Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the co-authored dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Education with an emphasis in Educational Practice

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Fostering Teacher-Student Relationships:
A Case Study Connecting Authentic Local History and Middle School Teachers

Date: June 28, 2022
Time: 1:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.
Place: Remote

Abstract
Research Problem: This co-authored qualitative case study explores the problem of teachers connecting with their students in the middle school classroom. While much research has established the need for teachers to better understand the background experiences of their students, more research is needed to explain the value of place-based professional development in promoting more positive teacher-student relationships (TSRs).

Research Questions: Using a psychological theory of change known as Relational-Cultural Theory, this qualitative case study sought to answer the following research questions while also applying this theory to the field of education. What are the possible implications of applying Relational-Cultural Theory structures to the exploration of challenging local history by teachers? What impact does an immersive experience in a neighborhood’s local history have towards increasing teacher’s empathetic competence? In what ways does a teacher’s knowledge and awareness of a student’s neighborhood impact the teacher-student relationship?

Data Collection Procedure: This qualitative research design utilized a case study approach to measure the effect of a place-based professional development experience for middle school teachers at a small charter school in urban St. Louis. Through a series of interviews, classroom observations, and a focus group, data was triangulated to discern the overall effect of the intervention. This was accomplished by several rounds of coding the text and then using a thematic analysis procedure to identify emergent themes and overall patterns of meaning.

Findings: The study yielded the following findings. Teachers want better connections to their students. Teachers see how local history and knowledge of place can help build a relationship (reciprocity, shared knowledge). Teachers can use local history as a tool to build a relationship with students and their families. Teachers see the value of local history and would like more PD and learning opportunities for students.

Keywords: place-based, professional development, Relational-Cultural Theory, empathetic competence, authentic local history, public charter school

Defense of Dissertation Committee
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