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Teacher-Parent Interactions in a Taiwanese Primary School: An Emotional Geographic Perspective

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Background

Educational reform initiatives prioritize parent participation in schooling in order to improve teacher-parent relations, which have been regarded as a key factor for children education. When parents are involved in schooling appropriately, children's academic performance is improved and other beneficial outcomes also reveal positive results, such as regular attendance, good behavior, and improved teacher efficacy. Yet, few studies have been paid attention to the investigation of emotional responses to teacher-parent interactions, particularly when educational policies are emphasized on new standards (e.g. accountability practices) and expectations for teaching.

Research Questions

This article seeks to explore how five dimensions of emotional geographies, based on Andy Hargreaves' theoretical framework, are used to analyze primary teachers' perceptions of their interactions with parents. The theoretical framework of this research, particularly borrowed from Hargreaves' (2000, 2001a, b) model of emotional geographies, guides us to reveal their social distance or social distance between teachers and parents.

Methods

Data collected for this article were part of a research project funded by National Science Council of Taiwanese government, aiming to explore the emotional practices of teachers' interactions with colleagues and parents over 2 years. We engaged in this project in a multi-ethnic elementary school (Brookside Elementary School as a pseudonym for the purpose of confidentiality) with about 150 students, located in central Taiwan. The data sources for this study were field participant observations, in-depth interviews and collection of documents of all kinds related to parent participation in schooling.

Frame

The theoretical framework of this research, particularly borrowed from Hargreaves' (2000, 2001a, b) model of emotional geographies, guides us to reveal their social distance or social closeness between teachers and parents. According to Hargreaves (2001a), the emotional geographies of human interactions are not merely physical aspect, but also interconnected with sociocultural, professional, political dimensions and teachers' moral purposes.

Research findings

Research findings illustrated that teacher-parent relations were investigated as emotional geographies, inescapable from teachers' judgment related to parents' sociocultural status, from teachers' moral purposes, from their notions of professionalism, from their hierarchically political distance from parents, and from the frequency to contact parents. Thus, Hargreaves' framework of emotional geographies could be a useful lens to explore teacher-parent interactions. The paper closes with suggestions for policy considerations.