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# Multicultural Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy in South Korea

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## Abstract

South Korea has witnessed a major demographic shift as more children of immigrants are entering the schools. Over the course of four months, I visited six elementary schools, graduate schools of education, and conducted interviews with teachers, principals, and district administrators to gain an understanding how multicultural theory, policy and practice were being implemented. I used of four heuristic devices to analyze the implementation of multicultural policy and curriculum at the elementary school level: 1) Serving the needs of children of immigrants, 2) Celebrating cultural differences, 3) Creating multicultural schools, and 4) Striving for a socially just society. The findings indicate that the current policy and practice has led to a deficit thinking model towards children of immigrants and therefore teachers and administrators need critical multicultural theory and praxis based upon a social justice platform. I do not want to be too critical of multicultural education in South Korea as I keep in mind issues of policy transfer, borrowing and lending; however, I believe that the research can have a positive impact upon multicultural education in Korea as well as in other countries that are also witnessing a rapid rise in immigrants and ethnic minorities.

*Keywords:* children of immigrants, South Korea, race and ethnicity, social justice, immigration, multicultural education

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I was deeply struck by the setting of my first visit to a nationally recognized multicultural[1] school in South Korea and was quickly reminded of my years growing up in the state of Iowa (U.S.A.), a predominantly White environment, where my elementary school was surrounded by cornfields. In this instance, I arrived at a school surrounded by rice fields, and, other than a small church located approximately 500 meters away, and the only infrastructure insight was the highway I just arrived on.

During the two-hour drive to the school located just outside of Seoul's rapidly blurring city borders, I discussed with my two graduate research assistants the aspects of critical multicultural theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tomlinson, 2018; Watkins, Lean, & Noble, 2016) and how it would pertain to our visit to the school. For the most part, we talked about cultural discontinuity (Delpit, 2006) and deficit thinking (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997) theories, as well as the way most K–12 schools in South Korea implement a multicultural curriculum by teaching only the surface-level aspects of culture (e.g., celebrations of food, holidays, and traditions). In other words, we spoke mainly of theory and less about the implementation of multicultural policy and pedagogy in the schools. However, once we arrived at our designation, our focus quickly moved to include all of these aspects.

The first thing that drew our attention was the display of flags representing the nations present in the school (16 flags in total, including South Korea). A large welcoming display of all the students' pictures also greeted us at the entryway, and, as we looked at the pictures, one of the graduate assistants inquired, "Who are the multicultural students?" All of the students were of East Asian ethnic descent, and most had phenotypes that were similar to ethnic Koreans, making it difficult to determine who was Korean, biracial/multiracial Korean and non-Korean immigrant. Therefore, the first question that came to my mind was: How were students identified as multicultural students by their teachers, administrators, and peers if physical appearance was not a determining factor?

Upon my return to Seoul, I delved into the literature on children of immigrants' education and critical multicultural education development in Korea. Through conversations with my graduate assistants, we concluded that the landscape of South Korean multicultural education theory, policy, and pedagogy provides a unique setting. First, until recently the majority of ethnic minorities residing in South Korea were either English language teachers (mostly White and holding a university degree), involved in the major banking and financial security companies (again, mostly White and university educated), or members of the U.S. military (racially diverse, yet mostly isolated to specific military camps). However, in its push to meet the demands of globalization, the South Korean government internationalized nearly all aspects of its society and culture with a particular focus on economics and education. Palmer and Cho (2012) contend that these efforts have resulted in an increasing number of non-Korean immigrants (see, Bhowmik, Kennedy, and Hue, 2018, for a similar immigrant phenomenon in Hong Kong).

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the rapid demographic changes can be seen as a population perfect storm. The fertility rate has reached critical levels in South Korea. Kim (2009) reports that the fertility rate registered record fell from 1.47 in 2000 to 1.17 in 2002 to an all-time low of 1.08 in 2005. The rate has slightly increased

in the ensuing years as the Korean government interceded by providing incentives for families to have more children (Kim, 2018). However, Kim (2018) reported that the fertility rate dropped again in 2017 to 1.05.

Added to these demographic shifts is the sudden rise of immigrant manual laborers, foreign brides, and the biracial/multiracial children of these families. Manual laborers are coming in to fill the "3-D" (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) jobs left unfilled by a declining workforce and increasing highly educated middle class. As a result, Kim (2009) concludes that there will be a 1.23 million shortage of workers by 2020, while the Bank of Korea estimates a 4.8 million shortage.

