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Diversity and Special Education: Korean Inter-Agency Network (KIN)

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Abstract

Diversity and Special Education: Korean Inter-Agency Network (KIN) explores issues relating to ethno cultural identity and special education. The paper outlines potential needs within the Korean-Canadian community, and identifies a source of support that has been developed by the community itself. Cobb concludes that agencies, such as the Korean Inter-Agency Network, can provide a vital link between schools and communities as educators and parents work together to dialogue, and develop formal and informal sources of support for children.

Introduction

The interplay between ethno cultural identity and special education presents both a challenge and learning opportunity for educators. In this paper, I explore some key issues of ethno cultural diversity in the realm of special education. The Korean-Canadian community serves as the focal point of this study. In the first section, I assess how Bennett and Weber deal with the dimension of ethno cultural pluralism in *Special Education in Ontario Schools*. In the second section, I pose three questions and examine three resources educators may utilize to learn more about the Korean-Canadian community.

Special Education in Ontario Schools

Special Education in Ontario Schools explores various facets of special education in Ontario. In Chapters 2 and 15 Bennett and Weber (2004) briefly reflect on the complex issue of respecting ethno cultural plurality while simultaneously utilizing standardized assessment procedures (p. 192). As Bennett and Weber (2004) observe, Ontario's procedure of identifying exceptionalities in learners can be a culturally biased contributing factor to mislabeling, as "assessment procedures that do not allow for cultural anomalies can have the effect of placing a child very restrictively in an educational system" (p. 24).

The fifth edition of *Special Education in Ontario Schools* fuses the issue of class overrepresentation and cultural overrepresentation in special education programs into a three-paragraph segment of Ch

apter 2. While I agree with Bennett and Weber's assertion that ethno culturally biased expectations, teaching methods, and assessment tools contribute to the mislabeling of learners in Ontario schools (p. 2); I believe further dimensions of this issue need to be explored. For instance, Bennett and Weber neglect to address the philosophical conflict that arises when educators recommend special education (i.e. the identification process), and a child's parents strongly oppose exceptionality identification and/or special education servicing on the grounds of their ethno cultural beliefs. The two may expand on this subject in future editions of *Special Education in Ontario Schools*.

Resources

In this section, I pose three questions, and connect one resource to each.

Where can teachers learn about special education in Korea?

The BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) Web site offers a range of articles written by BC certified teachers. The BCTF is available at the following URL: <http://www.bctf.bc.ca/home.shtml>. "Testing Undermines Education in Korea" (2002) was written by Emily Moes and Adam Woelders, two Canadian teachers, who at the time of writing, were teaching on Jeju Island in South Korea. The two observe, "In this highly competitive system, there is no special education, and few placements are available for students with learning disabilities" (Moes and Woelders, 2002). It would appear that special education does not exist as a viable source of support for a number of learners in South Korea. It is critical to note that the first time a number of Korean-Canadian parents are exposed to the notion of special education servicing is when a school informs them that their child might be exceptional.

How do first-generation Korean immigrants view special education?

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is an American-based international professional organization and advocacy group that is dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students with disabilities and/or the gifted (Council for Exceptional Children). The CEC homepage is available at the following URL: <http://www.cec.sped.org/index.html>. One article on the

CEC Web site, "Research Identifies Opportunities and Offers Solutions for Improving Family Involvement" (2001), discusses connections between family life and learning opportunities for children with exceptionalities. In the final section of the article, entitled "Helping Families Deal with Stress," the CEC (2001) asserts that an immigrant family's experience often has additional sources of stress:

In another study, Singer and his colleagues investigated the experiences of Korean immigrants and found that while Korean families tend to cope with parenting a child with a severe disability (e.g., autism, Down syndrome), the ongoing challenges of raising the child may be stressful. "Overall, for Korean families the challenges include difficulties in access to social services and communication difficulties with professionals due to language barriers."

Language barriers may compound the challenges Korean-Canadian parents as they reflect on their feelings about special education. These circumstances intensify the need for schools to offer support services and/or connect Korean-Canadian parents with resources that are available to them as they consider the shape of their child's education.

Where can Korean-Canadians find support?

The Korean Inter-Agency Network (KIN) is a Toronto-based support network for Korean-Canadians. Their Web site is available at the following URL: <http://myhome.naver.com/kinetwork/main.html>. KIN (n.d.) describes itself as "A non-incorporated organization of non-profit status which includes social, health care and government agencies." The organization goes on to state that its mission is:

To co-ordinate services, programs and resources of member agencies from the Korean Canadian community and mainstream agencies to provide a leadership role in identifying and meeting the needs of the Korean Canadian community in the Greater Toronto Area. (Korean Inter-Agency Network).

KIN has established links with 17 sources of support for the Korean-Canadian community in the Greater Toronto Area. A list of these sources is available at the following URL: <http://myhome.naver.com/kinetw>

[ork/kinmembers.html](#). KIN is one example of a support-oriented agency with which educators can develop a mutually beneficial and enduring relationship. In working with KIN, teachers can direct Korean-Canadian parents to alternative sources of support when facing the decision of whether or not to go through the identification process, and/or choose the form of formal or informal support they believe is most appropriate for their child.

Conclusion

Ethno cultural diversity adds dimensions to the issue of exceptionality identification and the process of developing suitable modes of formal and informal support for children. As I have observed in the Korean-Canadian community, not all newcomers to Canada have been exposed to special education. Language can be a barrier for ESL parents. It is thus incumbent on educators – administrators and teachers alike – to connect immigrant families with organizations, such as the KIN, as all three parties dialogue and work together to develop education plans, and learning experiences, for children.

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