context of people of African/African-American decent and their culture. We focused on these books since Korean children's racial attitudes toward Black people were often reported negatively in prior research studies (Chang et al., 1999; Choi & Lee, 2010; Song, 1999). Also, the participating children were rarely exposed to Africans/African-Americans in their daily lives or read books that depict them. Instead of simply introducing culture and languages that differed from those of South Koreans, these books dealt with racial equality from human rights perspectives with an ultimate goal of positive accommodation of differences with respect and dignity.

Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected through video and audio-recordings, open-ended interviews with the parents and teacher, children's artifacts, and observational field notes. The process of data collection was in accordance with the ethical standards of the Responsible Committee on Human Experimentation. First, the story-readings and subsequent role-plays were recorded once a week over a five-month period (approximately 660 minutes in total), focusing on the children's reading of multicultural books, the role-play activity, their peer interactions and discussions. All children were observed in different role-plays in order to gain an in-depth understanding of each child's interactions with books, peers and the teacher. Field notes were taken during and after each observation (120 pages in total) to include as much of the subtle detail as possible.

Also, formal interviews with the teacher and parents were carried out intensively and audiotaped. Two 40-minute-long teacher interviews were conducted, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the program. The first interview focused on general information, such as the teacher's general teaching philosophy, education, teaching experience, and attitudes toward other races. The second interview concentrated on the teacher's implementation of role-plays centering on racial diversity and her perception of changes in the children's racial attitudes and understanding after the role-play program. For parents, 20-minute-long formal interviews were conducted individually at the end of the program. The following table exhibits the detail of the interview protocol.

Table 2. *Interview protocol*

Data	Sample Questions	Total Interview Time for Two Semesters	Interview Protocols
Interviews With Parents	• What do you think about role- play activities? • Do you often observe your child's biased attitude toward different races at home? • What are your experiences reading multicultural books to your child (or children) at home?	• Once • 20-30 minutes	• Open-ended • Semi-structured • Formal
Interviews With Teacher	• What is your goal in conducting the role-play activity in your classroom? • Did you notice any changes in terms of the children's racial attitudes after the program? • What is your goal by reading multicultural books to your students?	• 2 times • 40 minutes each	• Open-ended • Semi-structured • Formal

They had a semi-structured format and open-ended questions which included the children's experiences with and attitudes toward people of different races and cultures, and their home experiences related to multicultural literature.

Data Analysis

For the qualitative analysis of the implementation of the children's literary discussions and role-plays, the data were grouped for each role-play activity. First, Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1996) preliminary coding was employed to transcribe the children's conversations with peers and the teacher, and the interviews with the parents and the teacher. Then, using a descriptive analytic coding, the researchers carefully read the transcripts and sorted the data into categories (e.g., race, prejudice/stereotype, equality, culture, and resistance) using axial coding methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Analytic codes were identified as they emerged from iterative reading of the data. These themes were then broken into sub-themes such as racial prejudice and racial understanding. A grounded theory approach (Erickson, 1986) was also employed to explore how a selected theme was related to the other themes

and to identify reoccurring themes. After all collected data were categorized, examples representing each theme were selected that seemed to best answer the research questions.

In addition, comparative methods such as the *triangulation* method of Patton (2002) were employed constantly to validate the data analysis. The researchers first adopted the *investigator triangulation* method, and checked the consistency of information, comparing each other's observations in the classroom and data analysis. The following table exhibits the detail of data analysis process.

Table 3. *Data analysis process*

Steps	Data analysis Process
#1. Preliminary analysis	• Transcribing the collected audio or video data including recordings of interviews into written form • Initial coding • Grouping each role-playing activity.
#2. Finding core themes	• Segmenting the meaningful segments of the data with a descriptive code. • Identifying core themes. • Categorizing themes into sub-themes.
#3. Identifying focal literacy activities	• Selecting some focal role-playing activities • Analyzing the data based on context-specific analyses
#4. Validating the data	• Triangulating the data • Member checking through face-to-face or email conversations

Also, using a *methodological triangulation*, the researchers compared several data sets, such as the classroom observations, interview transcripts, observational field notes, and the children's oral/written responses. By checking consistency of the data through triangulation, the researchers could reduce the potential bias of a single analyst and increase the trustworthiness of the data analysis.

