Analysing Children's Diversity and Identity in ELMER and The Ugly Duckling

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ABSTRACT

With globalization, immigration and the emergence of neoliberalism, the diversity of children has become an inevitable issue.The impact of racial issues and cultural diversity has created new demands and challenges for children, educators and child-carers.The curriculum have also been updated and changed to address this issue. By analyzing two specific storybooks, comparing the plots and characters, and combining with my own work experience, this article finds out the diversity and identity issues existing in early education. Through the study of children's diversity and identity, we find the factors that affect children's early self-identity. Apple(2001) believes that curriculum is controlled by class, race and racial struggle [1]. Curriculum plays a crucial role in early education of diversity and identity. Early educators should respect every child, encourage their differences and treat the diversity of children correctly and positively.

Keywords：*Early Childhood Education，Diversity，Self-identity，Curriculum*

1. INTRODUCTION

I choose two picture books: one is ELMER and the other is The Ugly Duckling. Picture book plays a vital role in early childhood education. Children love story and they can achieve many knowledges from the book. The books that I choose are about diversity and identity in early childhood education. Elmer and the ugly duckling, they have many differences but the same one is they are both different from their own group. Elmer is a colorful elephant with a patchwork coat, not the original elephant colors. Elmer is a fortune elephant, he has a cheerful and optimistic personality, and he loves practical jokes. His problem is that he does not know other elephants love him because of his differences. The ugly duckling actually is a swan, why calls him the ugly duckling, because when he was born, he did not look like other ducks, he had grey fur and very big, so everyone dislikes him and call him the ugly duckling. And his problem is that he can not recognize himself correctly because of the environment and be a weaker.

Why I choose these two picture books? When I want to find the background of these two books, I found ELMER's writer wrote this book for his daughter. He really cared about the racial discrimination, cause his daughter had a half of black blood. Meanwhile, the ugly duckling could be a good sample to compare with Elmer. I think the two characters in books are good representative of diversity and identity. After children reading these two books, they will know to be a unique person is a good thing, to be different and have their own personality can achieve others love. In early childhood education, too many children like Elmer and the ugly duckling, they have their own personality which are totally different from others, but they can not treat themselves in a right way. Preschoolers are aware of differences in race and ability among those around them. In view of this awareness it is important to promote the acceptance of diversity among children at the pre-school stage [12]. Children doubt themselves, want to assimilate themselves, and finally lose their own personality, at the same time the teacher can not correctly guide the child, ignoring the diversity of the child's development.

This article focuses on the early children under the age of six, the impact of neoliberalism, globalization and immigration, and the impact and challenges faced by children themselves, parents and teachers in diversity and identity on early childhood.

2. INVESTIGATION

2.1. Diversity and identity current situation in early childhood education

Diversity and identity are affected by many factors, such as the child's own personality, living environment, family background, acquired experience, traditional culture and so on. Diversity and identity have been watched by many researchers and educational institutions, but they are not very successful in practice [19]. Recent studies have demonstrated that the migration population continues to grow in North America and Europe [2]. Due to the influence of globalization, the immigration gradually increases and the culture becomes more diversified, but wider dissemination of the differentiated model of globalization in all aspects of policy and practice will help to avoid the "recolonization" of global policy and practice [11], so it is a

big challenge for children, parents and teachers. New Zealand ECE services is also involved in research into the diversity of children and families, particularly three - and four-year-old. As a result of the changes in immigration policy, the inclusion of children and special learning needs has also been brought forward by staff within the New Zealand education system [15].

On the other hand, the emergence of neoliberalism has a great impact on children's self-identity and diversity. Neoliberalism is so ingrained in our minds that for many there is no alternative: it is just the way the world works [4]. Neoliberalism has a potential to let children become a marketing product from an early age. The early childhood sector has been devastated by neoliberalism, with its emphasis on standardizing, simplifying curricula and positioning children as investments in future economic productivity [16]. It is precisely because of these factors, there are more and more documents that suggest that it is necessary to address these issues in the pre-school environment, and to develop policies that promote the diversification of early childhood centers [12]. The concept of identity is also very complex, it is also affected by a lot of factors. The influences of gender, class, and other formative categories overlap in very complex ways to form individual identities [17].

