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**Graduate Students' Reflections on Transformative Education for Latino Students**

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#### Statement of the Problem

- \* The number of Latino students is increasing drastically in the United States (Gándara, 2010; Villalba, Akos, Keeter & Ames, 2007).
- \* Two thirds of Latinos of immigrant origin have very low English skills (Batalova & Fix, 2011).
- \* In addition, Latinos have the lowest education levels among the different ethnic groups in the United States (Gándara, 2010).

#### Transformative Education

- \* Transformative pedagogy empowers students by incorporating collaboration, critical thinking and creative thinking into instruction. Transformative teachers encourage students to question their own beliefs and engage in critical analysis of their own and others' perspectives (Harrell-Levy & Kerpelman, 2010).
- \* Ada (2003) promotes transformative education for English language learners (ELLs). She explains that transformative education allows students to establish connections with the material being learned, to analyze it critically, and to incorporate their new understandings in a meaningful way into their lives.

#### Creative Reading

- \* Ada's (2003) creative reading approach has four phases which constitute a dialogue between the teacher and the student:
  - Descriptive Phase
  - \* The teacher asks questions to see what the students have understood about the story.
  - Personal Interpretive Phase
  - \* The questions encourage students to give their personal reflections and share personal experiences.
  - Critical Analysis Phase
  - \* Critical/Multicultural/Anti-bias Phase
  - Creative Phase
  - \* Transformative phase
  - \* Once students see the connection between their own lives and the thoughts and feelings to which the text has given rise, they consider taking actions and adopting attitudes to enrich their lives and others.

#### Purpose of the Study

- \* A study was conducted to identify graduate students' perceptions regarding transformative educational an educational option of their Latino students.

#### Context

- \* This study was conducted in a university in south Texas, close to the border with Mexico.
- \* The participants in the study were 26 graduate students who were enrolled in a curriculum and instruction course required for different master of education programs.
- \* The participants worked in school districts with predominantly Latino populations.
- \* Data on the perceptions of the creative reading approach and on education for Latino students were collected from two sources.
  - \* Questionnaire
  - \* Reflective essays that participants wrote after they followed the creative reading approach to design a literacy lesson.
- \* A qualitative data analysis of the survey responses and reflective essays was conducted.

## Results

- \* Participants saw great potential for implementing transformative education in their classrooms with their Latino students by following Ada's creative reading approach.
- \* They understood the approach as a framework developed based on Freire's critical pedagogy.
- \* The majority of the participants expressed interest in applying the creative reading approach in their classrooms.
- \* There were 6 themes regarding the possibilities for implementing creative reading with Latino students
  - \* empowerment
  - \* engagement
  - \* higher-order thinking
  - \* getting to know students
  - \* relevancy
  - \* valuing students' languages and cultures.

## Advocating for Latino Students

- \* Participants held high expectations for their Latino students.
- \* Encouraging students to think critically and holding high expectations for them empowers students. Empowerment starts "by acknowledging the cultural, linguistic, imaginative, and intellectual resources that children bring to school" (Cummins, 2001, p. 653).
- \* Participants stressed the importance of knowing their students and selecting culturally relevant materials.
- \* "In transformative pedagogy, the teacher provides students with the relevant learning material and asks them to engage it in a personal way..." (Harrell-Levy & Kerpelman, 2010, p. 83).
- \* Participants elaborated greatly on the importance of valuing Latino students' backgrounds and first languages.
- \* First language instruction provides the foundation for English proficiency and academic achievement (Freeman & Freeman, 2007; Goldenberg, 2008).
- \* The graduate students who participated in this study considered Ada's creative reading approach as a viable option to engage Latino students in the act of reading.
- \* When students are exposed to relevant and responsive learner-centered instruction, their motivation and engagement increases. Motivation and engagement are key factors to help ELLs succeed in school (Meltzer & Hamann, 2004).
- \* Participants elaborated on the potential Latino students have of becoming "independent thinkers" and engaging in higher-order thinking processes.
- \* Transformative teachers "challenge students intellectually and emotionally while, at the same time, provide them with a social environment that supports their abilities..." (Harrell-Levy & Kerpelman, 2010, p. 85).

## Reflection

- \* Bruner (1996) explains that reflection allows individuals to make sense of learned material. Comprehension is dependent upon individual experiences and contexts.
- \* In transformative learning theory, critical reflection is "rooted in experience" (Taylor, 2008, p. 11).
- \* Through critical reflection, participants displayed their potential as transformative teachers as they elaborated on the potential impact of creative reading for Latino students.
- \* Implications
- \* Latino ELLs need teachers who become their advocates to help them succeed (Houk, 2005; Soltero, 2011) and who have the vision to guide them in the transformation of their underachieving and marginalized reality.

- \* Graduate students must learn to view themselves as advocates for their students, and they should take back their newly acquired knowledge and understandings to implement in their classrooms as well as share with other teachers in their schools as did some of the participants in this study.

#### Implications

- \* Reflective exercises gave graduate students the opportunity to explore the applicability of the instructional methods in their own contexts and consider the benefits those instructional methods may have for their students.
- \* Teacher educators should consider engaging their students in reflective exercises to explore material, understand it in a more profound manner, and have a transformative effect in their beliefs and teaching practices.
- \* Reflective teachers who are advocates for their Latino students and who are willing to take on the challenge of exploring ways to improve the quality of instruction Latino students are receiving in schools are the key to provide the kind of transformative education necessary to help Latino students succeed in US schools.

#### References

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