In addition, foreign brides are filling the gender gap caused by male preference since the late 1980s. Most of these foreign brides, who are from Southeast Asia and China, are marrying working-class men (Kang, 2010). These women are also bringing their children from previous relationships and having biracial/multiracial children with their Korean husbands. From 2005 to 2008, the children of immigrants and biracial/multiracial children enrolled in school increased from approximately 6,000 to 19,000 (Hong, 2010; Kang, 2010). These children of immigrants are identified much differently than the expatriates from the financial and educational sectors of Korean society.

The purpose of this paper is exploratory in nature, while at the same time offering critical insight into multicultural education theory, policy, and pedagogy. The research analyses the implementation of multicultural education in public and private elementary schools located throughout South Korea. I fully realize that listening to the voices of the multicultural students and their families is valuable; however, for this study, I concluded that I first needed to understand the implementation process and that a subsequent study will look at the impact on the students, families, teachers, and community from their perspective. Future studies will focus on the lives of immigrant and biracial families.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework stems from the extensive scholarship on multicultural education, namely Banks (2010), Sleeter and Grant (2009), and Bennett (2011). From these frameworks, I developed four heuristic devices to analyze multicultural education as it relates to pedagogy, policy, and theory:

1. Serving the needs of children of immigrants,
2. Celebrating cultural differences,
3. Creating multicultural schools, and
4. Striving for a socially just (anti-oppressive) society.

These devices guide the multicultural program evaluation of the South Korean schools I visited with my graduate students. Ladson-Billings (2003) advises that by describing approaches as "heuristic devices," they are "not meant to serve as essentialized and fixed categories but rather as useful categories to describe an array of thought and practice evident in schools and society today" (p. 53). Moreover, I do not want readers to view these categories as stages in a multicultural education development process, as I feel that by concentrating on just one level at a time, the essence and ultimate purpose of multicultural education will be lost (Banks, 2010). In other words, all four of these categories should be considered when developing and implementing multicultural

education theory, policy, and pedagogy.

### *Serving the needs of children of immigrants*

These types of multicultural policies stem from an assimilation theory. The schools view children of immigrants as needing to fit into the mainstream and, therefore, that they need to be "helped" to overcome their cultural deficiencies. Typically, assimilation into the cultural mainstream consists of separating these students from mainstream students in an attempt to meet their individual needs. These specialized programs consisted of English as a Second Language and other forms of language education. Once the students prove proficiency within these areas, they are then allowed to enter into the regular classroom. However, without full inclusion into the everyday curriculum, content integration remains stuck at a foundational level, as most view multicultural education as an additive to the real curriculum.

While the intentions of the school may be geared towards helping children of immigrants navigate through mainstream society, it is my contention that if multicultural education policies and pedagogies remain at this level, then children of immigrants will continuously live on the periphery of society and rarely be able to enact social change. Delpit (2006) states that "if minority people are to effect the change which will allow them to truly progress, we must insist on 'skills' within the context of critical and creative thinking" (p. 19). The skills that Delpit refers to go beyond just literacy skills in that children of immigrants need to empower their identities, which entails understanding how the forces of power, privilege, and discrimination (i.e., racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia) influence and direct their identities (Freire, 1989).

### *Celebrating cultural differences*

Banks' (2010) content integration should be seen as the most basic form of multicultural education as it "integrates content" related to immigrants and people of Color into the curriculum. For example, U.S. schools may continue to teach their regular curriculum except during Black History Month. At this time, they may study the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and listen to his most recognized speech, "I Have a Dream." The content typically remains at the celebratory level, providing students with basic artifacts related to the immigrant group being studied, such as food, clothing, and music, and is typically based around a major holiday in that culture.

Leaving multicultural education policies at this level may lead the majority to espouse a colorblind philosophy without delving into greater issues of social and cultural inequalities. Indeed, the majority of students are led to believe that if schools are able to assimilate the culturally different into the cultural mainstream, then immigrants and people of Color can be accepted as part of the majority (Tomlinson, 2018). Thereby, a colorblind philosophy destroys opportunities to fully engage in discussions about racial and cultural differences as well as other forms of discrimination by leaving it up to the oppressed to create and enforce change (Freire, 1989). Lewis (2001) claims that colorblind philosophy allows the racial/cultural majority "to continue to see themselves as racially neutral, outside the racial hierarchy, deserving of their own success and not responsible for the exclusion of others" (p. 803). In other words, if people are all the same and provided with the same opportunities to succeed, then raising issues

related to racial/cultural inequality only promotes victimization, segregation, and discrimination.

