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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study examined two bilingual, ethnic-minority children in a developmentally appropriate kindergarten to discover how they worked and played in learning centers. A Vietnamese-Cambodian-American girl and an Indian-American boy were observed two to three times per week throughout the school year. The two children's interactions with other, mainly European-American, students were observed as the children engaged in activities in various learning centers. These centers focused on sand and water play, school readiness, housekeeping, listening to music and stories, discovery learning, block play, writing, art, and math. Additional data were collected through interviews of the two students, their parents, and educators, along with an analysis of student work, report cards, testing information, and classroom materials. The study found that the two children did not have positive social interactions in the learning centers. The Indian-American boy was usually dominated by the other students assigned to the centers. The Vietnamese-Cambodian-American girl usually attempted to dominate, but was swiftly stopped by the other children. Results suggest the need for making kindergarten programs more responsive to the needs of ethnic-minority children. (Contains 60 references. (MDM)

Cultural Conflict and Struggle: Working and Playing in Learning Centers

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Bilingual, ethnic-minority students, the fastest growing population in our nation's schools (Waggoner, 1988) have extremely high drop-out rates (Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990). Many researchers suggest that the dropout rates are related to the students' struggles to fit into the context of American classrooms (Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990). Their struggles are believed to occur because they must function at home and in school within at least two cultures as they develop their English literacy (Cummins, 1986) and often are unable to reconcile the differences between home and school cultures. Consequently, cultural conflict and struggle emerge and become evident in their social interactions (Au & Mason, 1981; Garcia, 1986; Derman-Sparks, 1991; Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990). Since there have been few studies which systematically observe and record the daily classroom experiences of bilingual, ethnic-minority children in the context of the American classroom (Piper, 1986; Dyson, 1989; Peter, 1992) their struggles are in need of explanation. Therefore, the purpose of my study was to observe two bilingual, ethnic-minority children in a developmentally appropriate kindergarten to discover how they work and play in learning centers.

Background of the Study

Peley's* family was from Cambodia and Vietnam. Raji's* family was from India. Both children were born in the United States and had been exposed to their home languages and the English language since birth. Early in the school year, Mrs. Starr*, their teacher, expressed concerns about the children's difficulties while working and

* pseudonym

playing in learning centers and other informal settings. She stated:

> Peley and Raji don't seem to enjoy the work and play in learning centers or other informal settings. Our centers encourage the children's beginning reading, writing, listening and speaking through fun activities. Peley and Raji are not making friends. I'm worried about their English literacy development.

Mrs. Starr considered literacy learning as a social process related to community building (Bloome & Green, 1982). The children were encouraged to socially interact during weekly thematic learning centers and related classroom activities in the half-day kindergarten program. Mrs. Starr reported that Peley seemed to turn away potential friends with her volatile behaviors and negative criticisms. Raji usually stood back and observed his classmates. When he attempted to interact, students responded negatively.

Mrs. Starr's uneasiness prompted me to spend the year studying the two children in the kindergarten program. The resulting information contributes to our understanding of two bilingual, ethnic-minority children's social interactions during work and play in learning centers and helps us explain other bilingual, ethnic-minority children's social interactions in similar classrooms.

Related Research

Social Interaction and Literacy Learning

A recent understanding of literacy learning, the sociocultural perspective, defines literacy development as a process involving social and cultural interactions at home and school (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Schiefflin & Cochran-Smith, 1984; Wells, 1986; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Dyson, 1989; Moll, 1992). Children become literate in their family, community and classroom cultures. Furthermore, social interactions within the classroom culture often demonstrate literacy learning

(Kantor, Miller & Fernie, 1992). However, research suggests that because bilingual, ethnic-minority children have home cultures different from the school culture, they may not understand social interactions within the classroom culture(Au & Mason, 1981; Derman-Sparks, 1989). Additionally, the moment they begin to read and write in the school culture, the cultures of their homes affect their success or failure (Clay, 1971; Verhoeven, 1987; Swain, 1988; Reyhner & Garcia, 1989). Consequently, cultural conflict often occurs and literacy learning may be adversely affected (Cummins, 1986; Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990).

