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A Descriptive Multicultural Phenomenology for Culturally Responsive Leadership

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A DESCRIPTIVE MULTICULTURAL PHENOMENOLOGY FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

As public schools in the United States continue to diversify in culture, educational leaders committed to multicultural education seek qualitative research methodologies for understanding phenomena in order to build culturally responsive leadership initiatives and interventions. This paper argues that a phenomenological research methodology is appropriate and relevant to understand cultural phenomena in the 21st century school. To serve this, the authors elaborate on a descriptive multicultural phenomenological research methodology for educational leaders. A phenomenological framework positions educational leaders to understand the nature and essence of personal experience. This approach will help educational leaders better understand the experiences of the diverse children within their school. Therefore, leaders may utilize a multicultural phenomenological research methodology to build appropriate culturally responsive initiatives and interventions to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse schools.

Keywords: multicultural, leadership, phenomenology, diversity, pedagogy, culture

Introduction

Currently, in the United States, institutions of higher education are facing challenges in their efforts to prepare educational leaders to obtain equitable educational opportunities for their communities. Across the U.S., communities are becoming more culturally and ethnically diverse than ever. However, with the advancement of globalization—minority populations are underserved in the quality and opportunity of education and intellectual development. These challenges have revealed unfamiliar and undiscovered territory to which hold promise for deeper cultural understandings and opportunities for social justice. Educational leaders are forced to find new ways of knowing, understanding, and comprehending what social justice in educational leadership could mean in the 21st century.

Outside institutions of higher education, the greater U.S. culture has developed a focus on social justice, which can be seen in television pop-culture, where audiences understand what it is to experience injustice through the protagonist. Many television drama series' focus is intended to shift what the audience *knows about* to *understanding with*; which can be a very large step based on our various positionalities. In the early 2000's, a space-drama titled *Firefly* managed to guide its audience to themes of social balance. In one episode, the main protagonist Captain Malcolm Reynolds had to remove a pistol from the hands of a central character River Tam – who struggles with how her mind perceives reality and what surrounds her. As Capt. Reynolds took the pistol from River, he asked generally, "It [the gun] is loaded with the safety off, does she understand?" At this point, the character River, replied "She understands she doesn't comprehend." And, it is in this state of mind, she is unable to discern her reality from the reality of others. Similarly, as we strive to become engaged in the process of social justice in educational leadership, we realize that comprehension of other people's positions is incredibly complex.

Social justice is a process that entails uncovering systems of oppression, exclusion, and misrepresentation, in order to offer equitable opportunities for all groups. In educational leadership, social justice may begin by understanding the personal meanings of diverse students and then begin to work to formulate culturally responsive initiatives and interventions. This paper argues that the phenomenological research methodology is paramount for understanding the curricular challenges and cultural meanings of students' educational experiences. A descriptive multicultural phenomenology intends to understand cultural phenomena in a school environment in order to better inform culturally responsive leadership initiatives and interventions.

Finding Place in Displacement

Amidst headline news of political turmoil, wars, racial violence, and terrorist attacks, there are hundreds of thousands of people transmigrating across the globe. Often unnoticed – the choice to move is voluntary for some, but involuntary for many (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Displacement and international migration are phenomena of contemporary times. Roughly 12.4 million people were forcibly displaced in 2015, which resulted in the total number of displaced people around the world to be 65.6 million; an increasing trend (Davies & Batchelor, 2017; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2017).

It must be stated that immigration is an abundant source of diversity, but is just one factor in the diversification of a society, especially for culture (Hassan et al., 2015). The intersectionality of culture is based upon interwoven networks of influence and communication to form complex layers (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). For this paper, we focus on immigration because it is pertinent to schools along the U.S. and Mexico border, and representative of the cultural diversification, blending, and integration that is happening worldwide.

Specifically, for 2016, in the Southwest border region of the United States, there were 20,455 unaccompanied minors (birth to 17 years of age) that were apprehended by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2017). This was a 102% increase from 2015 which had 10,105 children apprehended. These minors have been housed in the U.S. and have entered schools in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2018). As a result, Latinx youth will be the number one minority in the U.S., which will make them 30% of the entire public school student enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

Even though the United States accepted the most refugees globally in 2015, the current political trends for 2019 do not appear to be so generous. For example, in 2017 President Trump began enforcing strict federal immigration laws that are resulting in the deportation of undocumented immigrants from Mexico and other countries[1]. Recently, the Trump administration has pressured U.S. immigration judges (as part of their performance review) to meet a 700 case per year quota as a means to speed up deportations of undocumented immigrants (Miroff, 2018). The sense of fear for undocumented immigrants and the outrage of U.S. citizen protestors are creating a fermenting political climate in the U.S. (Rubin & Kazanjian, 2018; Palumbo-Liu, 2017).

