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Academic Student Inventory: Self-Observation Year (ASI SOY): Exploring Teacher Candidate Identity Development

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Abstract

Changes in diversity of the student population in the United States are not reflected in the teaching workforce. Currently, ethnic minority teachers are serving a disproportionately low number of language minority students. Recruitment, retention, and success of Latino college students are dynamic elements that can brunt the potential number of Latino teachers. We purpose a theoretical framework for identifying presage factors that can modulate teacher candidates' personal, academic, and professional development, likely to impact their teaching within diverse classrooms. It is contended that motives for teaching, ethnic identity, acculturation, efficacy, and epistemological beliefs are presage factors that can affect the academic success and number of Latino teacher candidates prepared to teach in the diverse classrooms of today.

Introduction

Changes in diversity of the student population in the United States are not reflected in the teaching workforce. Currently, ethnic minority teachers are serving a disproportionately low number of language minority students. Recruitment, retention, and success of Latino college students are dynamic elements that can brunt the potential number of Latino teachers. We purpose a theoretical framework for identifying presage factors that can modulate teacher candidates' personal, academic, and professional development, likely to impact their teaching within diverse classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

Motives for Teaching

Various motives drive a teacher's decision for entering the profession (Sinclair, Dowson, & McInerney, 2006). These variations may be a result of differences such as age, gender, minority status, academic achievement, and prior career. Similarly, Flores (1999, 2001) noted that personal experiences (cultural, language, and schooling) often impact teacher candidates' motives for pursuing bilingual education teacher preparation. Drawing from the motivation research, Sinclair et al. proposed that engagement is a result of the teacher candidates' motives to teach and as such is a predictor of teacher commitment. They noted entry 'motives' can change over time and are developmental.

Ethnic Identity

Clark and Flores (2001) emphasise the importance of a strong ethnic identity in the development of a teacher identity. They noted the significant association between ethnic

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identity and self-conceptualisation of bilingual education teacher candidates. Likewise, the important role that culture plays in the formation of bilingual education teacher identity and competence has been noted (Galindo & Olguín, 1996). Flores and Clark (2004) noted that ethnic identity may not be an issue for foreign trained teachers because their lived experiences differed from ethnic minority teachers. Nevertheless, they suggest that if ethnic identity is an essential developmental component, then teachers must recognise their own stance towards ethnic identity. Thus, ethnic identity cannot be dismissed for teachers, as their cultural experiences define how they will engage with students (Galindo & Olguín, 1996). As professionals, how teachers perceive and react to cultural differences may intercede with ethnic minority students' academic success (Peña, 1997). Researchers contended that a positive ethnic identification is important to develop in all teacher candidates (Clark & Flores, 2001; Flores & Clark, 2004; Gallavan, 2002).

Acculturation

Acculturation occurs because of the continuous contact that occurs when two distinct culture groups come into contact with one another (Cuellar et al. 1995). An individual's acculturation level is reflected in the degree of pride in one's ethnic identity. Acculturation is a multidimensional process that appears to be a major influence on the academic achievement levels of the Mexican American population (Felix-Ortiz, Newcomb, & Myers, 1994). Matute-Bianchi noted that the likelihood of achieving a high school graduation is when ethnic minorities maintain close ties and pride in their cultural group, (Matute-Bianchi, 1986). College stressors are found across all college students; however, acculturative stress is specific to ethnic minorities (Saldaña, 1994). This acculturative stress arises from the conflicts that arise in the process of becoming bicultural and reflects the ethnic tensions between the native and host culture. Flores (1994) found a greater probability of persistence in attaining a college degree for minority college students who maintained a bicultural perspective. For minority college students, being bicultural can facilitate academic success and educational attainment.

Likewise as college students, teacher candidates are also struggling with issues of acculturation. Differences have been observed between Mexican descent bilingual education teacher candidates' acculturation level (Flores, Clark, Sánchez, & Guerra, 2005). They suggest that ethnic minority teachers should explore their own acculturation level and their perspectives of the acculturative process in order to understand the different dynamics within the classroom.

Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a person's beliefs about their ability and confidence (Bandura, 1993). Competence, persistence, and perseverance are evident in individuals with a positive self-efficacy (Pajares, 1997). For students, this competence is demonstrated in their academic success. Bandura indicated 'the task of creating environments conducive to learning rests heavily on the talents and self-efficacy of teachers' (p. 140).