Work and Play Learning Centers

In early childhood classrooms which emphasize literacy learning as a social phenomenon for community building (Bloome & Green, 1982; Teale & Martinez, 1989), developmentally appropriate learning centers are typically created by the teachers (Fein, 1975 ; Vandenberg, 1981; Day, 1988; Gump, 1989; McKee, 1990). Play in the centers may be discovery-oriented and/or teacher-guided. Both allow children exploration and choice (Bergen, 1988). On the other hand, play defined as work in learning centers is usually a form of rote learning which is designed as a game and is a specifically directed, task-oriented activity (Bergen, 1988).

Children are expected to participate in the work and play activities in learning centers which promote reading, writing, listening and speaking and encourage connections between home and school (Neuman & Roskos, 1992; Kantor, Miller & Fernie, 1992)). The teacher is indirectly involved and acts as facilitator allowing the freedom to monitor and evaluate the children and the setting for optimal development (Day, 1988; McKee, 1990).

Euro-American children tend to be oriented toward competition and individual achievement during work and play settings (Anderson, 1988). While children of other

cultures may often approach work and play with a sense of humor and as social and cooperative in nature (Little-Soldier, 1989). Furthermore, even in pretend play, children bring cultural perspectives and family roles to the setting (Roskos, 1990).

Classroom Discourse

Since the culture of the classroom is usually determined by the classroom teacher who acts as a representative of the dominant culture (Edwards & Mercer, 1989), the research on early childhood, bilingual, ethnic-minority students has focused on explicit instruction of teacher/student, question/answer discourse and acceptable classroom learning behaviors (Kleifgen, 1990; Place & Becker, 1991). The children in these studies appear to learn the appropriate discourse. However, differences in classroom discourse and home language appears to deter student learning (Au & Mason, 1981; Heath, 1983; Philips, 1983). Since the teacher is not directly involved on a regular basis at learning centers, study of the children's discourse in the centers may be as revealing as the discourse recorded in other informal classroom settings with bilingual, ethnic-minority children (Piper, 1986; Dyson, 1989; Peter, 1992). Therefore, the observation and recording of dialogue in learning centers could offer important information concerning social interactions and literacy learning for bilingual ethnic-minority children.

Methodology

Similar to the African-American children in Rist's The Invisible Children (1978), Peley and Raji struggled in the dominant classroom culture. Similar to the teacher in Kidder's Among Schoolchildren (1989), it was not in Mrs. Starr's Eurocentric experiences to consider other cultures. In order to understand the children's struggles, I chose ethnographic research as the methodology which allowed me to observe and record data in a natural tic setting. The year's "thick description" (Geertz, 1973)

presented information in a manner similar to a feature length film representation (Rist, 1978) which revealed a story of cultural conflict and struggle during work and play activities in learning centers.

Focal Informants

Peley's serious brown face and almond-shaped, dark eyes were accented with a swishing, long, black pony tail tied with an ornate gold and glitter clasp of Southeast Asian origins. Average in height and weight for the typical kindergarten student, she would often be dressed in a size-too-small, stone-washed jeans, dingy, turtle-neck , cotton shirt and worn, velcro-strapped sneakers.

Raji's eyes were the first characteristic noticed when he slowly walked into the classroom. They were dark saucers with thick and silky lashes and eyebrows which dominated his small, evenly featured, black, satin face. He was smaller than the other children and his snug black cotton trousers revealed white socks and grey velcro-strapped sneakers. His black and red heavy winter sweater was standard attire, no matter what the season or temperature.

Peley and Raji appeared physically different in this classroom community where white skin, blond hair and blue eyes were the norm for the classmates and the kindergarten teachers. Their clothing also contrasted with their classmates. The female students had numerous colorful coordinated outfits resembling little women. The male classmates wore brand name trousers and jeans with jerseys of famous sport teams. Peley and Raji wore the same two or three sets of clothing throughout the school year.

