

Qualities of Internationally Educated Teachers in the U.S. Public Schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the qualities of internationally educated teachers in the United States. Their qualities are explored through the examination of the lived experiences of three multilingual and multicultural teachers working as certified teachers in the U.S. public schools. The research question is “What are the qualities of internationally educated teachers working in the U.S. public schools?” In a phenomenological research methodology, interviews were carried out with three multicultural and multilingual teachers who had been teaching in the United States and overseas. The whole-part-whole analysis was used to highlight the interview scripts as data analysis. The findings discuss the internationally educated teachers’ qualities in two broad strands: (1) being a role model for colleagues as they demonstrate tenacity and passion for teaching, extraordinary work ethic, and leadership; and (2) providing culturally responsive teaching. In the conclusion, this study summarizes the qualities of the participants and suggests implications for the U.S. school administrators, parents and students.

Keywords: *internationally educated teachers; immigrant teachers; multicultural teachers; multilingual teachers; immigrant teachers’ strengths; immigrant teachers’ qualities; work ethic of immigrant teachers; leadership of immigrant teachers; culturally responsive teaching*

1. Introduction

This researcher had been working in the U.S. public school system as an internationally educated teacher for eight years and had met with other internationally educated teachers. From my personal teaching experience and informal conversations that I had with other internationally educated teachers, I have made couple of observations: first, there were not many internationally educated teachers in the U.S. schools because of their limited access to the U.S. public schools; second, the qualities of these teachers were not recognized by the U.S. school administrators, teachers, and parents. Usually internationally educated teachers were considered as a newcomer and a learner of the mainstream U.S. culture. In other words, they were expected to learn and follow the norms of the mainstream culture and this expectation often placed them in a follower’s position, not in a leadership position. Their diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds were viewed in a deficit perspective as well. As an example, the internationally educated teachers’ foreign accent received more attention than their multilingual ability. On the other hand, having a foreign accent means that the teacher is from different cultural background and, thus, brings the cultural and linguistic knowledge of both United States and their home countries. Their multicultural and multilingual backgrounds can be utilized to better prepare students for the global world. In spite of these qualities, the traits of internationally educated teachers are not well known or appreciated in the U.S. public schools. In addition, existing research studies have

focused on the challenges of the internationally educated teachers face in the U.S. schools (Abramova, 2012; Beyon, Ilieva and Dichupa, 2004; Cho, 2010; Lee, 2013). However, there are not many research studies about the qualities and strengths of internationally educated teachers. There is a need for a more active research study on the qualities and strengths of these teachers in order to increase the understanding about them in the U.S. public schools.

Thus the purpose of this study is to examine the qualities of internationally educated teachers in the United States. Their qualities are explored through the examination of the lived experiences of three multilingual and multicultural teachers working as certified teachers in the U.S. public schools.

The research question is “What are the qualities of internationally educated teachers working in the U.S. public schools?”

The audiences of this study are school administrators, U.S. parents and students. For these audiences, this study is significant for the following reasons. For school administrators, this study assists their understanding of who internationally educated teachers are and what qualities and strengths they bring with them to the U.S. schools. This understanding may encourage school administrators to actively recruit more internationally educated teachers. I believe that this study also helps administrators understand the importance of providing a just and respectful working environment where internationally educated teachers’ potentials can be fully developed and recognized in their schools.

For U.S. parents and students who work with internationally educated teachers, this study increases their understanding of the lives of internationally educated teachers. Through this understanding, they may see that although internationally educated teachers look and sound different from them, these teachers are competent professionals who deserve respect and appreciation.

Phenomenological interviews were conducted to examine the qualities of three female internationally educated teachers. The study follows three sections. First section describes the literature review on the strengths and contributions of internationally educated teachers. The second section explains how data were collected and analyzed using phenomenological research approach. The third section discusses the findings along with two themes which are providing culturally responsive teaching and being a role model for colleagues. In the conclusion, this study summarizes the experiences and perceptions of the participants.

2. Literature Review

Several researchers (Arun, 2008; Carrison, 2007; Dee, 2003; Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006) highlighted the qualities and strengths of internationally educated teachers. Arun (2008) founded that internationally educated teachers from South Asia appeared to be knowledgeable, compassionate and capable educators. Adapting to the new context, they exhibited varied and flexible pedagogy, bringing a holistic perspective to their multicultural classrooms. Once settled, they engaged in the available professional development activities and took on leadership roles in their schools. Carrison (2007) also described the strengths of internationally educated teachers as potential leaders who can guide other teachers in issues relating to the education and welfare of culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families. I would like to highlight that both Arun and Carrison recognized internationally educated teachers as leaders, especially in the areas of multicultural education in the U.S. schools. Internationally educated teachers bring with them an inherent understanding of the backgrounds, attitudes, and experiences of students from certain minority groups and, therefore, can help inform majority teachers about effective ways to interact with students from culturally and linguistically diverse

