

Children problems faced by teachers in singapore

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Details on issues of diversity

Singapore's local customs and culture are unique with a blend of various ethnic influences. Here in this sunny island, we all grew up in a society where racial harmony is one of the central principles. Apart from issues of race diversity, there are many other issues of diversity which we sometimes conveniently overlooked. The biggest impediment to healthy interaction and communication between people of diverse backgrounds is truly just a lack of interest.

Race

Singaporeans live harmoniously and interaction among different races and people from different cultures are very common here. Singapore is now a blend of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and European influences due to our forefathers who are immigrants from other parts of the world. In most schools here, on a significant date in July, every school will celebrate racial harmony day and students will put on ethnic clothes to represent their own culture and that of others. On this day too, children will get the opportunity to see and experience aspects of the different cultures such as their traditional costumes, food, festivals and games.

Gender

In order for children with gender diversity to grow up into a healthy, confident and happy adult, the people around them needs to give them emotional support by being sensitive to their feelings. A gender diverse child may express themselves in many different ways and it is important for teachers to be sensitive to gender diverse children and understand that

everyone, no matter how different they are should be treated with respect and equality. Being insensitive towards the feelings of gender diverse children may make them feel small and not want to attend school or participate in activities, for fear that they will be bullied or mocked at.

Socio-economic background

Parents' participation and involvement in schools where there are a diverse mixture of children from different socioeconomic backgrounds, is more apparent where the parents play a part in their children's educational journey. With parents' involvement in school, it will also encourage children to stay in school and motivate them to achieve greater heights.

We cannot overlook the importance of racial and socioeconomic diversity in schools because it encourages tolerance and respect for differences among not just the children but staff.

Family Structure

Teachers need to be wary during communication, home activities and many other aspects of classroom involvements to consider all types of family structures, especially as they now vary more than ever before. Diverse family structures includes single parent both divorced or never-married, foster parents, adoptive parents, blended parents, unmarried biological parents, LGBT parents even a non-parent relative who the child has chosen or assigned to live with. No matter the type of family, children do best when teachers remain sensitive to these differences. It is important to be accepted in school regardless of their family structures as it contributes to students'

social-emotional well-being, which we know is important in impacting children's academic achievement positively.

Language and culture

Cultural diversity refers to people who identify with particular groups based on the country they were born in, ethnicity, language, values and beliefs. To include and respect for people from diversified culture and language, it is important to show them support by talking to them to find out how best to include them and respect their cultural needs. When we value and respect diversity, we are encouraging others to accept differences amongst individuals and groups. Like race and religion, language can also divide us. Although English is the main language, there are four other official languages in Singapore – English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. As we all use a common language to communicate, we will somehow close up the gap in language barrier amongst us.

Research on issue of culture diversity

New citizens or non-Singaporeans should try their best to understand Singapore and expand their social circle to include more Singaporeans. We on the other hand, should reciprocate by welcoming these new citizens and appreciate the diversity of views and experiences that they may have. When there are so many different people from different cultures or countries communicating, studying and working together, it is vital to understand how the different cultures may see each other.

I am concerned about this issue of diversity in culture in my centre. Being an anchor-operator preschool in the heartland, the children in my school not only

consists of the locals, but we have new citizens as well as permanent residents and a small number of foreigners. Children's connection to their culture develops through their experiences and having a strong sense of their own cultural history and traditions helps children build a positive cultural identity for themselves. Having minimal knowledge of a certain culture has caused a number of misunderstandings and conflicts in my school. Though at the conclusion of each incident, it seemed that these incidences can be prevented and avoided, it is always easier said than done. Culture comes in many forms and it can be through language, behaviour, tone of voice, gesture as well as mannerism. What may seem like a normal speaking tone to a certain culture, may sound rude to another. A child from a family who practices lowering down his gaze while being scolded or spoken to was being seen as rude as he did not maintain eye-contact with the teacher while being reprimanded. This shows that if we lack exposure and knowledge of a certain culture, we tend to conclude based on flawed assumptions. When there is no diversity in culture, some children may feel like they do not belong in a classroom and this may cause a decrease in participation and will result in low self-esteem and confidence.

Centre's Practices

When faced with issues between parents or between parents and teachers with regards to cultural differences, sadly, the centre has not put much practice in place. In such situations, teachers were instructed to refer the parents to the centre leader who will then be the mediator and calm both parties down. In a case of language barrier, most of the time, centre leader will be the main translator. Although the school has tried bridging the gaps

between parents from diversified cultural background through different festivals and celebrations, I believe more can still be done and teachers can be given more empowerment to handle such situations. In the classroom, teachers tried their best to promote an inclusive classroom by always welcoming new students and getting children to share about the festivals they celebrated, the food they eat and the things they do as a family during sharing sessions or share-and-tell period.

Leaders Roles

Diversity in race, language and culture is not only about knowing the different languages, food or costume of the different races or nationalities, it is about what is within all of us. Ho (1995) mentioned that culture is not just about racial and ethnic background. Therefore, I feel that before we advocate respect for diversity to the teachers and children, we need to start with ourselves first. As a leader, it is important to respect, include and bond all our teachers together regardless of race, language or where they come from.

Once the adults in the school are able to respect and tolerate one another, understanding each other's culture, it will be easier for them to then instill this value of tolerance and respect to the children under their care. Leaders should model and make sure that the teachers are aware of one another's culture and are able to tolerate and respect each others' background and roots from where they come from. Leaders need to make sure that the teachers are equipped with the right skills and knowledge to be confident in handling children's emotional needs first before prioritizing academics.

Leaders should also support teachers in promoting an inclusive classroom by encouraging teachers to do a self-reflection and think of possible scenarios or conflicts that may happen in the classroom and how they might address it.

From the teachers, these value of respect can then cascade down to the children through classroom activities and sharing sessions of the different cultures in class. Leaders should also provide opportunities and platforms for parents from diverse cultures to share their cultures with other parents and at the same time learn and be exposed to parents from other cultures. These can be achieved through events and sharing sessions organized by schools for parents. Another great way to allow culture diversity and tolerance to be successful is to organize home visits or home-exchange program where the school partner with parents and arrange for a family from a different culture to visit or stay in the house of a family from a different culture than theirs. This way, parents and children will also be able to witness the different upbringing each family has instilled in their children based on their cultures.

Leaders' roles in advocating respect for diversity is to be a good role model, to provide opportunities for teachers to understand the importance of diversity and provide platforms for children and parents to get to know one another better and be exposed to the culture of others'.

Conclusion

It is important for adults to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength and that everyone will be able to learn something new and special from everyone else. This will not be possible if all of us are confine to only our own race, language and culture.

Schools are the first platforms for social integration where children from different backgrounds can learn to relate to one another, thus, leaders roles are very important in making sure that opportunities are provided in school for teachers, children and parents to experience and embark on social integration. Parents should also support the effort of schools by encouraging their children to make friends and show respect to students from different backgrounds and cultures so as to help prepare them for a globalised world.

At the end of the day, the possibility of closing the culture divide is there when individuals, with respect and tolerance act to break down the barrier of cultural differences. As educators, we should always put children's emotional needs as our top priority.