Theoretical Framework and DataCollection

Symbolic interactionism served as the theoretical framework based on the premise that the way people act depends on their interpretation of a situation and the

meaning they give it. The meaning is derived from social interactions and modified through social process (Blumer, 1969). I became part of the kindergarten classroom environment and experienced "prolonged intense social interaction while collecting data systematically and unobtrusively" (Bogdan, 1972). A year of participant observations took place in the school two to three times a week during three hour sessions. Field notes were also recorded after each two to three hour visit in the child's home. In depth, unstructured interviews of parents, educators and the two children were included, as well as documents, such as student work, report cards, testing information and classroom materials.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing and continuous from the beginning of data collection, using the constant comparative methodology (Glaser, 1978). Data were read and reread for preliminary themes used in the analysis. As more data were considered, themes were refined to form the final coding categories. Recurring patterns offered explanations for the children's classroom experiences which were grounded in the evidence (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of their classroom world. Results of the study demonstrated the children's struggles in the dialogue and social interactions in learning centers.

Work and Play in Learning Centers

I observed many scenes during learning centers which depicted Raji's and Peley's social struggles. The examples which follow were typical of the children's unsuccessful experiences during work and play .

Patterns of interaction at the learning centers in this kindergarten program vividly demonstrated the two children's struggles. The nine learning centers had a weekly nursery rhyme or alphabet theme. Each center had a teacher assigned task or

work, which was to be completed first. Then the children were encouraged to play, which was defined by the teachers as any child-initiated activity using materials at the center. The children created all types of scenerios individually, in pairs or with the group. Imaginations and experimentation produced dramatizations, unique art and architecture, mechanical wonders, stories and poems. Three centers were located in each of three classrooms and the children rotated daily to different assigned centers. Teachers frequently changed the composition of the groups consisting of four or five children in each learning center. Since the teachers also instructed formal reading groups during learning center time, they expected the children to work and play cooperatively in a positive manner. The children usually asked and answered each other's questions and seemed to enjoy the centers. Nevertheless, Peley and Raji did not have positive social interactions in learning centers. Raji was usually dominated by the other students assigned to the centers. Peley usually attempted to dominate, but was swiftly stopped by the other children. Their kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Starr, was unaware of the two children's struggles.

Sand and Water Center

This popular center was a large plastic and wooden 2'x 4' table on wheels. The children worked and played with plastic containers or toys related to the weekly theme. At the beginning of the school year, Peley would often scream and laugh as she poured water out of a jug while describing bathroom functions. She tried to get the children's attention, by saying, "Isn't this funny? HeeHee!" She would smash castles, splash water and generate group anger. The children would call for help or ignore her. By the end of the school year, her behavior was not as overt. Instead she would quietly accomplish the destruction of her own creations without calling attention to herself.

Raji would work and play quietly in a corner of the table. He might make a suggestion, such as, "Let's make a water fall," or "Let's put a tower on that." He was either ignored or emphatically rebuked, "We don't need that! " or "No, that's not right!" Raji would stay in his corner alone while the other three children created, dramatized and conversed.

Readiness Center

The readiness center contained a large variety of games which focused on grapheme-phoneme connections, phonological awareness and fine motor coordination. Students also studied puzzles, shoe-tying and use of tools, such as wrenches, screw drivers and mallots. Peley again met difficulties with her social interactions. She would see when a puzzle was being put together incorrectly and attempt to help. "You do it wrong!" or I can help!" If a student in the group confronted her loudly with, "I did it right!" or"No! It's not your turn!", the resulting verbal commotion would signal the need for a reprimand from the teaching assistant. Peley would then retreat with a pout and not continue to work or play. At times she would even complain about an physical ailment and the assistant would give her special attention.

In another instance, Peley's struggles were related to her name. When the theme for the week was the letter "H," the game was to say words with the letter in it. Peley exclaimed, "I have two H's in my name. Kristie responded, "No you don't! Say your name!" Peley answered, "Peley Lim Chinh, Peley Lim Chinh! C-H-I-N-H!" Kristie added, "No you don't! I don't hear Hu, Hu, Hu!" Peley withdrew with frowning face, folded arms and head bent. The other children ignored her and continued playing the "H" word game.

