EMBRACING OUR CAMPUS QUILT

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Abstract

This study was conducted to find how secondary education teacher candidates viewed global engagement issues and hidden identities as a way to embrace their campus quilt at a regional state university. Our outcomes included not only identifying positive identity engagement, positive global engagement, and positive cultural engagement, but also positive teacher candidates-an indicator for a brighter tomorrow.

Keywords: *global engagement, hidden identity, building community, relationships*

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Introduction

The United States is becoming more globally diverse, therefore, attention to global issues is not only necessary for practical reasons but also because schools are reflections of the communities in which they are situated (Haupt, 2010; Levesque, & Croteau, 2022). Schools are becoming global (Fitzsimons, 2019) with the rise of super-diversity (Magazzini, 2017; Vertovec, 2007). It follows then that not only are today's college graduates joining an increasingly global workforce (Shadowen et al., 2015) and that teacher education programs play an important role in preparing candidates for life in their community (Byker & Marquardt, 2016). Therefore, it is vital for teacher candidates to recognize and embrace the intricate pieces that make up their cultural campus quilt in order to be better informed teachers and citizens (Sincer et al., 2022). For the purpose of this paper, the researchers define a campus quilt as pieces in the lives of teacher candidates such as their defined identities, both hidden and apparent.

In order to be effective teachers today, one must be aware of the cultures and identities represented in the communities they serve. Hidden identities have become an area of increasing interest (Cech, & Waidzunas, 2011; Camacho et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2014; McCall et al., 2020; Mobley et al., 2019; Secules et al., 2021; Smith & Lucena, 2016) for educational researchers. Although these hidden identities have focused primarily on gender-identity and sexual-identity, this work is more interested in framing hidden global identities. That is, identities that might include different languages or cultures of origin. Global identities may also include time spent in international or global settings and other factors that are not identifiable in an immediate sense. Our goal is to incorporate best practices for creating safe social and emotional spaces for teacher candidates by centering the idea of student agency with regard to hidden identities; in other words, the researchers are going to trust and respect teacher candidates when they identify a certain way; in other words, we will honor that our teacher candidates are who they say they are (Viscuso, 2013). For example, one of the author's children informed their teacher that their family is Indigenous, and their teacher did not believe them and told the child to adjust his identifiers to reflect her

understanding. Listening to and honoring the voice and perspectives of children in the classroom regarding identity cannot be understated.

This effort is increasing as a rallying cry to provide a safe space for classroom cross-cultural interactions (Godwin, 2021, Ladson-Billings, 2021) even those who have what may be perceived as an apparent identity but even when hidden identities are also present (Secules et al., 2021). This reinforces the idea that the people we interact with every day do not lead "single issue lives" (Enge et al., 2021). The goal of this research was to bring forth the story for one south central regional college campus that provides perspectives on how to co-construct ideas that can facilitate our teacher candidates' embracing their hidden and expressed cultural campus quilt in effect answering the call by Levesque and Croteau (2022) to "engage students' historical ideas, attachments, and identities" (p. 120).

Theoretical Framework

Because today's teacher candidates are a part of a global community that is interdependent (Tytova et al., 2021) and their communities form a complex quilt that is present in today's classrooms, universities in the United States should prepare teacher candidates for a professional life in that context. That is, teacher candidates should be instructed in how to engage in these complex realities that face their nation and others (Severiens et al., 2014; Toms, 2018). Though global engagement can mean an individual's commitment to exploring general local and global issues; raising political voice and joining non-profit organizations to address a solution to these issues (Morais & Ogden, 2011; Paige, et al., 2008), it can also be described as engaging with individuals and communities that exist beyond a nation's borders to address global issues and promote well-being (Tiessen et al., 2018). We are threading these definitions and inverting them to identify hidden global engagement that happens within our university classroom communities.

Method

The purpose of this research was to learn how secondary education candidates' hidden identities impacted their perception of global issues including other languages of origin, countries of origin, cultural diversity, and others. A retroactive content analysis was conducted on an identity assignment given during the spring semester of the 2020 academic school year in a social studies course for secondary education majors. The assignment asked students to choose selections from the campus common reader that they felt were most like them, selections that were most unlike them, and to explain in a narrative how their own identity was the same or different than what was presented in the text. Then students were also asked to explain how their identity and the story that they related to impacted their life as a student and how it could impact their future life as a teacher. This reflective assignment provided an opportunity to deeply examine their identity through the lens of the campus common reader and to think critically about how their identity frames their experiences.

The purpose of the retroactive content analysis was to use the enriching stories that were provided to create a snapshot of student identity. Here a content analysis is defined as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorf, 2018, p. 24). After the content analysis was completed, teacher candidates completed a survey in fall of 2021 as another means of gathering data. The survey would then examine the global engagement level of college students from a different lens that could illustrate a snapshot of the attitudes and characteristics of a target population (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005), an IRB was obtained for this part of the study.

Sample

The target population of the study was secondary education majors in the college of education who are attending a state regional university in the United States. The sample of the study was intentional, data was gathered based on responses that teacher candidates submitted in an assignment in class. The sample was also heterogeneous and spread across three classes; some students were just starting their teacher education journey while others had already entered their senior year. Of the students completing the assignment, a fraction agreed to have their information shared with the new campus president in an effort to help illustrate our campus "quilt" to her during her first year in role of president.

