

Excerpt from ...

Joyce, P. & Tutela, J. (2006). We Make Our Road by Talking. Doing Educational Research - A Handbook. In J. Kincheloe and K. Tobin (eds.). The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Interview with Dr. Joelle Tutela from Rutgers University about how my teaching experiences led me to apply to a doctoral program as well as helped to inform my research.

Tutela - Question # 1

How would you characterize your teaching practices and philosophy and how has it informed your research?

Joyce:

Based on my thirty years of experience, I would say that my teaching practices and philosophy have evolved over time. It progressed incrementally at different levels in my career from preschool to college level teaching. In that progression, I have been teaching in the area of urban education for fifteen years and with that experience I have come to acknowledge the worth of each student and the complexity of each individual. I know that is why I am so passionate about all students reaching their highest potential.

I remember in one of my undergrad education courses a professor gave my class a mnemonic – P.I.E.S. – physical, intellectual, emotional, and social, and indicated that all of these factors relate to the understanding of the total child. P.I.E.S. keeps me focused and cognizant of the reality that when dealing with young people their education goes far beyond school walls. I never forgot P.I.E.S., and still today it informs my teaching practices, philosophy, and now my research focus.

Tutela- Question # 2

How do you see your role as an educator and how does that influence your research?

Joyce:

I see my role as an educator in the form of a motivator, role model, and an “out of the box” representative for innovative alternatives in the field of education that will promote life-long learning. I interact with students and essentially tap into their world, through whatever means necessary, in order to have the tools necessary to stimulate their minds. In thirty years I have observed many children, but sadly in the twenty-first century, I have noticed a dramatic change in the energy level and motivation of the students that I teach. I have observed students sitting in class unmotivated and lethargic. It’s as if the thirst for discovery has been sucked out of them and because of that debilitating energy, igniting their imaginations and rekindling their spirits has become a constant challenge. In response to this dilemma, I am determined to pursue research that addresses societal and human influences connected to this problem that incapacitates my students.

The need for relationships both in education and in various aspects of research has evolved from my research. I have seen that building relationships with parents and students can help to motivate students who have lost their zest for learning. My research explores the need for teacher/parent relationships to ignite the spirits of non-responsive students. As a result of the research, teacher relationships with students as well as parents should be deemed mandatory groundwork when addressing student self-motivation. Consequently, with an effort to nurture

relationships as a priority in education the whole child is taken into consideration and more individual progress, both in academics as well as with “self”, becomes visible over time.

I adhere to a Freirean mindset and promote “out of the box” teaching. I feel that we are all interconnected and basically shrouded by a multitude of diverse surroundings not simply entombed within us. In effect, I believe everything I do has a ripple affect, which makes me constantly aware that my actions in the classroom have a resounding influence and therefore, warrants the need for critical thought to precede action. I incorporate this level of awareness and inclusive philosophy in my teaching practices and in my research. In my research as in teaching there has been evidence of my life experiences as well as in social situations that have melded together overtime and has trickled down to profoundly influence the direction of my research.

I believe that the various interconnected relationships of life helped me to formulate a firmly grounded educational vision. A part of this vision, which is dealt with in my dissertation, is to teach students and their parents how to navigate the system and be in relationship with it by first modeling “how to” and then gradually demonstrating the benefits of being among the power holders.

Tutela - Question #3

We have been talking a lot about our experiences in building a community at the high school level; do you think that building relationships and a community is necessary at the university level?

Joyce:

Based on my experiences in the doctoral program, I would say, the university experience requires navigating the system “know how” and building relationships as well. Much needs to be learned and relationships have to be built along the way to assist with the learning process. Ultimately, in order to circumvent the dreaded All But Dissertation (ABD status) in the doctoral program, survive the coursework requirements, and eventually earn a PhD degree, we have to be able to nurture a variety of relationships and critically negotiate through the system.

ENTERING THE CUNY Graduate Center

Tutela - Question #4

What motivated you to enter the Urban Education doctoral program at the CUNY Graduate Center?

Joyce:

A strong desire to be heard motivated me to continue my education and the PhD degree appeared to have the potential for creating a more credible voice. In many schools, PhD voices are often heard as opposed to *on-site* teacher voices. A common belief within the educational system is that a PhD degree means people listen to you as well as value what you have to say. I thought if that was truly the case, I needed to earn a PhD degree because I had something to say about urban education and I needed to be heard.

Observing administrators and educators who were not willing to go the necessary extra mile to understand the underlying issues that add to minority underachievement was another motivating force for me. In response to this blatant disservice to minority students and in an effort to end teacher deskilling, I enrolled in a doctoral program with the hope of enhancing the volume of my voice in anticipation of finally being heard as an advocate for students who often demand unprecedented levels of understanding.

Tutela - Question #5

Did you face any challenges in the process of applying to the Graduate Center?

Joyce:

My biggest concern, which also became my personal obstacle, was being a woman of color entering an environment that was traditionally not welcoming to minorities and reserved for “whites only”.

Tutela - Question #6

What did you do to overcome that challenge of the workload?

Joyce:

Well, I had to make sure that I was mentally and physically ready for the challenge. I had help from family and friends, which became my support network but I had to grapple with my inner psyche in order to set out on this demanding venture.

I also decided to trust the intuition of two professors that had faith in my ability to succeed. They mentored me through the enrollment process and have faithfully continued support throughout the program. In the months prior to the first day of class, I sought reinforcement and spoke with professors of color from my undergrad college. They were inspirational and helped me to feel even more secure with my decision to enter into a doctoral program.

After completing the registration procedure, paperwork, and entrance interview, I immediately began to meet other encouraging doctoral students who helped to relieve my lingering anticipation.