2.1.1. Respect for child's diversity

Respect for child's diversity is a growing concern in European childcare [19]. The development speed and level of development of each child are different, and the starting point of child rights protection is to respect the diversity of children's development. Therefore, education should adapt to the level of physical and mental development of each child, and the development of young children should be used as a realistic basis. The theory of multiple intelligences believes that young children are equal individuals with different development potentials. No one is omnipotent, and no one is incompetent. Normal people have multiple intelligences, but they have strong intelligence and weakness. Therefore, teachers should respect the differences of children, foster strengths and circumvent weaknesses, encourage children to have an interest in learning, and use different learning methods to obtain knowledge and experience. Meanwhile, from a child's own perspective, it is important to be able to deal positively with the diversity of his own, whether it's the physical or the character, and to be able to positively face it, build confidence and self – identity. Like the character of story book Elmer, everyone loves him because of his differences and personalities. However, the thing to note is that there is no such thing as early childhood education in Europe, there are considerable differences in the concept of diversity in early childhood education between and within European countries [19]. Therefore, there are different views on respecting the diversity of children in different countries. Precisely because European early childhood education did not pay much attention to diversity before, with the changes in recent years, more teaching models have been proposed.

The diversity of children is inevitable, so it requires teachers to be more professional.

2.1.2. The impact and challenge of diversity on teachers

From the perspective of teachers themselves, they should constantly strive to improve their professional quality, as a part of professional practice, teachers, as a professional, have the right to make independent decisions based on their expertise, their traditions, and their social practices, which often constitute a moral code [7]. Due to the particularity of teacher's work, it is necessary to consider the humanity of others before understanding oneself when contacting with children [7]. However, because each teacher's growth environment, values and religious beliefs are different, their autonomy and initiative are also uncontrollable, but the professional knowledge of various aspects of children should be constantly accumulated and improved. At the same time, because the influence of family on children is indivisible, it requires teachers to balance the relationship between family education and school education. Understanding how many factors affect families and children helps us to see the heterogeneity of each person, rather than categorizing families and children according to their race/ethnicity, class, ability or language [9].

In addition, educators are required to pay greater attention to the social and psychological aspects of their work; They need to communicate more with children's parents, be aware of different learning speeds and abilities, support their children to develop their social potential, and so on [8]. Therefore, from the perspective of teachers themselves, it can be summarized as the following three points: (1) Ask teacher to improve the level of teachers and continue to learn professional knowledge, while seeking the right behavior to enable children to live a good life [7]; (2) To balance the relationship between parents and children, and between parents and educational institutions; (3) To focus on the teacher-student relationship and gain insight into the child's diversity and background.

On a social level, teachers face more challenges. Due to the increasing trend of globalization and immigration, children come from different backgrounds, different countries and different races. The increasing diversity of children is a great challenge for teachers. The impact of different languages and cultural values, not only on teachers, but also between children will appear many problems. Like the picture book "The ugly duckling", it reflects a serious issue that it is difficult for children to form a sense of belonging in environments with different colors and races. Young people see and compare their relationships with those around them based on their social similarities or differences with reference groups that most directly affect their experiences [14]. Many studies show that many children are able to categorize by obvious cues such as sex, race or, in some cases, ability, by the age of three or four [13]. Children choose their friends by complexion. Therefore, kindergarten teachers are able to deal with the issues of diversity, as these

issues naturally become prominent at the appropriate stages of development and place diversity within a positive acceptance framework. These challenges are unsolvable in the short term and will continue for a long time. Many international organizations are also aware of the issue of diversity and have issued relevant policies and guidance manuals. A study in the 1990s of how multicultural childcare worked was telling [19].

2.2. Identity situation in early childhood education

2.2.1. Identity and self-concept

The definition of identity is difficult to describe, however, most definitions involve one or more of these characteristics: ethnic/racial background; traditional; occupation/class and other aspects of social identity defined by others and ourselves [17]. Children's self-identity can be influenced by the nature of themselves, their personality, living environment, the relationships of companions. Children with insufficient self-identity will determine their own value and ability according to the evaluation of the outside world. They are often timid, pessimistic, passive, indecisive and discouraged. Children with a high level of self-identity will be optimistic and enterprising, active in doing things, and willing to try and take challenges. The level of self-identity will affect children's future development. The establishment of children's self-identity comes from the correct guidance of their parents. Preschool is a critical period for the development of children's self-concept.