Findings

The purpose of this investigation was to understand the possibilities of role-playing

activities in helping young children develop positive understanding of racial/ethnic diversity and explore the world around them. Reading and role-playing stories about children from different races were found to prompt greater acceptance of diverse races and cultures. In this section, we present some empirical examples of how the role-play activities functioned as a medium to foster the children's emergent understanding of racial diversity, social justice, and equality.

Children's Attitude toward a Different Racial Group before Role-Play Activities

The participating children exhibited biased attitudes toward Black characters when the teacher showed them illustrations from a book that had African/African-American characters in it. The following example shows the children's responses to the Black characters:

Younghee: I think that they will steal an apple because they don't have money.

Teacher: So, do you think that they are poor?

Children: Yes!

Teacher: Why do you think so?

Minyoung: Because they are Black.

Teacher: Do you think that they don't have money because they are Black?

Children: Yes.

In the excerpt above, Younghee and Minyoung indicated that the Black people in the illustrations would steal an apple because their finances were insufficient. Other children also agreed with them, nodding their heads affirmatively. The children's biased attitude was also observed when they decided what role they would take among White, Asian, and Black characters. This was particularly evident when the children role-played making friends from different races after reading the book *Yo! Yes?* (Raschka, 2007), a story of making inter-racial friends. Most of them exhibited a preference to play an Asian or a White character, as presented below:

Teacher: So, who wants to play a Black character?

Children: (*quiet*)

Teacher: So, nobody wants to play a Black character?

Children: *(quiet)*

Teacher: If nobody wants to do it, I would do it. Is it ok?

Children: Yes.

Teacher: Ok, then, I will do it. I am a Black friend named Jane.

Now, who wants to play a White character?

(Some children raise their hands)

Although the children showed a less preferred attitude toward Black people by declining to play the role of a Black character, their attitudes started to change as the role-playing activities allowed them to take others' perspectives and be engaged in someone else's role, using their imagination and creativity.

Children's Changes in Racial Diversity During and After Role-Play Activities

While reading multicultural books, Ms. Lee often attempted to provide opportunities for the children to think about differences and similarities among human beings and to reflect on their own worldviews and diverse cultures. The teacher and the children had conversations after reading on the given topic including races, racial differences, and racial inequities, and these activities helped the children prepare for what they were expected to do during role-play. Through role-play activities, the children performed diverse roles, which allowed for a safe exploration of the event and characters. In this process, the children were able to expand their emergent understanding of culture, diversity, equality, fairness, freedom and justice.

Developing positive attitudes toward diversity. For the participating children, role-playing worked as a way to learn not only about social values but also about racial equality. As the children continued to perform role-playing activities throughout the semester, they were able to take others' perspectives, be engaged in someone else's role, use their imagination and creativity, and have honest conversations about freedom, racial differences, and racial inequity. The conversation below between the teacher and the children supports children's improved understanding of different races:

Teacher: Are Black people different from us?

Soyeon: They look different. They have darker skin.

Minwoo: Black people are really tall and have curly hairs.

Jimin: But they are just the same like us!

Hyunsoo: We all have a heart and we all love!

As the children were learning that we are all unique, with different talents and abilities to contribute to the world and at the same time we are the same as human beings, they could develop positive attitudes toward racial diversity. They also started to act out willingness to befriend Black people. After the role-play, in reflections, some children shared that the role-playing helped them think about the benefits of having Black friends, for example, learning about new toys and foods of different cultures. Other children pointed that they learned that everybody can be friends regardless of skin color or race. Ms. Lee also indicated that she observed the children's changed attitudes toward different racial groups as the semester moved on. She pointed out this change as follows:

Teacher: When we talked about different races before the program, the children showed biased attitudes, such as "Black people look angry," and "Black people are poor." They also revealed a biased view toward White people such as "Whites are pretty with blond hair," and "all Whites are like Barbie dolls." Such a biased attitude was reflected in role-playing in the beginning of the program. For example, some children were reserved to play a certain role depending on races. As the role-play activities went on, the children did not show much preference but they wanted to perform any racial group. They also started to include Black people in their drawings. That change was very interesting to me because, when I asked the children to draw "Americans" before the program, they always drew people with blue eyes, a sharp nose, and blond hair.