backgrounds (Dee, 2003). What the U.S. school administrators, teachers and parents can learn from the aforementioned studies is that they can view internationally educated teachers as leaders in the school building and utilize their cultural and linguistic knowledge and experiences to create a culturally responsive school environment for all students. Myles, Cheng, and Wang (2006) would corroborate this idea as they asserted that “school should become more inclusive and accepting of the experiences and identities” (P. 244) of internationally educated teachers and should view these teachers as someone who “would significantly enrich not only the lives of the children they teach, but also the broader educational communities into which they become immersed” (p. 243).

The contribution of internationally educated teachers to *all* students, not just to students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, was also highlighted by several researchers (Quioco & Rios 2000; Redmond, Clinedinst, & O’Brien, 2000; Tomlinson, 1990). For students from the mainstream culture, having a teacher from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds “presents an opportunity to learn from an individual who reflects the broad cultural and social diversity that is the bedrock of our national unity.” (Redmond, Clinedinst & O’Brien, 2000, p. 9) According to Quioco and Rios (2000), parents in the United States who are interested in multicultural education understand the significance of having their children exposed to teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In the 21st century, all students are affected by diversity in languages and cultures (Lustig & Koester, 1996). Consequently, it is important that students from the mainstream culture interact with culturally and linguistically diverse professionals in order to help eradicate racism (Tomlinson, 1990) and racial and ethnic separation (Hawley, 1989).

3. Methods

This study was a phenomenological research study which investigated the qualities of three internationally educated teachers who are working as certified teachers in the U.S. public school systems. Phenomenological research method was used for its use of insider perspectives of human experiences (Van Manen, 1990; Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom, 2008). I found the phenomenology study useful because it focuses on intentionality, consciousness, and first-person perspectives (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom, 2008). This approach is particularly important as this study aims to look at the participants’ inside stories.

3.1. Participants

Three participants were selected from a range of public schools from urban settings in the southeast part of the United States. The three female teachers who participated in this study came from different schools and were known to the researcher as co-workers in the same school district or as a classmate in the same doctoral program in a nearby university at the time of the data collection and analysis. All three participants moved to the United States in their adulthood, spoke English as a foreign language and had received formal education from Grades K-12 in their home countries. The teachers were from Europe (Annabel), Colombia (Mares) and Singapore (Niang). This study did not specify the name of the European country as the European participant did not wish it to be revealed. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identity. Their durations of full-time teaching in the U.S. public schools ranged from 4 to 19 years. At the time of the study the participants were teaching in the primary grades as certified teachers in the U.S. public school system.

3.2. Data Collection

The data which formed the basis of this study were gathered through phenomenological semi-structured interviews and bridling journal entries. The teachers were asked: their life before coming to the United States; the reason for becoming a teacher in the U.S. School; teaching experiences in the U.S. schools in the first year and afterwards; the strengths they have; and the moments that they positively influenced their students, colleagues, parents and school administrators. Each interview took approximately 2 hours and total five interviews were conducted for each participant. The follow-up interviews were conducted via e-mails and phone calls because the participants were out of country to see their families, and the researcher also moved out of state for a job change after the interviews were completed. The number of follow-up interviews varied depending on the participants. With Annabel, five follow-up interviews were conducted via e-mails. With Niang, six follow-up interviews were conducted via e-mails and phone calls. With Mares four follow-up interviews were conducted via e-mails.

3.3. Data Analysis

The whole-part-whole analysis approach advocated by Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom (2008), Vagle (2010) and Van Manen (1990) was employed to analyze the research data.

Table 1. Whole-Part-Whole Analysis Conducted

Phase	Guidelines	Specific notes
I. Holistic Reading of Entire Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the entire data collection. Did not make any interpretive notes. Got reacquainted with the data. 	
II. First Read of Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used Highlighting Approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlighted meaningful statements and phrases. Briefly described them on the margin. Wrote comments/questions on the margin.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used the bridling journal to explicate my thoughts. 	
III. Follow-Up Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed margin notes in order to generate follow-up questions. Conducted follow up interviews to clarify meanings important in describing the phenomenon. 	
IV. Second Read of Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used Highlighting approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articulated the meanings based on my highlighted markings and margin notes. Follow-up with research participant
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created a separate document for each participant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moved (copy and paste electronically) each highlighted statement to a new document. Made sure to contain all of the potential parts that might contribute to answer my research questions.
V. Third Read of Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlighting approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articulated my analytic thoughts about each highlighted markings. Continued this process with each participant's interviews and bridling journal.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read across each participant's data. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looked for patterns. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gave preliminary titles to patterns. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added to and deleted analytic thoughts. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saw each pattern of meaning in relation to the whole. 		