In response to the current political climate, many educational leaders in the U.S. have understood the challenges of an interdependent and interconnecting world to seek to prepare students to engage a wide spectrum of cultural diversity (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998; Sleeter, 2005). An educational leader designates professionals in formal leadership positions within an educational institution, such as principals and vice-principals, but also include teacher leaders, student leaders, or those from the community that lead educational initiatives. The educational leader ought to be motivated to engage the challenges of a multicultural educational atmosphere in the school by developing students critically literate in U.S. politics and world affairs (Au & Blake, 2003; Kreiner, 2011; McCabe & Christian, 2011). All while building community and appreciation for cultural diversity, and broaden students' notion of citizenry (Giroux, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

To assist the reader in understanding the descriptive multicultural phenomenology, a case study of an educational leader that conducted a phenomenological inquiry will be used throughout to explicate ideas and concepts. Phenomenology is favored over other qualitative approaches, such as ethnography or narrative, because it is able to understand phenomena through how irreal (emotions, feelings, memories) and real (cultural artifacts) objects are experienced. This case study followed Lola (pseudonym), an educational leader working as an English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) Coach in an elementary school located in the U.S./Mexico border. This school has a large population of Latinx and immigrant youth. As a school that has socioeconomic challenges, lower percentile of academic performance, and socio-emotional behavioral issues, Lola created an after-school program designed to help build a sense of community amongst students while helping each child find a place to self-actualize.

This program meets once a month, for one hour, with a group of 15 children from fifth and sixth grades to engage in recreational activities (non-competitive sports, crafts, etc.). With the help of interested teachers and volunteers from a local community college, Lola sought to understand the phenomenon of what it is like for the children to feel to be oneself and self-actualize within culturally diverse group activities. This phenomenological inquiry was utilized to build culturally responsive school-wide initiatives and interventions to help overcome the aforementioned challenges.

[1] See Shear and Nixon (2017, February 21), "*New Trump Deportation Rules Allow Far More Expulsions"* https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/21/us/politics/dhs-immigration-trump.html?_r=0

Theoretical Foundations: Leadership in Multicultural Phenomena

The Nature of Culture

To create a descriptive multicultural phenomenology, we will review the relevant literature on culture, culturally responsive leadership, and phenomenology. This will allow the reader to frame the research methodology within the relevant discourse. To begin, culture has manifested and developed with the biological evolution of human beings as they dealt with issues of identity, meaning, and society (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2004). It is based in shared values, practices, norms, language, etc., in which members utilize for developing a worldview that forms relationships to pass elements into future generations, while progressing ability and understanding (Burke & Christenson, 2004; Keith, 2011a; Miller, 2011). Furthermore, culture is pivotal in the development of human cognition and offers people a variety of resources to understand, behave, relate, express, and cope with life's challenges alone or in shared community (Cole & Packer, 2011). Culture has given us traces of phenomena that we experience, and investigation into these essences, could reveal more about culture itself and the phenomenal structure.

Cultural diversity is a popular term in education that is used to distinguish one culture from another by means of practices, values, customs, and other cultural artifacts (Arber, 2000). When cultural diversity is the focus, an ethnocentric perspective may arise where one continually evaluates one's in-group positionality more positively than the out-group (Beins, 2011; Gurung, 2011; Keith, 2011b). The connective tissues or similarities at the root of cultures, such as common values, are known as cultural archetypes (Hammond, 2015). Cultural archetypes raise existential questions where cultural meanings are generated to fill in existential gaps where there are no apparent meanings or evident truths (Salzman & Halloran, 2004). Within these cultural archetypal gaps are shared cultural phenomena—shared existential concerns, experiences, and uncertainties about death, the meaning of life, isolation, and freedom. This is not to essentialize any

understanding of culture or human nature, but to bring one into the realm of understanding and appreciating the unknown.

Currently, the cultural diversities around the globe have interacted in such a way that people have internalized the multitude of cultures they are exposed to—becoming multilingual or identifying with different nationalities, groups, etc. This is the result of exposure to diverse cultural influences, diverse relationships, immigration, and communities with growing diverse demographics. The majority of cultures are dynamic, shifting at the surface level with regards to the socio-political and economic contexts; but cultures remain stable at the roots that house concepts in identity, self, community, and decision-making (Hammond, 2015).