### *Creating multicultural schools*

Within this category, educational theory, policy, and pedagogy aim to transform the entire school by challenging students' "implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline" (Banks, 2010, p. 20). Students begin to question aspects of the status quo by developing multiple perspectives through what Banks (2010) refers to as "the knowledge construction process." For example, when U.S. students study the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus, students are asked to question: Who deemed it the New World? And what does this New World imply for the Indigenous people who inhabited the area at this time? (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Creating multicultural schools challenges institutional inequalities through both the curriculum and pedagogy. The culture of power is becoming more relevant to both the mainstream and the marginalized through a culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billing, 1995). Notions of meeting the needs of children of immigrants are no longer seen through an assimilation process, but rather the schools need to transform to accept, understand, and, most importantly, reflect the cultural diversity that exists throughout society (Banks, 1993; Sleeter & Grant, 1987).

### *Striving for a socially just (anti-oppressive) education*

I use the term "striving," as I realize that attaining social justice education is an ongoing battle. Moreover, educators should continue to "strive" to deeper levels of social justice education in their desires to meet the needs of all their students. And last, I accept the "ongoing challenges multiculturalism and multicultural education face with increasing demands by diverse groups, the growing complexities of the human condition, and expanding methodologies" (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p. 62–63).

The main aspect of striving for a socially just society focuses on "social action and reform to create societal conditions of freedom, equality, and justice for all" (Bennett, 2001). The foundation of this device rests upon critical race theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2003). CRT allows me to analyze theory, policy, and pedagogy that seek to challenge all forms of oppression at the individual, institutional, and cultural levels.

## Methods

Over the course of four months, I led a team of graduate assistants through six elementary schools and conducted semistructured interviews with teachers, principals, and district administrators. I also spoke informally with several teachers who were enrolled in graduate school courses aimed at addressing multicultural education issues. These were in-service teachers who were enrolled in evening and weekend graduate school programs. All of the teachers I spoke with stated that they had at least one multicultural student in their classroom. Moreover, at the university level, I formally interviewed department chairs of the multicultural graduate programs. All conversations in the field were conducted in Korean, and then the interviews were transcribed in Korean and then translated into English. The translated transcripts were then verified by another native Korean speaker. Thus, the graduate student research

assistants were integral members of the research project.

For teachers and pre-service, I was interested in why they chose to teach/study in multicultural education programs, what training they had received in multicultural education, what their philosophies/theories about multicultural education were, what they hoped students would gain from multicultural education, and how they believed multicultural education had impacted the overall educational system and Korean society.

I also had the opportunity to meet briefly with the district director and the assistant director about districtwide policy related to multicultural education. For educational leaders (e.g., school principals, district directors, and university department chairs) and educational researchers (e.g., university professors and government-controlled research institutes), I was interested in the development of multicultural education policies and how these leaders and researchers foresaw educational institutions carrying out these policies. More importantly, after speaking with several teachers in the field, I hoped to gain insight into how these administrators were attempting to resolve some of the early impediments to rolling out a multicultural education program.

It is important to note that with some of the conversations, I was asked to turn off the audio recorder. Some of the teachers were eager to talk about their experiences but were wary of "who" would be reading the article. As will be seen in the findings section, some of the teachers were "appointed" by their principals to lead the multicultural programs in the school and often felt isolated from other teachers, as multicultural education was not fully supported by all the teachers in the school.

Throughout the data collection process of interviewing teachers and principals and field observations of government-identified multicultural schools, I met dedicated and sincere faculty and staff in all of the schools. These were the people who opened up their classrooms, shared their resources, and, most importantly, provided me with personal insights into how they were implementing multicultural policies and developing their own theories related to teaching children of immigrants. I was honored to have them share with me their highlights and their struggles.

## Findings

Through the observations and conversations with teachers and principals, it appears that schools were not prepared for a sudden rise in numbers of children of immigrants—ethnic minority, Korean language-learning students. Their pre-service teacher training and years of experience in the field prepared them to teach Korean students who spoke the same language and—equally important—shared similar life experiences, expectations, and understanding of the concept of school.

