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Citation

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Table of Contents

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess and develop intercultural competence among early childhood educators. Intercultural competence is an integral part of creating a welcoming environment for all students in a classroom. It is not only the acknowledgement of individual differences, but the acceptance and celebration of what makes each person an individual and member of a cultural group. This project assessed the intercultural competence of 24 early childhood educators and staff at a child development center in the mid-south. Participants completed the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) as pre- and post-assessments. In between assessments, our team conducted a cultural competence training workshop to advance the educators' intercultural development skills. From the training and conversations with the educators, we provided diversity books and toys that could be implemented into the classroom. On average, the intercultural competence increased significantly over time.

Keywords: intercultural competence, intercultural development inventory assessment, diversity

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the intercultural competence of early childhood educators. During recent years, the discussion of intercultural competence in the school system and workplace has grown exponentially. This may be due to the fact that diversity in schools is on the rise. In 2014, the United States' public schools reached a "minority majority milestone" in which the number of Latino, Asian, and African American students have surpassed the number of White students (Drexel, p. 1). The rise in diversity means that there will be more responsibility on childcare centers to not only prepare children for the diversity in future schooling, but in the real world as well. Childcare will need to prepare children with the necessary skills, attitude, and knowledge to become successful members of a diverse world (Ingram, p. 1). The reason that there is a huge emphasis on early childhood is because children begin stereotyping and profiling during this time. "Children begin to notice differences and evaluate others at a very early age. By the age of three, children begin to show signs of being influenced by societal norms and biases and may exhibit "pre-prejudice" toward others on the basis of gender or race or being differently abled (Derman-Sparks, p. 2). These studies have helped toward raising awareness as well as making these environments more welcoming for everyone. However, there is little to no research that has been done to examine the prevalence of diversity inclusion before entering grade school. Unfortunately, this is a population that is often overlooked by researchers due to the misconception that children between the ages of birth and five years do not understand cultural identity. Many people believe that because several of the children in this age group are not able to use language like adults, then they cannot be affected by monoethnic toys or non-representative posters. This is important to study because intercultural competence is at the core of most social injustices discussed in the media. Issues

such as racism, stereotyping, and discrimination are due to the lack of focus on cultural competency development, and yet most people have prejudicial beliefs and attitudes (Marteev & Merz, 2014). To some degree, we all lack intercultural competence. It is not something that you are born with, rather it is a process that continues over the course of a lifetime (Marteev & Merz, 2014).

Literature Review

Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is an awareness of one's own cultural identity and the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures (Deardorff, 2011). The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI; Hammer, 2008) was developed to measure individuals' lenses of cultural similarities and differences along a continuum from monocultural to intercultural worldviews. This instrument has been tested on diverse (ethnic and national) populations; data from various studies have shown high reliability and construct validity, and no significant correlation with a social-desirability scale (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman., 2003; Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto,Yershova, & DeJaeghere, 2003). The IDI is an appropriate instrument for assessing educators because of the nature of the developmental process that can be supported through learning and experiences.

A typical way to conceptualize intercultural competency using the IDI is along a continuum of five stages (The Intercultural Development Continuum, IDC; Hammer, 1998): *Denial, Polarization, Minimization, Acceptance* and *Adaptation*. *Denial* (approximately 3% of people) reflects limited experience and capability understanding and responding appropriately to cultural differences in values, beliefs, perceptions, emotional responses, and behaviors. This is when a person might recognize observable cultural differences, but may not notice the less

surface level differences. For example, they may see that the food a culture eats is different, but they may be blind to deeper cultural differences such as parenting styles. This group of people may have the mentality that people of other cultures are just like them (Kruse et. al, pp.2).

Polarization (approximately 16% of people) uses an "us vs. them" mindset either through Defense (seeing cultural differences frequently as divisive and threatening to one's own way of doing things) and Reversal (valuing other cultural practices while denigrating one's own culture group). An example of this could be the belief that "my way" is better or "their way" is better (Kruse et. al, pp.2).

