

Synthesis Paper

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In this paper I will reexamine my autobiographical paper that I wrote at the beginning of the semester by using quotes from two different texts. I will cover the main themes in which I discussed throughout my autobiography. These themes include: elementary school, middle school, high school, college, semester in Rome, and a conclusion. The conclusion will involve giving myself advice.

I will be using *Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds* by Sonia Nieto and *Everything you wanted to know about Indians but were afraid to ask* by Anton Treuer to reflect and reexamine my life at the stages using their insight and quotes from their books.

As a brief reminder, I was born in Salinas, CA, but then moved to Mexico and did pre-school and kindergarten while in Mexico until we moved back to Salinas.

Elementary School

I began first grade in Salinas at a Spanish speaking school. I vaguely remember having a period in the day in which we dedicated time to learning English, but I never got good at it while I was there. I don't remember much about this time in my life. I just remember it wasn't the same small town in Mexico and I couldn't run around playing soccer with my school friends.

After Christmas break started, my parents decided they wanted better jobs, but they couldn't seem to find any around the area. We have some extended family in Minnesota and one of my dad's cousins told my dad that there were jobs in Minnesota which goes to show how "it is no longer just urban areas that are characterized by racial and ethnic diversity" because of the small size of the town (Nieto, 2013, 139). So, my parents decided to pack our things and visit Minnesota to see what it was like for a few weeks. We drove up since we didn't have money to

fly and the plan was to stay for a few weeks, but we ended up staying and I ended up growing up in the small town of Long Prairie, MN where I call home.

Moving to Minnesota was a big shock for me. I didn't know any English, I hadn't seen snow before, I didn't have any friends, and the sun went down so early. It was all foreign to me. I remember starting school soon after we moved there and the teacher asking me a question, but I had no idea what she had just said because it was in English. It was all weird too. To add to this, there was a lot more Caucasian people here. Even in the area that we lived in California, there was mostly Hispanics so seeing more white people was different. What I didn't realize is how the Hispanic population was going to grow and come closer to that stat that says "50% of American students are colored" because of the factory jobs in the small town (Treuer, 2016, 12:11).

After going through accelerated English learning classes I managed to adjust just fine. I made friends with the other Hispanics in the class quickly and I managed to find a best friend out of all of them that was always nice to me.

The biggest thing I learned from my Elementary years was that everybody looks different and that doesn't change who they are in the inside. Treuer puts it nicely when he says that "books don't always say, but do imply, that "we are all immigrants here"" (Treuer, 2012, 18). My parents didn't necessarily help with this because I realized early on that they didn't have the same view as I did because of some bad experiences that they had, but I managed to figure things out on my own a bit by the way my teachers treated me and how my white friends treated me as they would anybody else.

So, towards the end of elementary school I felt myself fitting right in with everyone else and not just my Hispanic friends. This was especially the case when I noticed that some of the

teachers were “valuing culture and language as an important way for them to find out about myself” (Nieto, 2013, 141).

Middle School

Middle school was an interesting and fun time for me. It was now that I realized who were my real friends and who alienate themselves from the crowd. My best friends were two shy Hispanics kids that I would say were just as shy as I was. I say that some of my Hispanic friends alienated themselves from the rest of the class because they felt like “Indians. They were so often imagined, but so infrequently well understood” and they were either bullied into it or they didn’t think they fit in at all (Treuer, 2012, 1). In turn, they segregated themselves. Any Hispanic kid who tried to hang out with all the white kids was considered a “white wanna-be” for the rest of middle school. When I hung out with my white friends it sometimes felt like “I kept getting advice that felt contrary to my values and dispositions” and I found myself oblivious to this problem and didn’t realize it until after middle school was over (Nieto, 2013, 81). Yet I seemed to retain the same beliefs I had coming out of elementary school. Just because we all look different and have different beliefs doesn’t mean we can’t be friends and respect each other. I also think it would benefit my peers who graduated with me “to examine dark chapter in order to learn from them and prevent them from reoccurring” because of some of the stereotypes they formed against each other based on their race (Treuer, 2012, 31).

After middle school was over, I had bad taste in my mouth and realized that my Hispanic friends “imagined [whites] more they understood [them]” (Treuer, 2012, 159). This began to change in high school a bit though.

High School

High school was a time of growth for me. It was during this time when I began to develop an identity that reflected my religious beliefs. I began to become more Catholic. This was because I went on a big retreat that changed my life. This also changed my friend group quite a bit though. Not only this, but I began Track and Field in eighth grade too. Neither of my best friends was in track or was Catholic so, I began to form a new friend group. My new friend group consisted of people who were Christian and who were in Track and Field with me. I still hung out with my other friends, but it was never really the same anymore because I desired to be with people who had similar beliefs as me.

It was during this period in which I became closer with my white friends so that “a deeper understanding was arrived at [by them asking] anything they wanted to know about [Mexicans] but were afraid to ask and get a meaningful answer” (Treuer, 2012, 8).