As shown in Table 1, the data analysis consisted of three steps. The first reading of the whole data involved highlighting statements, phrases and brief descriptions of the researcher's notes. The second read of the data involved articulating the meanings based on the highlighted statements and follow-up interviews. The third reading of the data explored patterns and coding in relation to the whole picture of the data.

4. Findings and Discussions

The internationally educated teachers in this study have demonstrated qualities which consisted of the following elements: being a role model for colleagues and providing culturally responsive teaching.

4.1. Being a Role Model for Colleagues

The three internationally educated teachers demonstrated their strengths as a role model for their colleagues through tenacity and passion for teaching, extraordinary work ethic, and leadership.

4.1.1. Tenacity and Passion for Teaching: Passion for teaching may be what many people in teaching profession possess, whether they are internationally educated teachers or not. The reason why I added passion for teaching as one of the internationally educated teachers' strengths is because these participants showed their love of teaching in an extraordinary way that other teachers from the U.S. mainstream culture may not experience. In other words, the three participants exhibited their love of teaching through tenacity. Tenacity in this study is defined as the internationally educated teachers' personal disposition of not giving up easily in spite of the dominant culture's systemic and sociocultural barriers that constantly try to negate the internationally educated teachers' professional identity. For example, these participants had to endure all the obstacles such as time-consuming and costly visa process, credentialing process, starting from the bottom of the system to gain an entry, prejudices, and cultural differences. Then they finally became a teacher in the U.S. public school system. Annabel, for example, pursued her love of teaching in the United States despite some of the challenges she faced when she first came to the United States.

And the entire process going through INS...(sigh) was really tough...[My husband] was a student at that time...I was babysitting... And it was [a] very stressful time because [of] not knowing what I will be doing here... [It was] frustrating because I completed [both bachelor's degree and master's degree in] five years [in my home country] which was very hard... [Although] I have the teaching degree but I received it in my [home] country. And ...I didn't know if my degree would be fully recognized [in the United States.]...But I was interviewed for the TELL [Teacher of English Language Learners] Program...and I got the scholarship... [Then] the entire process of receiving credentials started. I had to submit all my documents including diploma,... all the course work, everything... I had to take the PRAXIS series and one required course called exceptional children.

When this researcher asked Annabel why she wanted to become a teacher in the United States in spite of the challenges that she had to go through, she answered, "Teaching is about touching the heart of children, parents, and other teachers...this is why I wanted to be a teacher."

Mares experienced even more challenges than Annabel while she was pursuing her dream to be a teacher in the United States. The hardships that she went through are well described in the following excerpt.

I had a tourist visa... I went to [a local university], and they had this program called ALP, American Language Program...[which] change[d] my status to [a] student visa... [When] I went to talk to the superintendent in [Anderson County School District]... he said, "Thank you for coming. Whenever you get your papers done [for a work visa], whenever you have somebody to sponsor you [for your work visa], I'll be more than glad to hire you. But so far we are not doing any sponsors [for a work visa] or anything like that." So then I went to Twinkle Star Academy ...[that was] willing to sponsor [my work visa]. So I called my [immigration law] attorney. He said, "We can do [it]. But that will cost you more and more." Every single thing that [I] asked that attorney [was] one thousand more, two thousand more, three thousand more. So we did that. And after a month, I've heard [that] I was a teacher of the baby room...in Twinkle Star Academy. I got a work visa for three years. [In] the third year, [Twinkle Star Academy] ... said, "If you consider going to the Pre-K classroom, I will [sign] you[r] residency paper." Of course, I accepted it. I worked there for [total] six years; two years for Early Head Start and four years with Pre-K. And last May...I got my residency card! So I went to talk to [Anderson County School District] and I told her, "I am a resident now. I can come to [work for] the Anderson County School District," which has been, you know, my goal... I wanted to be a teacher [in a public school system ever since I came to the United States.]... If I have to do any kinds of job [to become a teacher], I will do them... And I did [that]. I was a babysitter. I also cleaned houses for the family that I worked with. I also did nails. (laugh). And I [worked for] Twinkle Star Academy [for six years]. And two years ago, I [became] a teacher in the Anderson County School District! They offered me to be a Collaboration Pre-K Head Start classroom [teacher]. And I accepted it and here I am!

Although the above excerpt does not show this fact, Mares has a total of fifteen years of teaching experiences in Colombia before she came to the United States. In spite of her teaching certificate and 15 years of teaching experiences obtained in Colombia, Mares had to start from the beginning and work for more than six years in various places in order to become a teacher in a public school system in the United States. Despite these challenges, Mares chose to be a teacher in the United States because she had extraordinary passion for teaching. Mares shared her love of teaching in the following excerpt.