Raji also had difficultiues at the center with certain fine motor tasks. By the end of the school year, he was the only child who could not tie his shoes. He wore velcro-

strap sneakers and seemed unaware of the importance of tying shoes in this kindergarten program. When the tie games appeared, he would urgently ask to go to the bathroom or go back to the classroom. However, he patiently worked with a screw driver and wrench and could spend twenty minutes putting together one or two plastic pieces with large plastic bolts while his classmates easily became frustrated and quit.

When it was "M" week, Raji was introduced to a matching game. There were sixteen square cards, 2" x2" with pictures on the front making eight pairs. The cards were scrambled and placed face down by the teaching assistant. The students were instructed to turn over two matching cards. Each child had a turn. If the cards made a pair, the child would win the pair. If not, the cards were placed face down for the next student. Raji's immediate quiet response was, "This is a memory game. We can win. Remember the card and the picture and where it is." His thoughtful remark went unheard; he proceeded to win the game easily. His victory went unrecognized as the children continued competing without him.

Housekeeping Center

This area of the classroom had a child-sized kitchen as well as dolls and a crib. Baby clothes, table linens, dishes, pots and pans, plastic food and cleaning equipment were included. Children would dramatize ironing, cooking, serving, eating, washing clothes and dishes, sweeping and tending babies. The usual talk was, "What do we have for dinner?" or "Left overs again!" or "Dinner is ready!" or "The baby is awake!" or I'd better iron." R aji would sit at the kitchen table or stand back and watch the students role-play mother, father, sister or brother. Raji took the role of the male in his Indian home.

There was also a full-length, ruffled apron in the broom closet which the designated mother wore. Peley would insist on being the mother. She would bustle

about bumping into students with her self-assigned tasks. Student responses would be, "Stop Peley! I'm cooking!" or "It's my turn to iron, now!" or "You have to stop!" Peley would ignore them and proceed with her frantic schedule. She took the role of person in charge of domestic duties and seemed to perceive this center as serious work. This was the female role in her Southeast Asian home.

Listening Center

This center was at a round table equipped with earphones, cassette recorder, storybooks, paper and art pencils. Children would sit in their chairs around the table and follow along in the storybooks as they listened with their earphones. There were sing-alongs and choral reading. The students would smile at one another and sing. A word study or drawing activitiy would follow. If students had problems with directions or the the equipment, they would help each other. The students would smile at one another while listening to the stories. Raji would listen attentively, follow the directions and successfully complete the activities. He said, "I like the stories and songs." However, the other children at the center did not share their nodding, and smiling during the sing-alongs and stories with Raji.

On the other hand, Peley would appear to be listening at the center, but would seem to be confused when completing the activities. She would say, "What do we do? I don't like this." She would copy a neighbor's work quickly and leave the center for the bathroom or the drinking fountain. When asked why she didn't like this, she pointed to the earphones and said, "I don't like them on my ears. They talk fast."

Discovery Center

This was the setting for the science lesson which was also integrated into the weekly theme. Insects, endangered species, germination, circulatory system, human senses and outer space were some of the topics examined. A teaching assistant

would help a group of children follow the initial directions for a specific task. Then the children would be left to complete the task. There were exchanges of ideas and positive comments among the children. Again Peley's and Raji's social interactions could be described as struggles.

An example was witnessed while Peley and Raji and four other children were drawing and labeling the daytime sky. Raji drew an intricate rocket ship with an attachment resembling a lunar landing module. He focused on the details of his drawing without conversing. Peley looked around, asked questions and commented to Veronica, "You made flowers. They don't go in the sky." Veronica responded, "I like flowers." Then Peley looked at Linda's drawing and saw her making an arc across her paper. Peley began to copy and Linda exclaimed, "You can't make a rainbow! I am!" Peley immediately turned her arc into something resembling a half circle. Linda then asked, "Peley, what is that?!" Peley answered, "I made a rock with a face." Veronica and Linda chided, "A rock isn't in the sky!" Peley countered with quiet exasperation, "I don't care!" Linda continued, "I like your sun, Matt." Matt responded with, "Wow! a rainbow. Nice job Veronica!"