In the school, the educational leader is faced with a school of individuals that have multiple dimensions of demographic, including socioeconomic, sexual orientation, culture, or race (Miller, 2011; Prieto & Schwatken, 2011). Critically analyzing this reality allows one to appreciate the distinctions in cultural diversity while seeking further elaboration through cultural archetypes. With increasing immigration restrictions and civil rights issues in the U.S., multicultural educators have sought to make education equitable for learning opportunities and inclusive of the knowledge, languages, and realities of the immigrant, marginalized, and minority students (Bruna, 2009; Hill, 2007; Nieto & Bode, 2018). Multicultural education is rooted in students' lives and values their identities, experiences and draws on their knowledge, cultures, and voices to create a dialogue (Au, 2014, 2012; Hill, 2007; Kreiner, 2011). There is an important distinction between the ability to think about cultural differences and the habits we have of thinking about these differences.

Multicultural education can be a rigorous curriculum that offers educational leaders, teachers and students analytical and critical thinking skills to uncover the patterns and complexities of their world to make meaningful relationships and affect democratic change for social justice (Hursh, 2001; Tanaka-Matsumi, 2011). Educational leaders can become more sensitive to the cultural meanings and developments of their teachers and students, especially for culturally diverse and immigrant populations (Banks & Nguyen, 2008). To gain insights on cultural meanings, phenomenological research is integral for understanding the differences and vast complexities in the academic and personal lives of culturally diverse students.

Multicultural Responsive Leadership

Culturally responsivity for education was introduced by Gloria Ladson-Billings in the mid-1990's and has since has received empirical validation (Gordon, Kervin, Jones, & Howard, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Pas, Larson, Reinke, Herman, & Bradshaw, 2016). By definition, a culturally responsive leadership (i.e. initiative or intervention) is the development of learning opportunities that utilize the school's diversity of cultures, heritages, languages, past experiences, current realities, and values as a means to facilitate the personal development and academic success of all students.

Culturally responsive leadership adapts within the dynamic of cultures, conditions, and circumstances as a means to validate and utilize the faculty and students' knowledge as the foundation for academic achievement (Journell & Castro, 2011). Educational leaders utilize culturally responsive methods to build a safe space where diverse relationships in the school and community may grow and flourish (Cooper, 2012; Dee & Penner, 2017). Culturally responsive leadership enables the school and learning environments to reflect the diversifying community/society. Children begin to learn to communicate successfully and form positive attitudes toward culturally diverse peers (Savage et al., 2011). This paper argues that if educational leaders are to understand the personal meanings of students' educational experiences to fashion culturally responsive leadership; they would benefit from employing a multicultural phenomenological inquiry to uncover cultural phenomena in the school (Kazanjian, 2019). This data will be the source for effective interventions or initiatives to promote academic and personal growth.

Essence of Phenomenology

To further elaborate the relevance of our approach to building leadership with cultural phenomena, we will discuss the literature relevant to phenomenological research. The tenets of culturally responsive leadership are aligned with those of phenomenological research in two main ways. First, the cultural responsive approach is about challenging biases and social inequalities to include culturally subjective experiences and meanings. Phenomenology engages the researcher in the process of *epoché* (to be later elaborated) in which the researcher contains or brackets preconceptions and becomes aware of inequalities and privileges based in race, gender, or socioeconomic status. As stated by Hammond (2015) educational leaders, "are also aware of the impact of their own cultural lens on interpreting and evaluating students' individual or collective behavior that might lead to low expectations or undervaluing the knowledge and skills they bring to school" (p. 18). Thus, the process of *epoché* provides the appropriate methods for the educational leader to acknowledge his/her own cultural assumptions, knowledge, and biases, and bracket them.

The second reason why culturally responsive approach aligns with phenomenology is that is seeks to serve underrepresented populations and unearth cultural elements that go unnoticed or disregarded in the school (Nieto & Bode, 2012; Sleeter, 2005). Cultural responsivity is about utilizing the students' schemas, knowledges, and values as curricular sources for academic achievement. Phenomenology seeks to understand the meanings of experiences as they are from the child's point of view (Moustakas, 1994; Rogers, 1970). Ultimately, to understand how a child experiences school, can open up perceptual avenues that can challenge the stereotypical cultural reductions, while calling forth and placing value on the cultural meanings (Hammond, 2015; Sleeter, 2005).

Utilizing a descriptive multicultural phenomenology to create culturally responsive leadership initiatives or interventions is a time-consuming and complex process. Educational leaders may not have time to conduct deep readings from the works of

Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, or van Manen. However, Moustakas' (1994) *Phenomenological Research Methods* is a concise manual and complete guide for understanding and doing phenomenology. Moustakas' (1994) work is appropriate because of its psychological foundation as well as his work in creating interventions and initiatives in the field of education (especially at the elementary level) (Moustakas, 1966, 1972, 1992; Moustakas & Perry, 1973). For the purposes of this paper, the authors seek to synthesize phenomenology into the discourse of multicultural educational leadership[1].