The teacher pointed out that role-playing provided the children with opportunities to be socially and emotionally engaged in their learning and to open their minds to people with different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Her view was also supported by the interviews with the parents, as the following example demonstrates:

Minsoo's mother: I remember that one day Minsoo said, "People have different skin colors, but they have bones and blood underneath the skin, just like me. We all think and talk.

Heesun's mother: It was interesting to see how Heesun's attitudes toward different races have been changed. It seemed to me that she started to approach these differences more positively. For example, one day she talked about the book she read at school, and talked about people with

different skin colors. She had never done that before... She enjoyed talking about her experiences about role-play activities and what role she played. Every time she talked about her role-playing experiences, she looked very excited. I could see how much she enjoyed it!

The children's changed attitudes were often observed in their homes as well. The parents indicated that the role-playing experiences seemed to serve as an excellent way to teach similarities and differences among human beings, and to develop a positive awareness of individual differences and racial diversity as a whole. The most visible change after the program was children's frequent talking about racial and cultural differences at home.

Exploring the notion of freedom. The children also had a chance to explore the emergent notions of freedom during role-play. The children performed a role-play about slaves' lives after reading the book *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine 2007). The book was about a young African-American boy named Henry, who escaped from slavery by mailing himself in a wooden crate to the North. After reading the book, the children discussed what slavery and freedom meant and why people treated Henry unfairly. Before performing the role-play, the teacher divided the children into small groups and assigned a role to each child: one child would act as a child living in Korea, and the other child would act as a slave. One pair acted out their play as follows:

Heesun: Hi. My name is Heesun. I'm five years old. I live in Korea.

Soomi: Hi. I am Soomi. I am a slave.

Heesun: When is your birthday?

Soomi: I don't have a birthday because I am a slave.

Heesun: I have many toys at home. Do you want to play with me?

Soomi: I'd like to but I can't.

Heesun: Why?

Soomi: (*Pausing*)

Teacher: (*To Soomi*) Why can't you play with Heesun?

Soomi: Because... I don't have time because I work all day.

Heesun: Then I will help you.

When Heesun asked Soomi (a slave character) to play with her, Soomi indicated that she would not be able to play because Soomi had learned the fact that slaves were not able to

do as they wanted. In reflections, most of the children who acted as slaves shared that they felt sad that they were not allowed to play as they wished and they feel empathy for that. They also talked about what freedom they had in their daily lives and what it meant to have freedom. Although freedom is an abstract and difficult concept to explore for kindergarteners, they could learn what it would mean to be a slave and how they would feel if they did not have freedom, through indirectly experiencing the lives of slaves by role-playing.

Exploring racial segregation. The teacher made use of role-playing as a means of teaching the children racial discrimination and injustice. This was particularly evident when they performed a role-play after reading *The Bus Ride* (Miller, 2004), which dealt with the story of an African-American girl named Sarah, who was legally prevented from sitting in the front of the bus. The children had a discussion about racial segregation and the unjust treatment of Black people in schools, hospitals, and parks. Afterwards, they performed a role-play about the segregation of Black and White people on the bus. The teacher usually did not play a role, yet in this specific play, she decided to play a role due to Younghee's request (teacher: Sarah's mother; Dongsoo: bus driver; Younghee: Sarah):

Teacher: Oh, here comes the bus. (*Pretending to get on a bus.*) Sarah, let's sit in the back seats because we are not allowed to sit in the front.

Dongsoo: (*Pretending to start the bus by turning the wheel.*)

Teacher: This is the first stop. I need to get off here. See you later! (*Pretending to get off the bus.*)

Younghee: I am going to sit in the front. (*Walks to the front.*)

Dongsoo: No. You can't sit here. Go back to the back seat!