In the visited schools, the teachers I spoke with had little to no training (experience) and theoretical background in multicultural education prior to the arrival of children of immigrants. Even the teachers who were appointed to be in charge of multicultural education for the schools received very little government-sponsored training in multicultural education and theory. One teacher stated, "It's true that teachers aren't very cognizant of multiculturalism, but also we don't have the budget to send teachers to receive additional work training for only one or two kids."

At the district administrative level, I inquired about the training of the teachers for multicultural students. In these conversations, the administration was meticulous in its actions. There was strong support for more research prior to developing and implementing policies related to teacher training. An elementary school vice principal confirmed:

> There are not a lot of people who are researching multicultural education in theory, and it's hard to find scholarly research regarding the basics of multicultural education. There is little research on the policies that are in effect. In Korea, I hope to see how multicultural education will develop according to the current situation and environment ... There need to be consistent programs based on research. There need to be inquiries and investigations on the multicultural population in the country. That should be the basis of the policies.

When I pressed for more specifics of the multicultural theories that drive the research and policies, the responses mainly consisted of learning from the research and comparing it to policies implemented in other nations; the United States, Australia, and France were mentioned.

In schools with larger numbers of multicultural students, the government attempted to provide more robust training for the teachers. The headteacher of multicultural education in one of the visited schools stated:

> At our school, all the teachers received training, work training for at least 30 hours [and] 4 times a year we invite professionals [art therapy, speech therapy, and head of multicultural education support center] to lecture. When we hold these lectures, it's not just the teachers of our school, but we send out a public announcement so multicultural education teachers or teachers who are assigned multicultural students in their classes can attend.

When I asked if she found the 30 hours of training helpful in meeting the needs of the multicultural students, she responded:

> It's like they don't need any separate multicultural awareness education. But, the "regular" parents have such harsh prejudices about the multicultural students, and that's the hardest. If we do a program, a field trip, they think isn't this too much and exclusively for the multicultural children. When their children take part in it [multicultural education programming], they're happy that all of the children reap all the benefits of our school. However, when we say multiculturalism, there's still some that think it's a marginalized culture, so even as they take part in the activities with their bodies and enjoy it, their heads are still not happy.

The teacher is attempting to explain the underlying issues related to teaching "other people's children" (Delpit, 2006) and addressing the issues that come with being oppressed (Ladson-Billings, 2009). While the majority of the teachers witnessed some benefits to having a racially and ethnically diverse school, the downsides far outweighed these minor victories, and therefore it was best to remove these students from the school (Tomlinson, 2018).

**Serving the Needs of Children of Immigrants: A Zero-Sum Game**

The first issue is grounded in a zero-sum game equation as the implementation of fresh and innovative programs that serve the needs of children of immigrants is seen as taking resources away from the ethnic majority (Korean) students. Indeed, some parents and teachers classified multicultural education as a reverse discrimination policy since ethnic majority students neither participated nor benefitted from the multicultural education programs. This led some of the teachers to conclude that there was a dire need to segregate children of immigrants out of the "normal" school or classroom so that they would not be a distraction to the ethnic majority students; students who are entitled to an education. A teacher at a multicultural elementary school stated:

> If the children are mixed together in this classroom, the Korean students are at a disadvantage, and the multicultural children can't keep up. I constantly have to take care, encourage, feed the [multicultural] children, etc., and it's not good for the Korean students. Korean students think I only like multicultural students. ... If multicultural children are not in the class, I'm sorry to say this, but my class wouldn't be like this. My class would've been so much better.

Here again, it would be easy to judge this teacher and draw conclusions that she is not concerned with her students; however, the way I perceived the conversation was that the challenges forced her to question her curriculum, pedagogy, and overall training. It appeared that all of the teachers were overwhelmed with rising issues related to their new students, which eventually led many of them to believe that segregated schools or segregated spaces were necessary to meet these demands placed upon them. Another elementary school teacher contemplated this point:

> The way I see it, the thing I want to say, is we need to take out the multicultural children separately. There needs to be a separate multicultural classroom … because Korean [language] is so difficult they can't keep up. Those children need to be segregated and according to their levels.