To offer a brief summary, phenomenology was developed by German philosopher Edmund Husserl as a descriptive science for studying essences as they appear in human consciousness (De Monticelli & Simionescu-Panait, 2015; Giorgi, 2009, 2010, 2012; Husserl, 2012; Weiss, 2016). As a science, phenomenology became a qualitative research methodology for understanding human experiences and exploring the wondrous relationships humans have with the world (van Manen, 2016). Phenomenology relies on the appearance of objects in consciousness to be the sole sources of data. Consciousness as an intentional experience means that one must be fully in the moment—there must be a harmony with the self and world where the meaning is dependent upon the two (Creswell, 2007; Felder & Robbins, 2016). Phenomenology is a unique research methodology that focuses on the prereflective, originary occurrences of meaning (van Manen, 2016).

Theories work to interpret human issues and cultural expressions; however, phenomenology does not utilize theories in the conventional sense. The reason for the absence of theory from phenomenology is that it makes assumptions, limits understanding, and conceptualizes, which are the very things phenomenology is questioning. Theory is however used in phenomenology as a frame, which can hold the study in a certain discourse (Moustakas, 1994).

A 'pure' phenomenology is strictly an eidetic or vivid description of a lived experience based on invariant qualities and essences of a phenomenon (Husserl, 2012; Wertz, 2011). A phenomenon's essence, Heidegger (1962) described is hidden, "but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground" (p. 59). The hidden nature of essence allows the phenomenon to become overlooked, forgotten, taken for granted, or commonplace (Rogers, 1980). Phenomenology forces these neglected essences to reveal meaning as a distinctive entity. The discipline is to find a 'pure' description[2] of a cultural phenomenon as it appears in consciousness (Husserl, 2012). In the description, the researcher contributes no speculation or interpretation to the data to clarify—adding nothing and subtracting nothing from it, just awareness and then description (Giorgi, 2009).

The essence of some-thing is a disclosure of *what* a self-being is – the essence is not contained in empirical intuition, but just a glimpse of fundamental possibilities (van Manen, 2016). Essence designates a feature or condition in which if the object would lose, it would cease to be (Moustakas, 1994). Essences are an essential part of a being, which empirical discovery may only reveal only one side. Other sides proceed to be

revealed, but never to gain all sides (Husserl, 2012). Physical and psychical properties allow us to enter the infinite possibilities and multiplicities of experience and essences to be discovered. In fact, phenomenology is about understanding shared human experiences of a phenomenon (i.e., what it is to relate, feelings of home, meanings for love, loneliness, fear, acceptance). Each of these phenomena have different cultural nuances but similar cultural archetypes that give meaning to a life lived with others.

Phenomenology is a personal inquiry for the educational leader that utilizes qualitative research methods to engage irreal and real objects (Giorgi, 2009; Rogers, 1970). A real object is something that exists in time and space and can exist without consciousness (clothing, cultural artifact, art, etc.). Whereas irreal things may exist in time but not space, they cannot exist without consciousness. Meanings, dreams, feelings, images, are just some examples of irreal objects (Giorgi, 2009). Irreal objects may also be considered 'subjective cultural phenomena' that are dependent upon the belief and consciousness of one person (Harari, 2015). If a person's belief in something changes, then so does the phenomenon. This might be a belief in a lucky charm, in which in the failure to procure results in the person believing it is no longer lucky.

Irreal objects can also exist amongst a large community of people, which are known as 'inter-subjective cultural phenomena'. These occur in the community of individual consciousness and are supported by communication networks linking the community together (Harari, 2015). This may be a belief in stories of an afterlife, laws, creation myths, or nationalism. These are valid phenomena and exist even if one person discontinues belief. The existence of inter-subjective cultural phenomena impact the world tremendously, as it connects complete strangers to cooperate.

There are two qualitative research approaches in phenomenology; hermeneutical and transcendental (Creswell, 2007). The hermeneutical is championed by van Manen (2016) who argued that interpreting the texts of life or written word is best for illuminating phenomena. On the other hand, the transcendental approach is led by scholars like Moustakas (1994) and Giorgi (2009) that worked in clinical psychology. In transcendental phenomenology, each elaboration of consciousness is transcendental knowledge; where hidden phenomenological truth or essence is found (Felder & Robbins, 2016; Heidegger, 1962).

In developing a descriptive multicultural phenomenology to fashion culturally responsive leadership, the transcendental vein is the most appropriate. Transcendental phenomenology focuses on the discovery of hidden sides of phenomena. The transcendental approach is applicable for multicultural educational leaders because it seeks what is hidden in cultural archetypes by means of pure description of essences.