Teacher self-efficacy as a construct is composed of general teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy (Ashton & Webb, 1986). General teaching efficacy (GTE)

deals with the teacher's belief about teaching ability as determined by internal or external factors. Personal teaching efficacy (PTE) is the belief teachers have regarding their degree of confidence in their teaching ability. While teachers indicate a degree of confidence in their ability to teach, they may also believe that their teaching ability will be affected by factors beyond their control (Flores & Clark, 2004). Other researchers have observed that teachers with strong teaching efficacy have a propensity to be creative and innovative in their teaching approaches (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Since teaching efficacy has been significantly correlated to urban student academic achievement (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Swars, 2005), it is important that teacher candidates' program of study provide opportunities for the exploration of both types of teaching efficacy. Further, cultural values are likely to impact teacher candidates' efficacy beliefs and thus should also be explored concurrently throughout the teacher preparation program (Lin, Gorrell & Taylor, 2002)

A greater sense of general teaching efficacy was noted in bilingual teacher candidates as compared to their early childhood, reading, and special education peers (Flores, Desjean-Perrotta, & Steinmetz, 2004). These differences were also observed in the classroom. These researchers suggested that bilingual education teachers are more likely to actualise control of their students' academic success because they are specifically prepared to work with diverse populations. Further Flores et al. cogently argued that all teachers should be specifically prepared to teach diverse student populations as a means of increasing their efficacy.

Epistemological Beliefs

Epistemological beliefs are implicit theories about the nature of knowledge. Our understanding of the relationships between epistemology and learning have been extended by Schommer-Aikins (2004) and colleagues' studies. These studies also reveal that epistemological beliefs are influenced by the individual's prior experiences. For example, home and educational backgrounds do mediate a student's orientation toward the classroom. Specifically, researchers have asserted that college students' epistemological beliefs and learning are important considerations in assuring undergraduate students' retention and success.

Noteworthy, in validating Schommer's framework several studies have included teacher candidates and thus merit consideration (Schommer-Aikins, Duell, & Barker, 2003). Teacher candidates' naiveté is reflected in their epistemological beliefs of how students acquire knowledge, roles in acquisition of knowledge, and perspectives towards knowledge (Mahlios & Maxson, 1995; Reynolds, 1992). As Fox (1983) poignantly stated, 'There are also many teachers who have hardly progressed beyond (a) simple view of learning because it is consistent with their own simple theories of teaching' (p. 159).

Brownlee, Purdie and Boulton-Lewis (2001) utilised Schommer's framework to investigate teacher candidates' epistemological beliefs, defining epistemological beliefs as the 'individual's views on what knowledge is, how it can be gained, its degree of certainty, and the limits and criteria for determining knowledge' (p. 286). Flores (1999; 2000; 2001), also employing Schommer's framework, has found support through factor

analysis for (a) certainty, (b) control, (c) structure, and (d) interaction. The *interaction of knowledge acquisition* dimension, which was unique to this study, is the teacher's beliefs regarding the interactive processes of culture, language, and thought. Epistemology is clearly an important element to explore in teacher preparation.

Conclusion

The present theoretical framework identifies potential psychosocial factors, which facilitate academic success and educational attainment among teacher candidates. Since teacher candidates enter higher education with prior family, community and academic experiences and these impact their outcomes as learners and teachers, it is apparent that these must be explored throughout their program of study. Further, since motives, ethnic identity and acculturation, beliefs, and efficacy have an influence on an individual, it demonstrates the complexity of the multidimensional issues that may impact their teaching practices. In sum, the theoretical framework appears to support the need to explore and measure presage factors contributing to the development of successful teacher candidates.

Using ASI SOY as a literal translation of this is 'who I am' and as an acronym for Academic Student Inventory: Self Observation Year (ASI SOY), the researchers used this framework to develop a reliable and valid measure of the teacher candidates' presage factors that may mediate their approaches to teaching (Flores, Clark, Guerra & Sánchez, in review). ASI SOY was developed as a multidimensional instrument to measure the individual's educational experiences, personal motives for pursuing the teaching profession, ethnic identity, acculturation issues, efficacy, and epistemology. Examining the multidimensionality of a teacher candidate allows for greater understanding of both the person and their professional potential as a teacher. Gathering this type of information from the potential teacher candidates may suggest profiles that inform us about levels of investment and persistence. This type of invaluable information can be used to develop proactive teacher preparation programs.

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