Minimization (approximately 65% of people) is highlighting commonalities too much that can mask a deeper understanding of cultural differences (i.e., color blindness, "I don't see color"). A consequence of this developmental stage is that this thought process tends to lack a deeper acknowledgement and appreciation of cultural differences. They tend to place more value on commonalities than differences and may act on this assumption. This can cause a failure to recognize minor differences that affect how a person's behaviors could be interpreted (Kruse et. al, pp.2).

Acceptance (approximately 15% of people) recognizes and appreciates patterns of cultural differences and commonality in one's own and other cultures, but with the inability to adapt to cultural differences. People in this orientation are also able to view commonalities between their own culture and other cultures and celebrate them as well.

Lastly, *Adaptation* (approximately 2% of people) is when one has a deep cultural bridging across diverse communities using an increased repertoire of cultural frameworks and practices in navigating cultural commonalities and differences. Adaptation is the highest level of cultural competence one can reach. The people that fall into this category are able to shift

cultural perspective and adapt their behavior when necessary. They have mastered the skill of adapting their behavior in a culturally appropriate and authentic manner. This is the level in which everyone should attempt to reach if they intend on being culturally competent.

For intercultural competence to develop, three major domains must be addressed: (1) identity development (i.e., self-awareness), (2) learning about cultural differences, and (3) bridging or adapting behavior with different groups. Intercultural understanding encompasses both cognitive and affective domains (Hill, 2006). The cognitive aspect of intercultural understanding comprises knowledge about one's own identity and culture as well as learning about others who are different (Hill, 2006). It also includes knowledge about the similarities and differences between cultures.

Intercultural Competence in Curriculum

Many people believe that cultural competence can only be taught in specific classes in school. For example, diversity may be covered in K-12 courses such as history, geography, and literature. However, intercultural competence can, and should, be incorporated into every aspect of education. A study done in Germany examined how intercultural competence can be taught through sports in gym classes using knowledge competence, methods competence, social competence, self-competence, and competence in school development as the five sub teaching categories of competencies (Grimminger, 2011). The physical education teachers were shown a thirty-minute video about the opportunities and myths of intercultural learning in sports for the teachers' own knowledge. The video discussed the assimilation and segregation tendencies of German sports and then the teachers had a twenty-minute group session on how to incorporate intercultural learning in their lesson plans. This study proved that diversity and cultural competence can be taught in even the most obscure topics. Sports are only one example in which

intercultural competence can be taught in schools. Words in different languages can be taught around the building, foods from around the world can be served during lunch, and the people in math word problems can come from diverse backgrounds.

One issue about teaching intercultural competence in classrooms is that educators are not taught how to discuss these sensitive topics. For example, a teacher may not be able to teach what they, themselves, have not been taught. Yet, this still occurs. In fact, some English-as-a-second-language teachers never receive formal preparation to become that type of teacher. Yet in 2006, it was estimated that over 14 million U.S. *K*-12 students had a primary language of something other than English (Garcia, Gal, Abry, Taylor, & Granger, 2018). This may indicate that students are not only receiving a proper education, but there is a level of understanding and respect that is not met. Students whose first language is not English will need tools provided to them that English native speakers may not possess. And if these teachers are not taught these tools, then they will not be able to provide them.

Another obstacle of teaching intercultural competence in schools is tackling how White Supremacy is ingrained in our classrooms. A literature analysis discovered a link between racial consciousness and behavior of White faculty in the classroom, as well as White self-interest being an influence on this relationship. The analysis studied 6 self-identified White faculty members from one university. The participants consisted of a wide range of rankings in the university including tenured professors, some on yearly contracts, and some on tenure track. Each faculty member went through an initial interview that was approximately 90 to 120 minutes. After this, they had 2 to 3 classroom observations and a 90-minute follow-up interview. The findings indicated that the amount of academic freedom a faculty member had directly influenced whether or not they discussed risky topics in their course. Faculty with yearly

contracts felt as though they did not have as much academic freedom as those with tenure. They explained that they felt it necessary to "stay within the confines" of their key role as a teacher simply to maintain their position in the school (Haynes, 2017, p. 91). Faculty on contracts avoided discussing racism in hopes of renewing their contract. The authors of this study believed teachers may not be discussing racism in the classroom because of their own assumptions based on race; thus, they were abandoning the needs of their minority students, reinforcing White racial knowledge, and dismissing the effects of racism to maintain White innocence (Haynes, 2017). This raises a serious issue given that 79% of all teachers in the US identify as White and that the majority say that they have not been prepared to address the emotionally and socially charged issues that arise in their classes (Haynes, 2017).