Younghee: (*Quiet*)

Teacher: (*To Dongsoo*) So, what are you going to say to Younghee?

Dongsoo: (*Pretending to stop the bus.*) You should sit in the back!

Younghee: (*Pretending to cry.*)

Dongsoo: (*With a louder voice*) You are not allowed to sit in the front!

Younghee: Why? I will sit here!

Dongsoo: No, you can't!

Younghee: (*With a firm voice*) I will sit wherever I want!

In the excerpt above, Younghee played a Black character who was supposed to sit in the

back, which helped her better understand how Sarah felt when she was treated unfairly. In the beginning, Younghee looked confused about why she was not able to sit in the front, yet as the bus driver kept telling her to move to the back seat, she protested in a loud voice. She seemed to feel Sarah's struggle and anger as her own. The audience also looked annoyed with the bus driver's unjust treatment of Younghee. When Younghee refused to sit in the back, the audience was delighted, clapping their hands. The teacher reflected on this moment as follows:

Teacher: For me, role-play about Sarah was the most interesting. The children seemed to really enjoy the play. When I asked Younghee about how she felt about the discriminatory behavior of the bus driver, she said that she was so sad and upset. I think this could be a huge learning experience for her and other children. Plus, most of the children seemed to really enjoy it, and they even asked me to play it again in the following day.

The children were deeply engaged in the role-playing activity, and learned the injustice of discrimination according to race and how to stand up for their rights when they receive discrimination. These experiences also helped them develop critical thinking, better appreciate another person's point of view, and develop racial awareness. Furthermore, children's learning about racial segregation and injustice was expanded to exploration of racial equity and equality.

Understanding human equality. The children had a noteworthy discussion about racial equality after reading *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1991), which was about a Black girl named Grace who wanted to play Peter Pan in her school play. The children discussed why Grace was not allowed to play Peter Pan and why people should be treated equally regardless of race or gender. Then the teacher asked the children to imagine that they were becoming a person of different race and to think about what they would like to become. Afterwards, the children were provided time to draw a face of their character for role-playing. After the children finished drawing and cutting out, the teacher attached bands to the children's drawing and had children put it on as masks. The children conducted a short play about their dreams, in which they announced the race of their character and shared their dream:

Byungmin: I am Black and I like pizza. I am going to be an owner of a pizza restaurant!

Jaeyoung: I am White and I am going to be a scientist!

Hyunsoo: I am a Korean and Asian... and...a girl. I am going to be a teacher!

Soyeon: I am a girl and Black. I am going to be the president, like Obama!

During the role-playing, the children played different racial characters and shared their dreams. Byungminn played a black character, and he indicated that he would like to run a pizza restaurant whereas Jaeyoung, a white character, expressed his desire to be a scientist. It seemed that race/ethnicity is not important for these children, since everybody can achieve their dreams regardless of skin colors. This experience enabled them to learn that all human beings are created equal, and they are capable of doing remarkable things regardless of their race or gender.

Discussion

This section highlights the children's changed perspectives of racial diversity, and societal privilege and power, and their shifting realizations regarding the importance of openly discussing diversity issues. The implications of role-playing for multicultural education are also addressed.

Developing Understanding about Racial Diversity, Racial Discrimination, and Equality

As society becomes increasingly multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual, there is a growing need to support children's development by instilling in them the tools they need to live together respectfully and to stand up to prejudice (Ponciano & Shabazian, 2012). In this study, role-playing enabled the children to explore the concepts of racial diversity and equality by discussing different racial groups and their lives, freedom and discrimination, which led children to become aware of racial issues and social justice. As the children were introduced to different racial groups and their cultures through a sequence of readings, discussions with their peers and teacher, and performing role-plays, the children developed a positive awareness about individual differences and racial diversity as a whole. As the multicultural readings and accompanying role-play progressed, the children gradually

showed a positive shift in their attitude toward different racial groups by talking about them more positively and often, showing empathy with them, and including them in their drawings.