Block Center

This center's activities took place on the "pretty red rug." Large and small wooden blocks were used to build structures related to weekly themes. Often, step by step directions were written on large sheets of primary paper and posted on a side shelf. The teacher assistant would come by and read the instructions to the group and help the children begin the task.

Both Peley and Raji encountered social struggles in this center. Early in the school year, Peley would make letters or shapes with the blocks and attempt to chat with members of the group. Her face would be an inch or two away from theirs as she

spoke loudly, "I saw you on the bus, Brian. Do you know me? " Brian would shake his head in the positve and move away from her. She would continue while positioning her face near his again, "Do you want to play peek?" She would then duck behind a wall of blocks before he answered. She would make loud sounds, "Yuck! Yuck!" Hee! Heee!" Sometimes a student would respond, "Peley, don't do that! You hurt my ears!" Peley would withdraw to the wall and whimper about a painful leg or sick stomach. Later in the year, she tried to direct the building process. She would don a hard hat and begin her orders, "First make walls and road. The doorway go here for trucks." Occasionally a child might listen to her commands, but usually the children would, say, "No! you're not the boss!" or ignore her as they built their own creations.

When Raji entered the block center, he would begin selecting and carrying blocks to his building site. He would hold two large blocks under each arm and say, "Look, I am strong! I am a strong man!" No one would comment. Raji would build and dramatize on the edge of the rug, away from the other children. One day, he built an intricate tower of large and small wooden and plastic blocks. As he stood up to view it from a distance, Johnny toppled the tower with a gleeful expression on his face. As the other children watched, Raji asked in a tone of quiet exasperation, "Why did you do that? " Without a reply, Johnny turned away and rejoined the group. Raji sat down on the edge of the rug and began the reconstruction. He was unable to complete his tower before it was time to leave the center.

Writing Center

The writing center also posed difficulties for Peley and Raji. Peley seemed to lose patience with the activities. An example of this occurred one morning while she stood at the table and traced her initials from wooden 3" x 6" letters. The other students sat at the table, traced their initials and decorated the letters with magic markers, glitter and

glue. Peley colored her letters with magic markers, observed the other children's work and said, "I'm done. I don't like this. It stinks! I don't want to do this any more. My hands are sticky, yucky!" The other students ignored her and continued to work. They discussed their letters and decorations. "I think I'm using that blue glitter." or "I like the silver." or " OOooo, this is pretty!" or "I like yours." Peley proceeded to the drawing easel and left her initials behind.

Raji seemed to work in earnest at the writing center, rarely interacting with the group. Whenever shaping letters with clay or tracing and decorating letters, he looked neither right nor left. He repeatedly used shades of pink and purple to create delicate flower desgns on the letters. One day while the children were making the letter ess with clay, Raji began talking about snakes near a friend's house. "My friend has snakes and snake holes around his house. They look like ess." The children responded immediately, "No! snakes!" "Snakes around the house?!" "Stop! We don't have snakes!" Raji did not have the opportunity to explain that the snakes he had seen were around his cousin's home in India where he visited annually.

Art Center

The art center was two double easels with paint trays and a multimedia table with scissors, paste and brushes. The assignments were both direct and indirect instructional activities with written and oral directions and open-ended questions. The children donned smocks fashioned from old frayed men's dress shirts. The children studied each other's work, commented and sometimes even added to each other's pictures with ideas and brush strokes. Raji and Peley rarely conversed with the other children during art center. No matter what the activity, Peley would find a way to include a drawing or painting of herself. She would stand alone humming at the easel, "This is me. This is me. This is me! " She repeatedly created a figure of a tall,

lithe woman in a long purple gown covered with crescent moons and stars. The woman had a long black pony tail and green face. Her eyes were black slanted lines and her mouth was a straight red line.