The Current Study

The current study examined the intercultural competence of educators at a child development center focused on early childhood development, specifically with children aged 8 weeks to 5 years old (pre-Kindergarten). The goals were to investigate their current cultural competence, to then train them and provide additional tools to further their cultural competence, to provide items for the classroom that promote diversity, and finally to post-assess their cultural competence and if it changed over time. The research questions were: (1) What is the average intercultural competence of early childhood educators?; and (2) Is there notable change in the educators' intercultural competence between the pre- and post-assessment based on cultural competence training?

Method

Procedure/ Participants

Data came from 24 early childhood educators and staff at a child development center in the mid-south. The majority of the participants identified as white women with a bachelor's degree in child development or related field. The mission of this center is three-fold: to provide an early childhood facility for children from eight weeks to five years; to serve as a teaching laboratory for college students studying child development, and to serve as a research facility for faculty and graduate students. The center is accredited by the National Association for Education of Young Children, while also being a member of this national organization. The minimum requirements to be a lead educator at the center include: a bachelor's degree with an emphasis in child development or something similar from an accredited institution, at least two years of experience teaching young children in some kind of setting, a member of an early childhood organization, and must be CPR certified. The requirements to be an assistant teacher are a little less strict. To have this position a degree is not required; however, they must complete a training process.

For this project, all educators volunteered to participate and IRB was deemed expedited by the primary institution of data collection. In December 2019, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessment was sent to each teacher via email and educators were given one week to complete the assessment. As an incentive, the educators were awarded a $30 Walmart gift card for completing the pre-assessment. In January 2020, a 3-hour training workshop was held during the educators' professional development day by two licensed IDI administers from the research team. During the presentation, intercultural competence theories and definitions were reviewed, as well as research on implicit bias. During the training, the group average, as well as each teacher, were provided their IDI results from the assessment. The overall group results were then discussed as well as what it meant to belong in each development orientation,

and some steps that can be taken to increase intercultural competence. This presentation was adapted to the needs of the group while also providing them with information from a standpoint in which none of them had any knowledge on intercultural competence. It was done this way to ensure that each educator understood the basics of the discussion. Following this, the educators were asked to walk around every classroom in the center to look for items that promote diversity or books that had a variety of cultural representation. The next part was that the educators were asked to create lists of items that promote diversity that they wish to see in their classrooms. This assisted our team with the purchasing of new toys and items in February 2020 (i.e., books on gender, disability, race/ethnicity) that were implemented into the classroom. Finally, the post-assessment was administered in March 2020; educators were again incentivized with $30 Walmart gift cards to participate in the IDI assessment. The pre- and post-results were analyzed in order to see if educators' intercultural competence increased significantly over three months.

Measures

IDI Assessment. Educators completed the Intercultural development Inventory (IDI) once at the beginning of the study and then again at the end of the study. The IDI is a cross-cultural assessment of intercultural competence used by companies, organizations, and schools all over the world. The assessment is available in 17 different languages and has been psychometrically tested, indicating it is strong in validity and reliability. In order to retain validity, "psychometric scale construction protocols were followed to ensure that the IDI is not culturally biased or susceptible to social desirability effects (IDI website)." The assessment consists of 50 multiple choice questions that can be answered online and typically takes 15 to 20 minutes to finish. A continuum was created that extends from a monocultural mindset to a multicultural mindset in order to scale where an individual or group is in achieving cultural

competence. Items include questions regarding intercultural experiences in terms of participants'
(a) cross-cultural goals, (b) challenges that they confront while navigating cultural differences,
(c) intercultural incidents that they face when they encounter cultural differences, and (d) ways
they address those cultural differences. The IDI ranges from a score of 50 to 145 that individuals
are scored on for their Developmental Orientation (DO), which was used for this study. DO
indicates a participant's primary orientation toward cultural differences and commonalities along
a continuum. The DO is the perspective that the person is most likely to use in situations where
cultural differences and commonalities need to be bridged. Scores of 55 to 70 indicate *Denial*, 70
to 85 indicate *Polarization*, 85 to 115 indicate *Minimization*, 115 to 130 indicate *Acceptance*, and
130 to 145 indicate *Adaptation*.