[1] It must be noted that Indigenous philosophy is often second to the Western Canon in terms of academic study in the US—a result of the social, physical, political, and psychological dominance that many colonizers had in colonizing indigenous peoples

(and their philosophies). Therefore, Mika (2015) argued that we acknowledge how indigenous philosophy may access fundamental components of cultural phenomenon, by means of a collective experience, rather than isolated logic.

[2] Whereas interpretation is a multi-position process where theories, hypotheses, and assumptions are used to clarify or prove/disprove ideas or data (Giorgi, 2012).

Descriptive Multicultural Phenomenological Methodology

Most science traditions and research methodologies are based in philosophical principles, but the methodologies of science are not the same as those of philosophy (Wertz et al., 2011). One cannot easily appropriate multicultural philosophy to a phenomenological science without major considerations and significant modifications (Giorgi, 2010). The context of the multicultural classroom must be understood if one is to employ phenomenology effectively.

Multicultural phenomenology begins with the educational leader as researcher narrowing his/her focus of study of an irreal cultural object. Stating the research problem or question has to have a direct and personal link to the researcher's lifeworld. The term 'lifeworld' designates the consciousness of present moment, which carries meaning, context, and culture (Felder & Robbins, 2016; Giorgi, 2009; Wertz et al., 2011). Here, cultural phenomena happen in a spontaneous manner yet the researcher can approach them with a method and degree of control (Moustakas, 1994). To provide an easy reference for time-challenged educational leaders, the following is a step-by-step outline of the descriptive multicultural phenomenological methods (it demonstrates a cultural focus in a phenomenological inquiry). The subsequent sections will provide an elaboration and demonstration through the case study of Lola.

1. Identify the real (cultural artifact: painting, statue, clothing, tree, etc.) or irreal (only exists in consciousness: dreams, feelings, cultural meanings) object of inquiry. This is best done by reflecting on what cultural elements are fascinating or interesting in the researcher's daily happenings (e.g. rituals, expressions, feelings, etc.). Most often they are common and overlooked.

2. Formulate the phenomenological research question

1. De-naturalize from natural cultural attitudes and take on the phenomenological attitude

3. Epoché

1. Write out cultural preconceptions about cultural phenomenon under inquiry

2. Look for themes or meaning units

3. Bracket the meaning units throughout your written reflection

4. Reflect on how to contain them or dispute them as you move forward

4. Phenomenal Cultural Reduction

1. Formulate and conduct non-directive interviews

1. Transcribe the data

2. Bracket Meaning Units under cultural themes/understandings (similar to step 3.c)

2. Individual Textural Description

1. Paraphrase descriptively each participant's meaning unit bracket that highlights the textural qualities of the cultural experience/meaning.

3. Composite Textural description

1. Synthesize all the individual textural descriptions.

5. Imaginative Variations of Culture

1. Individual Invariant Structural Description

1. Paraphrase descriptively each participant's meaning unit bracket that highlights the structural (how it was experienced) qualities of the cultural phenomenon.

2. Composite Structural Descriptions

1. Synthesize the Textural and Structure Descriptions

6. Begin to reflect: How does this discovery move person forward? How does it contribute to the existing body of research literature? What has been gained, what was missed? Future directions.

Phenomenal Question Propagation

To begin, the multicultural educational leader must first develop a phenomenological question. This is done by taking notice of commonplace or taken-for-granted irreal cultural objects in the diverse classroom. For our ELAR Coach Lola, in the habitual happenings of every day, she asked, "What is this experience like? How does the meaning of this experience arise? How do we live through an experience like this" (van Manen, 2016, p. 31)? The ELAR Coach engaged in the afterschool program and felt her participation revealed a new wonder into the essence of personal self-actualization within culturally diverse group activities. Lola asked more specifically, how this

experience revealed the essence of the phenomenon of *becoming a self-actualizing person*. This research question reflected herself, students', and volunteers' realities.

The research question formulated was "What it is like to self-actualize within group activities with culturally diverse members?" This provided the focus and parameters of the study. Therefore, the research question is carefully constructed, where each word is purposely chosen and ordered to give the researcher a honed lens for setting attention, guiding interests, and reflection in the process. Our ELAR Coach then conducted a critical literature review to detect the gap in the multicultural literature. Although Lola's time was limited, she narrowed the literature search to culturally responsive interventions and multicultural afterschool group initiatives (Wertz et al., 2011).

A Balance of Structure and Flexibility

Descriptive multicultural phenomenology is an appropriate methodology if the inquiry is qualitative and seeks to investigate the meaning of an experience by elaborating on lifeworld phenomena in culture (Wertz et al., 2011). For investigating the physical phenomena in the environment, creating new theories, or testing hypotheses, descriptive multicultural phenomenology proves of little use. The focus is on the initial research question and to elaborate on the cultural phenomenon through layers of essence, texture, structure, and cultural meanings.