When Raji was asked what he liked to do best in school, he always responded with, "I like to draw. I like the easel." He usually was so absorbed in the art or writing centers that he was the last to finish his work. He also often drew a brown man with pronounced muscles on his arms and legs, large brown eyes and an obvious smile. He would comment to himself, "This is my muscle man. He is strong."

Math Center

The math center was located at a table where children focused on quantitative terms, counting and number symbols. They used manipulatives while learning sets, shapes and money. Peley and Raji excelled in the math games. They would quickly learn and be first to complete a task. This aggrevated social interactions. Peley would tell or show others what to do and how to do it in an abrasive manner. "No, it's this way! You make two here, not there!" The students usually turned away and ignored her comments.

Raji would finish the game or task and begin making designs with his manipulatives. The children would berate him with, "You are supposed to count your acorns! Did you make the sets? " Raji would be reported to the teacher, " Raji's not doing his work!" The teacher would come to check on him. Raji would demonstrate his work and then return to his designs.

Summary

The discourse during work and play in learning centers reflected consistently negative social interactions. Both children usually attempted to involve other children or become involved with the other children, but they were consistently rebuffed.

Neither child was able to develop friendships in the kindergarten classroom during the school year. All of the children in the class had a acquired at least one friend by the end of the school year. Mrs. Starr was proud to explain that all of the children labelled in her class with special needs had learned to fit into the program except Peley and Raji:

> Johnny with autistic behaviors, Linda and Jamie, medicated for hyperactivity, Ashlin, our African-American child and Kristie, with uncontrollable tantrums have made friends and are well on their way to bceoming enthusiastic literacy learners. Peley and Raji are still having problems and need help during the summer.

The teachers and teaching assistants were unaware of the typical social interactions experienced by Peley and Raji. Peley and Raji never made specific complaints; the children in the groups rarely called attention to the interactions. Occasionally the staff puzzled over the fact the Peley and Raji were not making friends, but they attributed their behaviors to personal and family characteristics. "Raji is so shy! He needs to learn how to talk and play with the other children. I wonder if his parents encourage him to make friends? "

Raji's father speaks English, but he doesn't seem to understand our program. He took Raji out of school for two months to visit relatives in India. It's difficult for Raji to have to catch up!"

Peley's family doesn't speak English. They don't understand what is going on in school."

"Peley is voliatile. She has real problems. She needs to learn to get along with others. The family seems to stay to themselves when they come to school functions."

At the end of the school year, standardized testing by the reading teacher,

ESOL teacher and classroom teacher produced recommendations for the summer literacy maintenance program at school and summer day camp. The teachers believed the children needed help in maintaining their English literacy learning during the summer months. They also believed the children needed contact with other children to practice socialization skills. Finally, the staff strongly suggested that Peley and Raji continue receiving special help from the ESOL teacher.

Discussion/Implications

The purpose of my ethnographic study was to record observations in the kindergarten community as Peley and Raji interacted with students during work and play in learning centers. Early in the school year, Mrs. Starr was concerned about Peley's and Raji's difficulties with social interactions because she feared that this might hinder their English literacy learning. She expected all of the children to fit into the kindergarten literacy learning program as they participated in the classroom community. Through small groups and pairs, she encouraged discussion and sharing and developed lessons about friendship, self-esteem and personal feelings. Since Mrs. Starr was unaware of the dialogue during informal settings, she could not understand why Peley and Raji did not seem to be enjoying the program.

The results of this study are consistent with the research which suggests that bilingual, ethnic-minority children have great difficulties fitting into the context of American classrooms (Au & Mason, 1981; Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990). Their struggles are believed to occur because they must function within at least two cultures represented in the home and school as they develop their literacies (Hakuta, 1986). It is also consistent with the research which demonstrates that European-American children's work and play may be difficult for students of other cultures to understand and vica versa (Anderson, 1988). Finally, a major finding in this study is that teachers

must become more aware of the informal discourse in learning centers, since it may represent classroom cultural conflict and struggle. This study contributes to the understanding of bilingual, ethnic-minority children's cultural conflict and struggles in a kindergarten program. Findings from this study raise issues which support certain recommendations for literacy learning in multicultural settings.