In picture book "The ugly duckling", the ugly duckling act like a coward, one is because of the peer relationship, the other is because of the parents. Mother duck does not protect and encourage her baby. It is still under the influence of globalization, increasing immigration and neoliberalism, as a result, the heterogeneity of school classes is changing, it can also be a challenge in family education [10]. Language development is also one of the factors affecting children's self-identity and self-concept. It's a language spoken by a variety of children, and they really have formed their sense of identity, social sense, and belonging. When a child is able to express himself verbally, he can get a response from his peers, including body language. Therefore, good reading habits must be formed from childhood. According to a study, children who often have the opportunity to sit on their parents' laps when they are young are more likely to develop good reading habits and language development later in life. However, our tutor had mentioned about "recolonization" in early childhood education, because of the influence of cultural colonization, just like the emergence of many international schools in China, many children are exposed to two languages from the early stage and get along with children from many countries. They have to deal with the relationship between their mother tongue and their second language, and language usually represents national identity. Young children need their language to be valued and their

family experiences validated so that they feel safe enough to venture into the language and culture of their early years [17].

Picture book is one of great help to children's early language development and reading ability. So, from parents' perspective, there are three points to enhance children's self-identity and self-concept: (1) To provide children with a free and relaxed family atmosphere, and reduce the child's psychological pressure, so that the child can have a good self-experience, build a good sense of self-identity. (2) To encourage child's efforts and progress, it is easier to promote children's strengths than to correct weaknesses. Let child see his strengths and feel that he can do something. Connecting with family and parents is crucial [17]; (3) To enhance reading and language ability at an early age.

2.2.2. Identity and social connection

From a social point of view, the overall cognitive trend of the society also plays a guiding role in children's identity. For example, new multimedia means such as media and network are influencing early children. Too many children are exposed to video or books related to racial discrimination, which will have a negative impact on children's self-identity. The overall values of society affect the way children think about themselves and others. This can come from a parent's perspective, the image of the media, and the child's own perception of how people perceive and treat their "image" [17]. Many parents and educators conclude from their children's "behavior" that they are "inherently" different, without taking into account their own contribution to their children's socialization. Therefore, the difference is not only a physiological problem, but also a social learning problem [17].

Children's self-identity is closely related to the identity of others, the relationship between peers has a very profound impact on self-identity. In the process of interacting with adults and peers, children not only learn how to get along with others, but also learn how to treat themselves and others, and constantly develop the ability to adapt to social life. And that's because it says that babies are born with two factors that affect the child's identity, one is genetics, one is the environment, and the genetics are beyond control, but the environment factor is optional, and the children are unable to avoid social interaction, so they have to have early social interactions. Good social interaction has a positive effect on the nature of the child's self-identity. Recognition from others can help children establish a true and correct self-image. Sometimes parents can't objectively evaluate their children when they treat them, and most of what they see are advantages. However, others can give objective and reasonable evaluation when they treat their children. Therefore, social interaction is very important for children, and appreciation from others can also help build children's self-confidence.

Meanwhile, peer relationships give children a sense of community. In the process of communication with peers, children are at a similar level in psychology and physiology, and the communication between them is equal and

reciprocal. In this kind of equal and reciprocal communication environment, they are more likely to accept and understand each other, and acquire effective communication knowledge and skills [5]. They can know themselves and their partners in the game, follow the rules and even negotiate the rules, they can get along well with their friends through good communication, so as to form a good friendly relationship. The ugly duckling did not have good social relations in the early stage. Due to environmental factors, he could not be recognized among his peers or family members. He is a neglected type of peer relationship. Children act weakly when have this kind of relationship. To solve the problem of children's peer communication, teachers or parents can take some measures to promote children's social communication. For example, set a positive example which may avoid or reduce children's aggressive behavior. Strengthen children's positive social behavior and eliminate or avoid the environmental factors that cause aggressive behavior. For neglected children, we can take measures to change the environment, let them enter a new class or a new game group, create a right environment for children.