Descriptive multicultural phenomenology does not claim to be non-prescriptive, nor does it have room for major modifications. When methods are too flexible or open, results are warrant to misuse and misinterpretation (Giorgi, 2010). On the other hand, too strict a method and phenomenology becomes reduced and ineffective in its prepackaged steps. Thus, the research methods must remain a science for other critical readers to evaluate, by means of balancing structure and flexibility (Giorgi, 2009; Smith, 2010).

The educational leader as researcher must provide a specific rational for using descriptive multicultural phenomenology and why it is appropriate and ethical for conducting cultural research on certain populations (Wolf & Hulsizer, 2011). Our ELAR Coach Lola conducted this phenomenological inquiry to address the personal and academic needs of culturally diverse students, mainly the subpopulation of Mexican and Latinx immigrant youth in her school. Cultural diversity for her study entailed both Whites and people from other cultures; as a means to prevent the othering or devaluing of the many diversities within the group. Cultural diversity is a spectrum of heterogeneity that can include shared experience, sexual orientation, or cultural subgroup.

This methodology has the appropriate methods because it utilizes interviews and personal involvement to uncover the meanings of personal experiences for children. Methods within the phenomenological methodology include but are not limited to, case study, participatory research and non-directive interviews. The sources of data for the phenomenological interviews may be the children and volunteers, in which,

Involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions. Although the primary researcher may in advance develop a series of questions aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the person's experience of the phenomenon, these are varied, altered, or not used at all when the co-researcher shares the full story of his or her experience of the bracketed question. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114)

Lola was a culturally sensitive person and phenomenology required her to utilize senses, knowledge, and feelings as data sources (Wertz et al., 2011). The self is the ultimate authority in knowing the meaning of things and essences as they appear in consciousness (what is personally felt, thought, and perceived). This is especially important for participatory research, in which Lola sought to experience the same phenomenon as the children. Empathically relating to culturally diverse groups helped Lola understand and describe the context, conditions, and settings of the cultural phenomenon under study—appreciating subjects (children) in contexts (group activities) (Moustakas, 1994).

Lola was especially mindful of the emotional structure of culture, race, and ethnicity, when she conducted research and reviewed the findings (Beins, 2011). Emotions may be essential for knowing or experiencing a phenomenon, but can also be misleading if not fully explored (bracketed) or if there is a sense of emotional illiteracy (or cultural disconnect). To avoid stereotypes and bias (e.g., misrepresentation as seen through postcolonial theory), Lola had a sense of literacy in the diverse culture under study, that being immigrants from Mexico and Latin American countries. This includes the language, beliefs, groups, cultural worldviews, emotional meanings, and kinship patterns (Wolf & Hulsizer, 2011). To help her understand these cultural building blocks and nuances, she enlisted the help of volunteers (parents, children, and coworkers) to help her perceive these elements while spending time developing empathic relationships within the community. Perspective shifting to other worldviews is essential for multicultural phenomenology, but so is recognizing our own worldviews or *natural cultural attitudes*.

The Natural Cultural Attitude

In our cultural lifeworld we develop a *natural cultural attitude* (Giorgi, 2009). This is indirectly as Weiss (2016) argued, influenced by the person's cultural experiences, geographic location, cultural history, and interpersonal encounters with the world. The natural cultural attitude is the foundation of familiarity in a worldview or paradigm. People are not only in the processes of developing the natural cultural attitude, but also oblivious that we are its constructors (Husserl, 2012). It stems from a person's encounters with the cultural institutions (e.g. schools, religious centers, social gatherings, places of work and leisure) and relationships (friends, parents, peers, authority figures, etc.) that develop external attitudes, values, social norms, and viewpoints of others.

To “de-naturalize” the natural cultural attitude, Weiss (2016) recommended that “We begin to recognize that our natural attitudes are themselves complex, dynamic constructions, evolving and transforming over time, across space, and, most importantly, in response to specific social, cultural, and political encounters” (p. 4). Descriptive multicultural phenomenology means critically elaborating on and then bracketing natural cultural attitudes based on what things are and what the mind desires to see (Moustakas, 1994). This reflection ushers one into the phenomenological attitude—to “be able to return to the beginnings, to the things themselves as they give themselves in lived through experience—not as externally real or eternally existent, but as an openness that invites us to see them as if for the first time” (van Manen, 2016, p. 43).