These teachers were not looking to rid themselves of these students; rather, due to factors related to cultural discontinuity and lack of teacher training to meet these nuanced cultural aspects in ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse classrooms, throughout the school visits, there were signs of disgruntlement and division due in part to how a small number of multicultural students were perceived as devouring all of the teachers' time and energy. An elementary school principal stated, "The homeroom teachers aren't too happy with getting multicultural students [in their classrooms]. They're not too excited about it because these children fall behind and they think this is a problem."

As more and more multicultural students began flowing into these designated schools, some of the teachers assigned to lead the multicultural curriculum expressed how other teachers in the school viewed the multicultural efforts as "reverse discrimination" due to the belief that these efforts drew resources away from the entitled Korean students. One elementary school teacher stated:

> In our school, there is a lot of support for multicultural students. The other teachers say that it's unfortunate for the Korean students because the Korean students don't have access to these programs ... Since I'm working with multicultural students, they say things like, "they give you too much to the multicultural students."

The battle lines were clearly being drawn as an "us versus them" dichotomy that was being firmly established in the schools and led to further animosity towards and isolation of children of immigrants. Moreover, the other teachers in the school began to distance themselves not only from the students but also from the teachers assigned to lead the multicultural curriculum.

In many cases, the teachers assigned to lead multicultural programs in the school were seasoned veterans: As one teacher stated, "I have experience and have flexibility, and I can naturally feel what certain students need by my senses. It's been 30 years that I've been an educator." However, most of them felt that they were fighting a losing battle, especially with little training and upper-level administrative support. Some even concluded that multicultural policy was a short-term program that aimed to address the current rise in awareness of the rising non-Korean ethnic immigrant population in Korea. Certainly, this could be compared to the United States multicultural policy, as some predominantly White and affluent public-school districts either viewed the policy as aimed towards students of Color and therefore none of their concern or concluded that multicultural was an "add-on" to the regular curriculum and as a result, multicultural education was taught using surfaced artifacts through typical food festivals that included ethnic garb and dance performances. In these cases, multiculturalism was seen as exotic and foreign through the "celebrating of cultural difference" and, therefore, definitely not a part of the fabric of the majority/dominant culture.

Without government support and empirically-based critical research, teachers and in-school administrators were attempting to solely "serve the needs of children of immigrants" and therefore concluded that these students needed more than what they could offer. This feeling of helplessness connects directly to the second main issue of "blaming and othering children of immigrants."

**Blaming and Othering Children of Immigrants**

When I asked a group of teachers enrolled in a graduate school multicultural education program why they wanted to work with children of immigrants, the far majority clearly stated that they wanted to "help" because they viewed these students as living in difficult home situations due to their foreign-born mothers and working-class fathers. Most of the teachers wanted what was best for children of immigrants and viewed the teacher's role as essential in their development. However, from this foundational deficit thinking perspective (e.g., that children of immigrants needed their "help"), the teachers disempowered the children of immigrants' identity, which eventually led the teachers to "blame the victim" for their struggles (Fine & Weis, 2003; Valencia & Black, 2002) and an "othering" of multicultural students (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Valencia &Solórzano, 1997).

The main issue for most of the teachers I

spoke with was the fact that many of the children of immigrants were learning Korean as a second language. Certainly, there is a great deal of research on second language acquisition (Jang & DaSilva Iddings, 2010; Jang & Jiménez, 2011) and, therefore, this is not the focus of the paper. Rather I highlight how the teachers believed that if the students were segregated into classrooms that focused on learning the Korean language and that once the students "mastered" Korean, they could enter the "normal" classroom. Therefore, blaming language skills was considered a verifiable reason to remove students from the classroom.

Moreover, the lack of Korean language acquisition by children of immigrants was directly tied to their home life situations. In many cases, the children were coming from homes where the mother was a recent, non-Korean ethnic minority immigrant, and the father was a Korean ethnic, working-class citizen. The parents were viewed as a major deficit for their children. Mothers were automatically considered to possess limited proficiency in Korean language and lack of cultural capital that resembled Korean culture, especially in correspondence with educational achievement. Several teachers and administrators held the belief that these non-Korean immigrant mothers were uneducated and were working full time to keep their families out of poverty, and therefore held little regard for their children's education. One principal was quite clear that the family background was the main issue that needed to be addressed:

> One of the reasons they [children of immigrants] have trouble with language is that the parents have a limited vocabulary. The mother is a foreigner. Because they have a limited vocabulary, they don't have the skills to teach their kids Korean. And another thing is, most of them need to work and earn money. In the countryside, they need to work so they don't have time to spend with their children. They don't spend time together, and because of that they don't talk, they don't read to them, they don't engage in cultural activities like going to a concert.