It was because of this that, and getting to know myself better that I began realizing who I wanted to become in high school and I realized that I didn’t want minority students to feel like they had to be stuck in a blue-collar job when they grew up because they weren’t smart enough to do better. I wanted to become high school teacher and “have that ability to influence student learning” by instilling confidence and courage in students (Nieto, 2013, 13). I wanted to instill in them what their parents have which is a hard-working character.

College

Coming to college at the University of Mary was a change for me. I never really expected to see a lot of ethnic diversity on campus and I was right, but that has changed over the past few years. Nonetheless, it was different because when I was back home I would speak Spanish every

day and once I came here that changed immediately. The thing that changed greatly was the diversity of people's homes.

I would say that the biggest thing I've learned from living with people who grew up with parents from America is how to be sensitive to the culture. I realize I grew up in America, but at my house we have a Mexican culture with the food and everything. So, I did have to learn a thing or two about simple manners I never realized were a thing. I also experienced this during High School, but it never really hit me until I lived with someone who wasn't Mexican. With this I also realized how "all cultures change over time" and how mine was changing because I did not have as close of an interaction with my people of my background (Treuer, 2012, 42).

College also became a "safe place where people can ask question and give a meaningful answer", and this was especially true with my roommate at the time because of all the interesting discussions and debates that we had (Treuer, 2016, 21:47). It was at this point that we felt like were being part of the solution and not a part of the problem as Treuer says, "If you are not part of the solution, you might be part of the problem." (Treuer, 2012, 163)

Semester in Rome

During my Sophomore adventures in college I studied abroad in Rome. This, once again, demonstrated to me how different cultures can be so different even though we are so connected online. Studying abroad in a country where you don't know the native language made me be more culturally sensitive and helped me to remember how much I don't know and how much I shouldn't assume. This also made realize how much "language and culture are assets not to be wasted or disparaged" because I would always end up being the translator. I even had some peers tell me that they wish they were bilingual in another language (Nieto, 2013, 91).

Conclusion

To conclude the paper, I will finalize my thoughts on what I have learned from my experiences and readings I have done and give myself advice based on the four pieces of advice that Nieto provides in her text.

Learn About Yourself

What I would have to say about learning who I am is that “I need to spend time thinking about who I am and how my identities, experiences, values, and biases can help or hinder my work with students” (Nieto, 2013, 150), and this is something that I need to do often. If I don’t then I will forget my goals and my purpose for teaching.

I need to be able to know myself because “knowing myself is a key ingredient in being able to connect with my future student’s”, and if I don’t have this connection then the trust will not be there (Nieto, 2013, 100).

The last piece of advice I would give myself is to reflect on past mistakes and how and why they occurred. Also, “we all need to come to terms with our collective past”, so I must have no regrets (Treuer, 2012, 150). This means I should look at every moment in which I stumbled as a moment of learning and growth. If I continue to do this, then the fruit that will bear will undoubtedly be plentiful.

Learn About Your Students

Learning about my students is something that will take time. A word of advice that I would give myself is to realize that “learning about my future students is unquestionably one of the most important endeavors” I will undertake as a future teacher (Nieto, 2013, 151).

The biggest thing to remember in my future classroom is that “one of the things is that one size does not fit all”, and this means I need to learn about my students learning styles (Treuer, 2016, 30:00). Once I am able to learn about my students and how they best learn and understand the concepts I am trying to teach, I will fully grasp the idea of how “good teachers understand that knowing their students well and tailoring their pedagogy to the students in their classroom make a difference in the quality of the education students receive”, and this could mean the difference between a student passing or failing (Nieto, 2013, 37).

Cultivate Allies

One of the things I know I struggle with is not asking for help. Nieto says that “trying to go at teaching alone can be overwhelming”, and this is something I need to fully recognize and work on by seeking out help when I need it (Nieto, 2013, 152).

Also, “learning to teach is a lifelong journey with ups and downs, twists and turns, and numerous surprises”, and having allies during the struggles is great for persevering through these hardships of teaching (Nieto, 2013, 73). It is these allies that will help me grow by examining my skill and helping me improve by giving me advice.

Have a Life

I have a feeling of relief when Nieto says that “the last thing teachers should do is focus solely on teaching” because I want to have a life outside of school and grading homework (Nieto, 2013, 154).

I can honestly say that I am not looking forward to the initial burnout of teaching. The best advice I would have to give myself to fight the burnout is to continue the healthy hobbies I already have. I like to play the guitar, going on runs, and hanging out with my friends and family. All of these things will become a key part of my life as a teacher to rejuvenate and avoid the burnout.

References

Nieto, Sonia (2013). *Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds*; Portsmouth,

NH: Heinemann

Treuer, A. (2012). *Everything you wanted to know about Indians but were afraid to ask*. Saint

Paul, MN: Borealis Books.