The *multicultural phenomenological attitude* is achieved in openness and where cultural phenomena are continuously discovered, recognized, and reflected upon. The multicultural phenomenological attitude is about returning to the things themselves in the cultural lifeworld experience. Most importantly, developing an awareness of how cultural meanings and experiences may be vastly distinct, but ultimately are reflective of the infinity of sides in which human beings experience cultural phenomena. The ELAR Coach critically analyzed her own cultural knowledge, meanings, and experiences to greet the cultural phenomenon of self-actualization in group activity in a fresh way—not comparing, contrasting, interpreting, denying, or romanticizing (De Monticelli & Simionescu-Panait, 2015).

The First Bracket- Epoché

The first step in descriptive multicultural phenomenology begins with *epoché.* As stated by Moustakas (1994), “*Epoché* is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (p. 33). *Epoché* is about returning to cultural phenomena with a fresh perception (Moerrer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; van Manen, 2016). The process of *epoché* involves bracketing the natural cultural attitudes in the lifeworld that have been influenced by the cultural institutions of science, education, society, general public and important figures in our lives (either favorable or unfavorable) (Moustakas, 1994).

First, Lola critically reflected and called forth the knowledge, preconceptions, attitudes, values, etc. embedded in her mind about the Mexican and Latinx cultures. Then she began the process of bracketing. Lola wrote her preconceptions out and placed them in brackets with proper labels of meanings or themes. For example, as a White female from the northeast part of the U.S. that recently moved to the Southwest, she had been educated with certain attitudes about people from the Mexico, due to what she learned in school, media, or society. There was a great disconnect from her knowledge of the Mexican and Latinx culture and the realities of their culture. Calling forth and critically reflecting all personal attitudes and knowledge, regardless of truth is an important part of *epoché.*

Lola's attitudes toward Mexico and people from Mexico may have affected the way she perceived, treated, interacted, or understood those children. Lola explored White privilege and any sense of pity from the constant images of poverty or drug cartel violence seen on television, movies, and internet media. She critically disputed any kind of missionary perception or deficit model, where she felt that these children need saving. The ELAR Coach thought she knew Mexican culture from representations in movies or books, where the U.S. typically promotes patronizing representation of Mexico (as seen in Western films). The use of bracket names reflected these themes: Values, Relationships, Culture, Community, Misrepresentations, etc. Whatever the preconceived notions or attitudes, *epoché* called them forward so that Lola could critically engage them, place them in appropriate meaning brackets, and was open to the cultural phenomenon as experienced in the students' consciousness.

Phenomenological Cultural Reduction

After *epoché,* the ELAR Coach engaged the next step, which was to experience the afterschool program with a fresh perception and openness to the phenomenon. Within the course of group events, the Coach carried out the research methods chosen; participant observation and interviews. Phenomenological interviews were done during conference periods or allotted time afterschool for an appropriated time limit. Lola created and asked open-ended, non-directive[1] questions that sought to help the interviewee (volunteers and students) explore the meanings of the experiences in the afterschool program. It was important for Lola to receive approval by her institutions research review board to implement research protocol and collect data (e.g., participant and parent consent forms).

The exploratory interviews were with participants directly involved with the afterschool program's events, such as volunteers and students (Seidman, 2006; Wertz et al., 2011). Enlisting the help of school administrators, staff, or faculty that are directly involved with the program helped illuminate Lola to cultural nuances and rules. This was beneficial for cultural understandings and translations that Lola did not previously understand, and could now have a better position to grasp the structure and essence of the cultural phenomenon.

After the data had been collected from field notes of participatory research and transcribed participant data, the process of phenomenological reduction was employed. This entailed careful measure of each cultural experience or meaning in itself as itself: a pure description of essences (Husserl, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological reduction is the next step in phenomenology and seeks to present cultural phenomenon as it appears in consciousness, ignoring the object as it is outside consciousness or in reference to past knowledge (Giorgi, 2014; 2012). Reduction comes as a way of holistic description, to include essential elements, perspectives and perceptions, ocular and auditory sensations, emotions, and feelings. The reduction is not to limit or essentialize, but enable a self-consciousness of one's natural cultural attitude to 'purify' phenomena and describe things anew (Husserl, 2012; Weiss, 2016). Reduction begins by way of reflection to accesses the originary impressions of the experience, in which one is still

connected to the original experiential meanings—traces of the past are continued to be lived in the present.

The written portion of phenomenological reduction is a textural description of the invariant textural qualities (what is experienced in the phenomenon) from the interview data sets of each participant. Each textural description is based on reflection of the cultural elements, color, feelings, sights, sounds, and other ways in which the phenomenon was experienced (Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 2012). These signs are qualities of the essences in which elaboration reveals the textural qualities of the phenomenon. The ELAR Coach reviewed the interview data (and participant observations) and from wrote out elements, such as the way an event felt when participating, the sound of the children laughing together or how their faces looked when they were eating together. After the textural description was written, Lola read the entire description to grasp the whole or greater meaning (Giorgi, 2012). The descriptive data findings should always be written in a purely descriptive way so the critical other can directly check the data (Giorgi, 2009).