An elementary school teacher held similar deficit thinking about foreign mothers:

> The problem is, no matter how hard we teach these children, they cannot be bilingual. They can't speak Korean. Reading and writing are failing. ... The fact that the mother is a foreigner makes a huge difference. If they're foreigners, they don't appreciate it even though we give them things. They don't know about school materials. And every day the children try to get something from me. They believe everything's free. The multicultural children have the mentality that all things are free for them. They just want to take.

In a conversation with an elementary school administrator, we heard another version of how children of immigrants' cultural/language deficiencies were exposed:

> In our first-grade classrooms, there are many [multicultural] students. These first graders lack Korean language skills. For the upper elementary students, they learn the language fast. But for the first graders, many of them are in a public education program for the first time, so it's hard for them. And Korean parents have a zeal for education.

> Many of the Korean students go to preschool before they enter elementary school, but these children usually don't. They usually speak their native language with their mother or grandmother at home. And when they come to school, they can't speak Korean. For the first graders, even though they may have lived in Korea for a long time, they lack the language abilities.

The administrator provides reasoning for the cultural divide and the lack of Korean language proficiency of first-grade children of immigrants. She illustrates how the children are raised "differently" that leads to a cultural difference, which is quickly turned into a deficiency when children enter school.

The teachers and administrators also considered the fathers as being stereotypically uninvolved in their children's lives and, due to their working-class status, as not earning a university degree and possibly disconnected from the educational system in Korea. A teacher in an elementary school stated:

> [We] can't ignore the issue of the father. In Korea, the men who are in international marriages, perhaps because they have to live hand to mouth, but their educational mind [is lacking]. The father needs to engage in a child's education, but there are more families where the fathers don't get involved. Korean fathers today, they are very involved in their children's education. But for multicultural families, they [the fathers] abandon them [the children].

Due to these perceived home situations, many of the teachers began to view these students as possessing major deficits that would inhibit their success in the classroom. The interviews we conducted with teachers and administrators working firsthand with multicultural students illustrate the development of deficit thinking that eventually leads to marginalization and animosity (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). Most of the teachers and administrators are deeply invested in these students' success in school and society; however, the pressures to assimilate quickly placed a significant burden on children of immigrants. This is not a new phenomenon when it comes to post-colonial immigration, as Rosaldo (1993) states:

> Race relations in North America involve a blend of assimilationist efforts, raw prejudice, and cultural containment that revolves around a concerted effort to keep each culture pure and in its place. Members of racial minority groups receive a peculiar message: either join the mainstream or stay in your ghettos, barrios, and reservations, but don't try to be both mobile and cultural. (p. 212)

If they are unable to quickly assimilate to their new environment, they will be seen as a burden to society and soon marginalized in their schools and communities. And at the same time, if these children were able to assimilate by quickly learning the language and the cultural norms, they continued to hold the label as a foreigner, non-Korean ethnic, and therefore remained in segregated and marginalized spaces. Thus, by understanding the foundation of these deficiencies, the schools can attempt to address the language and cultural divides.

As we entered the school, we met a Black girl standing at the main entrance. I instinctively said "hello" to her, thinking her

native language was English. However, she quickly responded in Korean, *annyeonghasaeyo* (hello), and in disgust informed me that she *only* speaks Korean. Instantly, I thought of my own experiences of living up in the United States and having strangers come up to me and say *nihao* and in so doing, automatically designating me as a foreigner and mistaken as Chinese (one of the stereotypes for Asian Americans is that we are all of the Chinese descent). Therefore, this young girl's response hit close to home, and I sincerely apologized to her for making this mistake. We ended up talking for a brief moment about her time in the school and discovered that her mother is from a country in central Africa and that she was born and raised in Seoul.

After conducting our formal interviews with the administration and headteacher, we were given a brief tour of the school and were introduced to two veteran teachers in the school. As we began talking about our project, one of the teachers began talking quite negatively about *all* the children of immigrants in the school, especially about classroom management issues—behavioral issues. This same teacher started talking about one particular student that had caused her so much trouble in the classroom, and we came to discover that she was talking specifically about the young girl we met upon entering the school. The point that I am attempting to make here is that even though this particular student speaks Korean as a first language, her phenotypes automatically designate her as a foreigner, non-Korean, which then leads to stereotypes and possible discriminatory actions.