2.3. How we rely on curriculum to solve this issue

Progressive and sociocultural point of view all noticed how students participate in the curriculum. This raises concerns about what is present in the curriculum, what children can see and hear, how children interact in this environment, how they interact with other students, teachers [18]. Therefore, it is not surprising that the language containing diversity and culture is clear in the carefully crafted text of the early foundation phase of the New England mandate (EYFS) [6]. EYFS, published in 2007 and launched in 2008, provides a statutory curriculum framework for all pre-school education in the UK for children aged zero to five [1]. EYFS [6] emphasizes the importance of ensuring anti-discrimination. The principles of "equal opportunity" and "meeting the different needs of children" permeate the discourse of the curriculum. The overall purpose of the course is clear. This is to ensure that all children, regardless of their cultural or socio-economic background, have an equal right to access quality curricula that support and affirm their personal backgrounds [1].

Nursery curriculum starts from the reality of children's life, children's growth environment, and children's thinking mode, guiding children to initially form a certain concept system, in order to improve children's thinking ability, judgment ability, cognitive ability, adaptive ability, independent ability, to achieve healthy growth of children. In the specific teaching, we combine kindergarten life courses with diversified teaching concepts, so that children can experience diversification in the process of learning and growing up, so as to further improve the integration of children's life and education of self, society and value. These are not simple practices; It is much easier to say that we believe in multiculturalism, diversity and social justice than

it is to find and achieve their meaning in the lives of children [3]. Nevertheless, EYFS's curriculum model has some drawbacks. The limitations of EYFS in addressing the issue of cultural diversity make the task of providing inclusion challenging [1]. This is inevitable, the world's children may not apply to a curriculum system, each country has each country's tradition, each people have each minority's identity, so there will always be different on the curriculum, but the overall goal is the similar, respect the diversity of children, efforts to improve the curriculum system, found problems in the development process to solve the problem. Therefore, my comments on curriculum in preschool in China including two aspects: environmental diversity; curriculum mode diversity. Objectively speaking, the "environment" diversified education in the course of the kindergarten life value displays in: (1) The kindergarten environment layout to meet children's physical and mental development characteristics (2) In terms of class "environment", adopt diversified integrated layout concept, will on the child's good works hung on the wall, where children can see the post some life pictures. It is precisely because of the diversity of children that we should respect and make use of the diversity of children. Therefore, the diversity of the curriculum model is conducive to the multi-directional development of children, giving them more choices, helping them better understand themselves and establish a correct sense of identity. Children will find their own shining points in numerous courses and build confidence.

2.4. What I know about diversity and identity

When I was in the college, I had an internship in the kindergarten in China, I noticed a boy who had Down Syndrome, he did not act like a normal child, some children would tease him and do not want to be friends with him, like the ugly duckling, he was often bullied, snubbed and laughed at by other children, but I found he had some special ability. For example, he had a good talent in music, and he was more curious and creative than other children. Therefore, as mentioned above, teachers play a crucial role in the formation of children's sense of identity, which requires correct guidance from teachers. In addition, the whole society should promote correct values through the media, so that children can try to avoid information related to disability discrimination and racial discrimination at an early age. Children born with disabilities should be taken into account in the diversity of young children, who are more complex, more vulnerable and have more potential to distort their self-identity. It is because of my childhood and the experience of becoming a teacher when I grow up that is why I want to choose to study diversity and identity, which is a trend and challenge in the current society.

3. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of two storybooks and the comparison

between the plots and the two characters, this essay finds out the problems about diversity and identity in early education. By investigating the current situation of diversity and identity, the analysis of the problems in the context of diversity and the challenges of children, parents, teachers, and the state was found, and analysing the diversity of the curriculum of the early education. Through the study of diversity, discovering the factors and solutions to the early self-identity of the children. Based on individual experience, I also have some comments on the understanding of diversity and identity. Under the influence of globalization, immigration and neoliberalism, we cannot avoid the diversity of children. In this context, new requirements are put forward for children, teachers and parents. Racial issues and cultural diversity have become unavoidable issues, and the curriculum system is constantly updated. Apple (2001) argues that course is coming under the control of class, ethnic, and racial struggle [1]. We should take a positive attitude to deal with the diversity of children, and early education should be like Elmer's storybook, respecting each child and encouraging their differences. We have to confront the problems of diversity so that children can grow up healthier, both physically and mentally, and these problems have to be addressed critically.

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