The results of this study demonstrate that Peley and Raji were unable to achieve positive social interactions during informal work and play literacy learning activities. Discrimination against their physical appearance, dress and cultural differences may have contributed to the negative interactions, since children, by the age three have developed prejudice about differences in color, dress and culture (Derman-Sparks, 1991). There was no study of diversity in the learning centers, since the kindergarten teachers expected Peley and Raji to assimilate into the school culture. Often schools ignore differences, believing colorblindness is the way to teach tolerance. However, researchers suggest that acknowledging and celebrating differences helps to eliminate stereotyping in classrooms (Gougis, 1986; Ogbu, 1987; Ortiz, 1988; Cummins, 1986; Pereell, 1989).

Recommendations for this classroom setting and others like it could be implemented within the existing program (Thomson, 1993). Peley's and Raji's skin, eyes and hair were unusual in the predominantly white, blond and blue-eyed school population. Their clothing also was not typical in color, style and fit. Since the study of colors and similarities and differences are part of many kindergarten programs, the celebration of our colorful world and its colorful people could be emphasized on a daily basis. Multicultural crayons teach the children that "white" skin is rare. The crayons demonstrate the many shades of skin color and that "white" skin is a misnomer. Children are also curious about skin colors, facial features and hair texture

(Nieto, 1992). At the beginning of the school year, these could be studied and discussed in centers and other informal settings as children draw pictures of themselves. Raji drew himself as a the brown muscle man; Peley created herself as the elegant Asian lady in long purple gown which is a typical picture for Asian girls to draw. Neither child had an opportunity to discuss their pictures with the class.

Frequently teachers discriminate unconsciously about what they expect from children of lower SES and ethnic-minorities (Figueroa, 1989). Minorities in schools are often placed in the lowest tracks because of evaluation procedures. Tests and the tester's interpretations of the results may be culturally biased (Hakuta, 1986; Delgado-Gaitian, 1989). Peley and Raji were placed in ESOL class during kindergarten and also recommended to continue in first grade because of their scores on an English proficiency test. Yet they both could read and write stories in English as well or better than most of their classmates. Both children were concisered social problems, since the teachers had no understanding of work and play behaviors inother cultures.

Recommendations for this program and others like it would encourage authentic assessment of the children's reading, writing, listening and speaking with materials which reflected the children's culture, interests and abilities. Peley and Raji spoke other languages which could have been shared formally and informally. Additionally, literature related to their cultures would have added meaning to their learning and enriched the classroom community.

Recommendations for this program and programs like it would use the kindergarten daily sharing time as a means to encourage children to listen and learn about other cultures (Banks, 1988). Peley's Asian jewelry and Raji's knowledge of India acquired during his annual family visits could have been topics for the celebration of their home cultures and languages.

Recommendations for this program and others like it would encourage connecting home and school. Informal visits in bilingual, ethnic-minority homes and in school would encourage the communication necessary for connecting home and school cultures (Faltis, 1993). Peley's and Raji's play in the housekeeping center may have been better understood if there had been knowledge of family roles in the home. Volunteer translators may also be available and would aid parents in the understanding of the school program and would aid teachers in the understanding of the parents needs . Developing a rapport with the parents would allow cultural sharing, and could have given insights into Raji's and Peley's social interactions for a more complete understanding of their English literacy learning (Banks, 1988).

A Final Word

This study implies that schools may actually interefere with children's literacy learning if educators to not work to understand the diverse backgrounds of children in classrooms. Educators often chose to avoid contact with individuals of different cultures, thus the burden of interpretation of the school culture is placed on the ethnic-minority students. Schools must take the first steps toward connecting with the children's cultures (Jacob & Sanday, 1976), since students must not be required to sacrifice their culture for school success (Rodriguez, 1982; Hoffman, 1989; Tan, 1992). Furthermore, teacher education programs must prepare educators with the means to enhance the literacy learning of bilingual, ethnic-minority students, the fastest growing school population (Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990).

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