Again, I am not writing this article to weigh judgment on the teachers and administrators, especially since I consider myself an outsider researcher to the Korean educational environment, and I did not investigate the Korean language ability reading and writing levels of the multicultural students. I am attempting to illustrate how teachers "easily" develop deficit thinking about their multicultural students and how this deficit thinking then leads to marginalization and isolation of these students, their families, and communities (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997).

It was at this point in the research project that my graduate students and I made the decision to visit an area just outside of Seoul that was home for many immigrant families (see Kim, 2011). Prior to our visit, I asked the graduate students what they "thought" and "heard" about this particular area. One of the students shared that her mother did not want her to go visit the area, especially at night, as it is considered a high crime rate area. I then asked the class how many have even visited the area? The answer was none; none of the 26 students in my graduate-level class had visited the area, and the answer is, why should they? There really is no reason for them to visit, thus furthering the realization of the isolation of the recent immigrant population.

The few students who opted to join this field trip during the daytime were excited to see the area, especially the established Migrant Community Service Center. As we walked around the area, we noticed the various restaurants offering a variety of non-Korean foods and the number of shops selling cellular phones. I asked the students what they did not see that is typical of most Korean residential areas. The answers ranged from franchised coffee shops and fast-food chains to *noraebang* (karaoke singing room) and Korean snack food shops serving *dukbokki* (spicy rice cake snack). However, when I pressed them to look even closer to what was "missing" in a residential area, one student said, "a *hakgwon*"

(learning institute). This started our quest to find at least one hakgwon in the area, and, alas, we were unsuccessful. While the Migrant Community Center offered free classes and job training programs, we could not locate a hakgwon that offered courses for elementary through high school students to receive additional classes in a wide variety of subjects.

The visit provided a fresh insight into the development of deficit thinking through a model of "Serving the needs of children of immigrants" and "Celebrating cultural differences." In that, "serving the needs of children of immigrants" was not about advancing or thriving in the schools but rather about surviving by learning the basic skills of the Korean language and assimilating to a working-class identity. Throughout our visits to the schools, rarely did we hear any of the teachers speak about the students learning beyond mastering the Korean language. Moreover, when incorporating cultural aspects of children of immigrants, the lessons were typically in the form of surface-level artifacts of food, clothing, and celebrations. This then led to the furthering of stereotypes by exoticizing the other through simple cultural displays. It was difficult for the teachers to view these students as dynamic and flourishing, especially as they were portrayed as completely reliant upon the Korean system for their basic survival needs.

## Discussion

There is still significant fieldwork that needs to be done around multicultural education in South Korea, as multicultural theory, pedagogy, and policy are just at the emerging stage. Moreover, I do not want to appear to be too critical of the development and implementation of multicultural education in South Korea. Yet, the research findings and educational policy suggestions can have a lasting impact on not only multicultural students and their families but also on Korean society and educational systems throughout the world working to incorporate the rising number of immigrants. More importantly, Korean stakeholders need to investigate their Korean identities, privileges, and entitlements, and as a result, hopefully, they will be able to see how they can begin to directly challenge the racism/oppression that exists in Korean society (Cho & Palmer, 2013).

Even though my theoretical platform is heavily based upon multicultural education theory developed out of the United States, I am aware of the difference in context, culture, and history. Most important are two glaring differences: (a) Korea's educational system remains highly centralized within MEST, and (b) current ethnic diversity shifts are mainly immigrants from developing countries and their children. Therefore, I must keep in mind issues of policy transfer, as it relates to policy borrowing and lending, in developing my suggestions and implications (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010). Certainly, Korean stakeholders can learn a great deal from the development of multicultural education policy and implementation in the United States, but this does not mean that these stakeholders need to follow the same process or design and implement the exact same policies. Rather, I hope to make Korean stakeholders aware of such issues in designing and implementing multicultural education policies.

For example, Lee (2010) described how foreign wives are being encouraged by their families and the school to speak only Korean to their children. In this sense, the children and their mothers are learning very quickly that their culture is seen as both inferior to Korean culture and a hindrance to

assimilation. And as the children attempt to shed themselves of their mother's culture, they are, in a way rejecting part of who they are. What I fear will happen is that children of immigrants will grow up believing that Korea will be tolerant of the racial and cultural differences as long as they assimilate, only to learn that they will continue to be viewed as a non-Korean or at best a second-class Korean as long as the Korean attitude towards immigrants remains the same (Tomlinson, 2018).