[1] See Demorest (2005) for discussion on Carl Rogers' non-directive interview methods.

Imaginative Variations of Culture

After Lola completed *epoché* and phenomenological reduction, she sought to engage the structural essences (how the phenomenon is experienced, in themes such as time, relationships, identity—that which holds the texture) of the cultural object through imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Through imaginative variation, she entered a realm of possibility to create a structural description of cultural meanings. This is by way of imagination, altering perspectives, assertions and negations, different vantage points, contrapuntal reflections, and purposes. Lola worked to distinguish invariant qualities and meanings of the essences of a cultural phenomenon (DeRobertis, 2016).

The invariant structural quality of the essence is something in which if removed, the phenomenon ceases to be (Giorgi, 2012; Wertz et al., 2011). An example can be seen in the cultural phenomenon of 'belonging', where if the quality of the affirmation of identity (i.e., sense of self shown in relationship) is removed, then we lose sight of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). To clarify, the textural quality is the *content of experience*, and the structural is the *process of experience* that holds the texture. The structural elements reveal the themes and meanings under the textural qualities. Engaging free imaginative variation, one removes elements of the phenomenon in order to see what is essential (Giorgi, 2009).

In the final phases of the descriptive multicultural phenomenology the ELAR Coach wrote a composite structural description. In this description, the textural and structural data and meanings were synthesized to offer the critical reader a pure description of the

phenomenon under inquiry. Many times, this composite description will be poetic or written as prose to communicate the deep meanings found in the essences of a cultural phenomenon. An excerpt from Lola's multicultural phenomenological inquiry into self-actualization in group activities reads as follows:

Becoming oneself in a group activity begins with the feeling of the weight of the world falling off one's shoulders—this weightlessness is a release of the self. Vibrant, intense, and rich colors: purple, red, blue, and sounds match the feelings of joy and togetherness. There is a feeling of connection with others, as if the self is synthesized with the group, yet the person remains and feels affirmed, valued, and dignified. Time exists as if we are in flowing eternity. Feelings intensify and reach new depths that reveal more of what it means to be a person becoming.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the written composite structural description allowed Lola a unique vantage point which to create culturally responsive interventions and initiatives throughout the school. The composite structural description is important to understanding the meaning of school experiences for culturally diverse students. By understanding what it is to have a self-actualizing moment within group activities, Lola applied this new data to comprehending how she could lead for teacher and student success.

For example, Lola's new comprehension may serve to help teachers develop culturally responsive lesson plans that utilize group activities allowing students emotional space to develop relationships, self-exploration and expression. Through engagement via multicultural education Lola utilized the afterschool program design to allow students to express culturally diverse meanings and explore cultures together. Lola and the teachers worked on bringing in culturally diverse students' cultures into the curricular content. When conferencing with students Lola now has deeper insight into the cultural phenomenon of self-actualization and can work with the diverse child's specific socio-emotional needs. An example may be understanding a barrier to learning. Perhaps a culturally diverse child feels a great sense of loneliness in school, even though they work in groups. As Lola uses her new insights, she can comprehend this loneliness and work to innovate strategies allowing this child to feel a sense of belongingness.

The multicultural phenomenological inquiry has generated data which is a gateway to understanding the cultural meanings for students' experiences. To begin, three questions must be considered as one generates culturally responsive initiatives: "How has this cultural phenomenon helped me understand the cultural meaning/experience under inquiry?", "How do I connect the phenomenological results with my instructional coaching?", and "What interventions or initiatives might I develop that would draw upon research results that allow teachers to utilize in helping culturally diverse students succeed personally and academically?"

Multicultural educational leaders are the avant-garde for ushering in the 21st century globalized age of education. The cultural diversity of students brings with it an

abundance of perspectives, meanings, and values different than our own. The educational leader will need a research methodology that works with the endless diversification of the educational setting. With increasing diversity, leaders have the privilege to access cultural phenomena from a multitude of vantage points in which to collect data to inform culturally responsive initiatives or interventions. These interventions will not only support academic and personal growth but also inspire hope in culturally diverse youth that the world is not plunging into dystopia; rather, there are more people than ever wishing to help and make life better (Harari, 2015). Ultimately, the culturally responsive initiatives and interventions generated from a descriptive multicultural phenomenological inquiry will allow educational leaders to grow the educational setting with the global dynamic, and open up our understanding of what it means to be an emerging person in the 21st century.

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