These results showed that role-play offered opportunities to become emotionally engaged with the characters and experience diverse cultures, races, and communities (Harlin, Murray & Shea, 2007). The children were engaged in exploring similarities and differences among diverse races, which suggested that they were developing a more sophisticated multicultural consciousness. Moreover, while identifying minority groups who have received discrimination and realizing inequality, children experienced disagreement, which influenced them to change their perception and attitude (Fesinger, 1957). This great variety of factors embedded in the role-play helped eliminate the young children's prejudices significantly and generate positive attitudes toward different races.

In early childhood classrooms, it is critical to address injustice and develop equity-based pedagogies because children construct their own ideas about fairness and their sense of identity early in life (Boutte, 2008). Ausdale and Feagin (2001) confirmed that preschoolers raise issues of race within their peer groups more frequently than adult caregivers know. Sometimes teachers do not approach issues of race, prejudice, and racial inequity since they are not comfortable addressing them (Winkler, 2009). However, without proper intervention or effort, children continue to develop racial biases and prejudices (Aboud, 2005). Therefore, children should be involved in open, honest, and developmentally appropriate conversations about race, racial differences, and racial inequity (Winker, 2009). It is important for children to explore issues of fairness and justice and to think about their role in making a more just society for themselves and others.

The Effects of Role-Play in Multicultural Education

"Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I will remember. Involve me and I will understand." This aphorism demonstrates the power of active involvement to promote deeper and more lasting learning and understanding. Numerous scholars have supported the importance of active involvement to change their understanding and attitude toward racial diversity and reduce stereotypes (e.g., Camicia, 2007; Kolh, 2002). In this study, when the

children were acting as a Black person who experienced discrimination, they were deeply engaged and presented emotional behavior integrated with thought. Even after the role-play, the children expressed anger toward unfair treatment. Moreover, sufficient discussion on a topic before acting it out will help children prepare for what they are expected to do during role-play. After sharing their ideas and feelings in a large group, children can enact countering racial stereotypes and prejudice they are faced with. Such an exercise can also empower children to explore and construct the knowledge (Banks, 2004). Ample flexibility in the role-play encouraged the children to interact freely with their drama partners, which allowed them to explore rather serious concepts (e.g., injustice and discrimination) in a stimulating way. In addition, the reflection times reinforced their experiences and learning. As role-playing created a comfortable and non-threatening learning environment, the children could explore different perspectives and embrace the feelings of others. Overall, the children maintained open, warm, and positive attitudes throughout the discussions, role-plays, and reflections.

Besides raising the children's social and racial awareness, role-play contributed to various other areas of their development. The children expanded their vocabulary and got involved in reasoning and critical thinking, which all fostered their intellectual development (Grant & Mistry, 2010). Furthermore, the role-play supported their personality development by offering the opportunity to explore their racial and cultural identity and augment their self-esteem (Taylor, Sachet, Maring, & Mannering, 2013). Regarding the social and emotional aspects of development, the children—both as audience and actors—presented various emotional signs, showing they were engaged in others' situations. By enabling the children to be socially, emotionally, and intellectually engaged in their learning, the role-plays addressed the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of development all together (Camicia, 2007), which effectively eliminated the children's prejudicial attitudes.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study elucidated the potential of role-play in early childhood classrooms by sharing empirical examples of how role-play helped young Korean children engage in topics of

racial diversity. This study forms a basis that might lead to future studies addressing the need to take into account the importance of role-play in early childhood classrooms as a means of teaching and learning multicultural issues. However, there is also the limitation of this study: as a small-scale qualitative case study with 25 children, three of their parents and one teacher as participants, the findings in this study are specific to a particular case, and thus the relevance of the findings may not extend directly to different social, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts. Furthermore, although the participating children were from relatively homogenous cultural backgrounds and had similar experiences related to racial and cultural diversity (e.g., limited experiences in reading multicultural books at home or being in contact with other racial groups in their daily lives), we do acknowledge that each child's individual experiences at home could still have influenced the children's perception and understanding of racial and cultural diversity. Yet, we attempted to understand *the process*, rather than *the result*, by sharing empirical examples of how the children negotiated and represented their notions of diversity and equality through role-play.