Instrument

A professor-developed identity-based assignment was developed that teacher candidates then completed as part of their coursework. The assignment required students to choose one of two writing prompts to respond to regarding their campus common reader, *American Like Me: Reflections on Life Between Cultures* (Ferrera, 2018). One option asked students to "Find TWO narratives from the text that are most like you and TWO narratives that are most unlike you. These FOUR selections from the book will frame your narrative in which you will compare your experience to those four individuals and then construct your own narrative. Finally, address what "American like me" means to you in your life as a teacher-in-training. The second option asked students to "Describe how a school's culture can represent either a melting pot, in which assimilation is expected, or a salad bowl that celebrates individuality. Identify two school settings that you are familiar with-one whose culture represents a melting pot and one a salad bowl. Describe how the schools you have selected fit into their respective category, and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each."

Data Analysis

These reflections were completed by the teacher candidates after reading the campus common reader and attending either a secondary social studies course, an introduction to education course, human growth and learning course. Although the assignment was given to all teacher candidates, fifteen specifically wanted to share information with the university president about their identities in an attempt to provide representation for the population that they were a part of. Here researchers decided to use an inductive method to code the data (Thomas, 2006). Each researcher analyzed the data independently and noted common themes that emerged by reading and interpreting the data. After the researchers analyzed the data independently, they compared notes in those narratives that were provided by identifying common themes in order to provide meaningful data (Krippendorf, 2018).

Findings

The following table lists the most common responses that teacher candidates provided in their identity self-study:

1. Teacher candidates believe it is important to value others' perspectives.
2. Teacher candidates believe it is important to talk about issues and listen to what others have to say.
3. Teacher candidates have a unique identity that sometimes cannot be

captured in demographic data qualifiers.
4. Teacher candidates have experienced racism including through people expecting them to adhere to certain stereotypes.
5. Teacher candidates strive to find commonalities and community on campus.

The most common response to the self-identity study is, teacher candidates, believe it is important to value others' perspectives, which refers to respecting how people identify themselves and accepting others for who they are. An example is when a teacher candidate said, "From my personal experience, as a student, I have also learned that it is important to be a good listener and to value different cultural perspectives. This not only helps others feel valued but also is extremely beneficial to learn from other walks of life." This teacher candidate knows the importance of listening and learning from others' experiences.

The second most common response is, teacher candidates, believe it is important to talk about issues and listen to what others have to say. A teacher candidate said the following, "The best thing we can do for the future of the country is to encourage understanding one another." This teacher candidate understands the importance of effective communication inside and outside of the classroom.

The third most common response is how teacher candidates have a unique identity that sometimes cannot be captured in demographic data qualifiers. Every person has unique identifiers that can only be known or understood if someone takes the time to get to know them. Such as in the case of this teacher candidate who said, "I took what I liked from the Korean culture and I took what I liked from the American culture, and I lived my daily life how I wanted, practicing what I wanted because it was fun and not because I felt a pressure to." This particular teacher candidate identified with two different cultures and lives her life according to how she identifies herself as.

The fourth most common response, teacher candidates have experienced racism including people expecting them to adhere to certain stereotypes signifies that these events occur in all places including schools and the workplace. Such as in the case of this teacher candidate who said, "When my classmates would learn about my ethnicity, if I wasn't met with general disinterest, I'd be faced with uncomfortable questions stemming from stereotypes." Another teacher candidate mentioned, "I have experienced racism for being Indian and Mexican all from different types of people." It is important to acknowledge these events in order to become advocates for change.

The fifth most common response was, teacher candidates strive to find commonalities and community on campus. A teacher candidate said about the university campus, "None of it comes close to the culture of our very own student body, and each clique of the student body shines brightly in its own merit." As educators, we should create a welcoming environment for all students in our classrooms where there is friendship and respect for differences.

Along with the findings above, one of the researchers noticed that once teacher candidates felt comfortable with sharing their identities both hidden and apparent in class within the classroom community, new and unique perspectives and stories started to be shared. One student for example began telling stories of her life in Hawaii and how what she had experienced as a student in a classroom there was completely different from the conceptual classroom her peers had experienced going to school in Texas. Many students

disclosed stories of their own immigration journey while others described that they were born in Texas but moved somewhere else during their childhood and/or adolescence. Some of them talked about not really knowing where they belonged, or that they felt like they had come to find a new, non-distinct identity that was uniquely their own. These are just a few of the stories we experienced students sharing once we opened up our classroom community to identifying, embracing, and expressing their identities.

Concluding Thoughts

Teacher candidates in this study have demonstrated an interest in global issues and global engagement. Furthermore, teacher candidates showed interest in engaging with other cultures which supports the idea of embracing their campus quilt. Here we associate the hidden identities that teacher candidates bring to campus with them with the concept of a quilt because their identities can be something that is framed in tradition, knitted together through time and circumstance, and provides comfort when needed.

As teacher candidates become more aware of the intricate parts that create their campus quilt, they will be able to value and be a part of global issues as was predicted by the United Nations (de Mello & Sterpin, 2004) which will in turn enhance their cultural competence (Byker & Marquardt, 2016).

This work was important since it identified that teacher candidates have hidden identity positivity and are already identity engaged, which sometimes also indicated hidden global engagement (Aytug, et al., 2018; Dong, et al., 2008). Further research is needed to determine how teachers' education programs can continue to support teacher candidates as they embrace and express their own hidden identities in a global landscape (Levesque, & Croteau, 2022). If we continue to support teacher candidates in their quest to embrace their own identities and then in turn support community building (Caldwell, & Harris, 2008; Keller, & Kusko, 2015; Lambert, 2003) with their future students in their future classrooms, we can anticipate a more cooperative and accepting community of tomorrow.

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