   Perceived orientation (PO) versus developmental orientation (DO). The IDI assessment
not only asks questions to determine cultural competence, but also asks a series of questions to
determine what level of cultural competence one believes that they have achieved. Both of these
are presented to the participant in their IDI profile. A person's developmental orientation is the
perspective they are most likely to use when in situations where "cultural difference and
commonalities need to be bridged (IDI, pp. 5)." One's perceived orientation and developmental
orientation can fall anywhere on the continuum.

   Orientation Gap. The difference between a person's perceived orientation and their
developmental orientation is called the orientation gap. If the gap is over seven points, it is
considered to show a significant difference between the perceived orientation and the
developmental orientation. The larger that gap, the more likely the assessment taker will be
shocked with their results because they overestimated their cultural competence. People are more
likely to overestimate their cultural competence than underestimate it.

Plan of analysis

The data were first analyzed as a group to measure the intercultural competence of the educators as a whole, examining the average Development Orientation (DO). Then, we compared the pre- and post-assessments of the group DO's to determine if there was a significant change within the three months of taking the assessment, using a *t*-test.

Results

For the pre-IDI assessment, the average development orientation (DO) for 24 educators and staff was 96.29, indicating most were in *Minimization*. Within each DO, 8 educators were in *Polarization*, 13 were in *Minimization*, and 1 was in *Acceptance,* and 2 were in *Adaptation*. For the post-IDI assessment, the average DO for 21 educators and staff was 101.89 (also *Minimization*). Within each DO, 4 were in *Polarization*, 11 were in *Minimization*, and 6 were in *Acceptance*. Using a paired t-test, the group significantly increased in their DO, $t = 2.26$, $p < .05$.

Discussion

There was a significant increase in the IDI assessment over the course of only four months for the early childhood educators who participated in a training related to intercultural competence. Overall, most educators scored in the *Minimization* orientation, which is the most common orientation among adults and comprises 65% of the population (IDI®). When people are in *Minimization*, they may focus too much on commonalities, while ignoring cultural differences with the mindset of "I do not see color" or "We are so similar". In order to advance beyond the *Minimization* orientation to the *Acceptance* orientation, educators need educational opportunities which aid them in understanding concepts regarding power and privilege, as well as other crucial differences between cultures.

Implications

Increasing intercultural competence is essential to educators. Therefore, it is important that educators for all ages systematically make changes in their curriculum, assessment, policies and environments. Future research should seek to measure the effects of intercultural competence longitudinally, rather than just a months, as with any development this skill may take additional effort and time to fully form. Additional qualitative data using reflections and interviews would help capture the full extent of educators' learning and intercultural competence growth.

Limitations

The present study's participants were primarily white women living in a White community in the mid-south. However, some research (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Loes, Pascarella, & Umbach, 2012; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001) indicates that White individuals benefit more in critical thinking development when they are exposed to people from diverse backgrounds, compared to people of color. Another limitation is that the IDI assumes individuals become more interculturally competent in a linear progression and forces individuals into stages without allowing for the possibility that individuals can express multiple, complex and conflicting aspects of intercultural competence (see Perry & Southwell, 2011 for a review). Relatedly, the IDI does not assess different dimensions of diversity, thereby removing the possibility of showing the ways in which individuals' intercultural competence varies for different groups of people or cultures. Another consequence of the linearity of this study is the lack of evaluation of possible fluctuation or digression of the results over a period of time. Surveying the educators again in the coming year or even years later could negate the possibility of long-lasting results.

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