Also, we did not attempt to generalize the benefits of role-play in early childhood classrooms in South Korea. Rather we strived to present particularities through detailed descriptions that facilitate a deeper understanding of the possibility of role-play as a means to teach racial diversity and equality. This inherent limitation calls for further studies on how role-playing activities can be connected to multicultural education in different ethnic and socio-economic settings. Further studies examining effects of broader educational contexts, such as school support and parental education, on children's racial awareness and understanding are also needed.

For Improved Early Childhood Multicultural Education

Multiculturalism focuses on creating equal educational opportunities and positive attitudes toward differences (Banks, 2004). While the study focused on a Korean context, the findings have broader implications for early childhood classrooms elsewhere in several aspects. First, the social and emotional aspects of children's development experienced during role-plays emphasize the importance of having social interactions among peers and a psychologically comfortable environment. Children should be involved in open, honest, and

developmentally appropriate conversations about race, racial differences, and racial inequities (Winker, 2009). It is important for children to explore issues of fairness and justice, and to think about their role in making a fairer society for themselves and others. In order to promote relaxed yet dynamic interactions among peers, teachers should be prepared to address multicultural topics that children can face in everyday life, and provide unbiased and equitable learning environments. Dealing with the everyday nature of injustice is important because it implies that individuals can begin to identify their roles in unjust situations and to work against injustice (Freire, 1972). In the keen observations of children, teachers should identify prejudice and stereotypes and appropriately address them by providing a space where the children can express their feelings and ideas without restrictions.

Second, the cognitive aspects of children's development on diversity issues suggest that children can learn such terms as *discrimination*, *freedom*, and *inequality*, and participate in reasoning and critical thinking about them. In addition, recognizing the existence of one's own culture and coming to an understanding of the underlying values and beliefs of that culture is the first step in developing an understanding of others' cultures. When children are faced with a new reality, their past prejudices and stereotypes begin to break down, and they construct a new framework upon which to continue their lives and work (Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Leitze, 2006). For a long-term benefit, it is essential to provide children with sufficient time to construct their racial knowledge through exploration and critical thinking, rather than letting them take prevalent social perceptions regarding races and cultures in an unfiltered way.

Third, it is paramount that educators are prepared to embrace multiculturalism and construct equitable learning environments. It is a prerequisite that teachers be open-minded toward diversity and have extensive knowledge about other races and cultures. However, many teachers have reported that they are not familiar with specific ways of teaching diversity issues to young children (Cho, Park, Sung, Lee, & Park, 2010). Therefore, more support should be provided, such as professional development training and workshops where teachers can expand and deepen their knowledge, and learn about practical strategies regarding multicultural education.

Finally, in order to sustain positive changes in children's views and attitude about racial

diversity, continuing efforts, not only at the individual-teacher level but also at the school and community levels should be made to provide improved educational opportunities. It is critical to empower schools and social structures to form unbiased attitudes and perceptions toward races and cultures in young children. Multicultural programs should be integrated into overall school curriculum on a long-term, on-going basis. Multicultural issues should be instructed comprehensively and sensitively, rather than in an isolated and superficial way. It is important for children to realize that multicultural learning does not end in the classroom but is prolonged and applied in everyday lives. Some specific examples of providing direct experiences for a sustained educational effect can include teachers playing video clips of different racial/ethnic groups' non-stereotypical daily lives, inviting people of different races to the class as guest speakers, and going on field trips to African museums or exhibits. School personnel should set aside sufficient time and resources from the other academic subjects for teaching multicultural education. Necessary skills, training and resources are prerequisites for teachers to be able to implement high-quality programs. Furthermore, schools should create a more equitable community and set policies such as zero tolerance to racial prejudice or discrimination. In order to connect students' school and home experiences, it is crucial to educate the parents in the importance of multicultural education during early childhood, and what the parents can do at home to elevate their children's understanding.

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