Abstract

This dissertation examines the development of pedagogical relationships between tutor mentors and students, parents, and staff in a tutoring and mentoring program dedicated to decreasing the push-out rates among students of Spanish- and/or Portuguese-speaking descent in the Toronto public school system. Using a Transnational Latina Feminist framework, I examine program documents, observation and interview data to understand how these relationships develop, and how tutor mentors navigate issues of cultural and linguistic identity in these relationships. Furthermore, I examine how discourses of identity and community are articulated by the tutor mentors in the development of these relationships.

Identity featured prominently in participant narratives, and participation in the program was often positioned as an enactment of cultural identification. I found that discourses of linguistic and ethnic identity were often conflated in participant narratives, obscuring the boundaries between them and constructing a homogenous community of Portuguese-speakers at the exclusion of other lusophones in the city. While this distinction between ethnic and linguistic identity was less blurred for Latinx tutor mentors, their identifications as Latinxs featured prominently as motivators to enter the program and engage in these mentoring relationships with their students.

Discourses of community critically shaped how the program was structured and operated, with the program utilizing its relationships with the Lusophone and Latinx communities to function as a bridge between the communities and a school system from which they felt alienated. As a bridge, the program also provided important spaces for the creation of counter-narrative for the parents in the community, building the social capital necessary to create change around how Lusophone and Latinx families engage with the education system. Authentic caring relationships, characterized by cariño and the consejos imparted by tutor mentors were a critical part of the program experience. These relationships provided a positive learning environment for students, as well as a place for tutor mentors to heal from their own negative schooling pasts through counter-narratives.

This dissertation contributes to a few different fields of knowledge. Particularly how to approach equity schooling to deepen the commitment to equitable spaces in education. It contributes to our understandings of the importance of relationships in pedagogy, and how beyond learning, these relationships can help educators to heal from past negative schooling experiences. This work highlights the benefits of community-based education, through the creation of spaces of counter-narrative creation for communities living with harmful stereotyping. In addition, my dissertation contributes to the growing fields of Latinx-Canadian and Luso-Canadian studies, exploring how Latinxs and Lusophones articulate their lived experiences in the transnational context of Toronto. I also contribute to Latina feminist thought, offering a different reading on Latinidad as it is lived in Canada and how the different reading of the Canadian context can enrich our understandings of mestizx consciousness.