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11-2013

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Teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students:

A phenomenological study of volunteer teachers' learning curve

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Research Problem

- Cristo Rey Jesuit High School (CRJHS) in Chicago
 - Dual-language, Catholic school
 - Located in Pilsen, a neighborhood of predominantly Mexican immigrant families
- Jesuit Alumni Volunteer (JAV) Program
 - Two year volunteer commitment
 - Serve as teachers, activity sponsors, coaches, and/or assist with the school's work study program
 - No teaching certification required

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore and describe the experiences of former Cristo Rey Jesuit High School teacher volunteers. The experiences of these teacher volunteers include how they learned to teach on the job, as well as how they developed the intercultural competence necessary to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Research Questions

Central Question:

What meaning do former Cristo Rey Jesuit High School teacher volunteers attribute to their **learning to teach process**?

Research Questions (cont...)

Subquestions:

- How do these individuals' **backgrounds** influence the essence of how they learned to teach on the job?
- What was the **process** of learning to teach like for these individuals?
- What **feelings/emotions** did these participants experiences?
- How did the **demographics of the school** impact their experience?
- How did their experience at CRJHS impact their **view of education**?
- What can **teacher education** learn from their experiences?

Literature

- Johnson, Birkeland, & Peske (2005) found, “three elements – the person, the program, and the school – contribute to the teacher’s sense of preparedness during the first year” (as cited in Kee, 2012, p. 25).
- Intrator (2006) – “evokers of intense emotion” for new teachers
- Culturally relevant teaching
 - “must meet three criteria: an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 283)

Why is this important?

“Much of what they would have to learn must be learned in and from practice rather than in preparing to practice. Or, perhaps better, they would have to learn, before they taught and while teaching, how to learn in and from practice” (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 10).

Sample Selection

- Snowball sampling
- 5 former CRJHS teacher volunteers
 - Jamie, Amanda, Christian, Robert, & Quinn
- 1 former teacher volunteer from a different CR network school
 - Silvia
- 2 former Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) teachers who are also former CRJHS teachers
 - Francis & Michael

Data Collection

- Semi-structured interviews
 - lasted approximately an hour
 - conducted via Skype
 - (all but one) audio-recorded
 - transcribed
- Interview protocol
 - 30 open-ended questions

Data Analysis

- Creswell (2013)
 - Code
 - “Develop a list of significant statements” (p. 193)
 - Theme
 - “Group statements into meaning units” (p. 190)
 - Interpret
 - “Develop the ‘essence’” (p. 191)

Preliminary Findings

- Influence of individuals' backgrounds
 - "I wanted to be in a place that's not suburban white or predominantly white. Something that got me out of my comfort zone" (Jamie)
- Process of learning to teach
 - "We spent a lot of time together. It wasn't like you could sit in your classroom and do your work and just freak out by yourself, you had to interact with people" (Amanda)
- Feelings/emotions
 - "As nervous as I was, I knew that I had the support of other teachers, that I could ask them as many questions as I needed to and that they would have the time and patience to help me out" (Quinn)

Preliminary Findings (cont...)

- Impact of school demographics
 - Homogeneity is good for solidifying cultural identity because no one calls your identity into question (Christian)
- View of education
 - “Unfortunately teachers are oftentimes set up to fail particularly in poor communities” (Robert)
- What can teacher education learn from their experiences?

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