The current curriculum appears to uphold the notion of disempowering the children of immigrants' identities believing in assimilation practices and tolerant notions. I understand that South Korea should not borrow the United States' multicultural education policy as the two nations have distinctive racial histories; however, it is my hope that South Korea can learn from the United States' mistakes in implementing an effective multicultural curriculum and pedagogy (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010).

Taking from culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995), I can see how schools throughout the nation will need to begin engaging students on these racial issues. Students throughout the nation are arriving at school with the established notion of who is and who is not a Korean. Children of immigrants are not viewed as Korean by Koreans, and I believe this is one of the first issues that need to be engaged. It is not my place to say that Korea needs to accept biracial and children of immigrants as Korean, but at the same time, a conversation needs to move beyond the surface of acceptance and tolerance.

Moreover, Koreans need to begin to view the working-class wives and immigrant workers as a direct result of the country's push for internationalization/globalization and, therefore, need to view these people as contributors to the Korean society, rather than a hindrance. In this view, engaging the issues will involve learning directly the histories of immigration and the contributions immigrants are making in society. This, I believe, will have a direct impact upon the children; because, as it stands now, it looks as though the children could view their mother's culture as inferior and, therefore, a form of disempowering their racial identities.

Engaging Koreans, immigrants, and children of immigrants around the issues of race and racism in the Korean context, I believe, will impact the identities of all those involved. More importantly, these engagements need to move beyond the surface level of cultural differences. It is my hope that through engagement, immigrants and their children will feel empowered in their lives in Korea and that Koreans will find a way to address and overcome racial prejudices. Indeed, social justice activists need to come from both the racial minority and majority in order for true engagement, empowerment, and enactment to take place.

**Significance**

The issues related to multicultural policy and practice in South Korea need a thorough ethnographic study in order to unveil the multiple and nuanced issues attached to educating children of recent immigrants. This paper illustrates that "serving the needs of children of immigrants" and "celebrating cultural differences" are typical policy responses to a sudden and rapid rise in ethnically and culturally diverse (multicultural) students. Moreover, the paper concludes that these policy responses generally lead to deficit thinking (Valencia

& Solórzano, 1997) and segregation and marginalization of the ethnic and culturally diverse students.

In addition, the paper establishes that the teachers are at the frontlines of implementing these multicultural policy initiatives and, with little training in theory and praxis as well as minimal administrative support, teachers are often isolated in their endeavors, which leads to frustrations with classroom management issues. It appeared as though the teachers were just surviving the day rather than developing robust curriculums and innovative pedagogies to meet the new and dynamic demands in the classroom.

I am suggesting that our Teacher Preparation Programs (TPP) need to prepare teachers who are "committed to working toward an understanding of how white supremacy, cis-heteropatriarchy, coloniality, ableism, environmental racism, and capitalism intersect to legitimate violence, knowledge, and power" (Palmer & Gardner, n.d.)**.** Indeed, TPPs that focus on social justice theory and praxis will develop critical, creative, and inquisitive educators who are prepared to create inclusive educational spaces, teach with love and compassion, and construct their own theories and pedagogies through an action research agenda (Davis, Clayton, & Broome 2018). It is my belief that when teachers are prepared in this manner, then the schools will be able to implement multicultural education policy that resembles "creating multicultural schools" and "striving for socially just (anti-oppressive) society" (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

In conclusion, I strongly believe that our teachers throughout the world are dedicated to the mission of educating all of our children. And in this time of mass migration, countries like South Korea and the United States will continue to witness a rise in the number of immigrants and refugees seeking work and asylum; many of them will be bringing their children with them or will give birth to children in the host country (see, www.migrationpolicy.org). Our schools will be one of the first public institutions to interact with these children of immigrants and their families, and therefore it is imperative that our teachers are well prepared to educate our new neighbors.

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[1]Multicultural (*damunhwa*) is a term used in South Korea to identify people who are not members of the dominant-majority ethnic group. These include immigrants and biracial/multiracial people. Moreover, Korean ethnics immigrating to Korea, mainly from China, are considered multicultural people. Throughout the paper, I use "children of immigrants" rather than "multicultural children" unless it is from a direct quote (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2002).

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