I adore my students. I adore being a teacher. That's the only thing I know how to do. That's the only thing I have done [in] my whole life. And I am passionate [about] it. I think that if I had to choose another career, I would be the most miserable person in life. I think what I choose was what I had to be. I don't see me in any other office, company or anything. I love what I [do]. I just think that that's what I was meant to be, a teacher.

Similarly Niang believed that it was her calling to become a teacher. The following excerpt shows that in spite of the challenges that she experienced during her student teaching, she never gave up on her love of teaching.

My student teaching was a nightmare. I think it was just personal conflict with the [collaborating] teacher. That's why from that experience, I learned not to be that way to other student teachers now... This was an older lady... My son was only six months old. So to [my collaborating teacher], it's like, 'she shouldn't be even here.' But I was never late, I never missed a day, I stayed until six o'clock. But she won't give me guidance... My lesson plans were ... filled with white out because I had to change everything every time I gave [them] to her. [She said] "You can't do this,

you can't. I guess you are not ready for this" Why didn't [she] tell me this when I asked [her] before I planned [the lesson plans]? If I saw her today, I would tell her, "Look, you tried to beat me down but look at what I have accomplished...I am not what you think, what you want, [or] wanted to make me." And I'm so glad that I stopped revenge because [teaching] is exactly what I [have] want[ed] to [do]. Ever since I was seven, I always wanted to be a teacher, you know.

Niang's passion for teaching is also described in another episode. Even after Niang finishes her work at school, she said that she could not stop thinking of her teaching and students.

I love [children]. I would babysit for free... I just love being with [children]. And I've always been that way... I love my [teaching] job. I mean, it's not work to me. I want to do it well and I love it. [My husband] understands that. Sometimes he teases me... I was grading papers yesterday during my daughter's honor's day ceremony. It was not her time [yet] and I knew when she was coming. So instead of watching all other children, I was grading [my students' papers]. [My husband] said, "You are grading papers here?" (Both Niang and the researcher laughed)... I love what I do...I feel like I am a better person because I'm doing what I want to do and I'm doing what I love.

All three internationally educated teachers had undergone challenges on the way to become school teachers in the U.S. public schools. In spite of the hardships they had, the participants endured them and successfully pursued their dream to be a school teacher in the United States. To these teachers, teaching was not just a job, but something that gave them purpose and meaning to their lives and their senses of self.

4.1.2. Extraordinary Work Ethic: All participants demonstrated a strong work ethic in their teaching. Annabel shared that she worked too much, and that her husband called her a workaholic: "I'm [a]...hard worker. My husband calls me...workaholic (laughs)." Similar to Annabel, Mares said that she always worked extra hours to be the best teacher she wanted to be.

I'm very strict with myself...When I do something, I have to do it in the best way, not [just] good, [but] the best! Because if not, anybody can do it and that's why I am in this position... because I think I am the best and give the best of myself to the people that are around me that include my students, my supervisor, and myself. I don't think everybody is like that. And that means that I get more tired because I work more than anybody. My sister tells me, "Why do you have [to] work so much? Are you the only teacher that works so [hard] like that?"

Likewise strong work ethic gained Niang her school administrator's trust. When this researcher interviewed Niang's school principal, Helen, about Niang's work ethic, Helen's response was exceptionally positive. The following excerpt shows how Niang's hard work gained her school principal's support and trust.

Every time that Niang has wanted to test something... [such as] over night staying...[for] students and parents at school on Friday evening, she would come to me and have a very good plan. She had everything thought through; good parent letters explaining about safety, talking about what the protocols would be, what the evening will hold for them. And I just felt like she was very prepared. Her ideas were sound. They made sense. And ...there were things that maybe regular [American] teachers wouldn't necessarily want to do because it was time

consuming. I felt like she just has so much energy that she puts into her job but it's not a job. It's what she believes in. And that passion just comes through loud and clear.

All three excerpts show that the internationally educated teachers in this study did not hesitate to do extra hours of work to be the best teacher they wanted to be and focused their energy and time on being competent teachers. This study found that the extraordinary work ethic was one of the outstanding qualities and strengths of these participants. Interestingly, however, there is not a research study conducted to examine the internationally educated teachers' work ethic yet. Thus there is no supporting literature on the exceptional work ethic of the internationally educated teachers. However, this study helps fill the gap in the literature and adds information about internationally educated teachers' work ethic from both internationally educated teacher's and the school administrator's perspectives to the current knowledge. The internationally educated teachers used the expressions such as "best," "work more than anybody," and "workaholic." They wanted to be the best teachers they could be by working harder than anybody in their schools. As Niang's principal confirmed, these teachers brought so much "energy" and accomplished "things that maybe regular [American] teachers wouldn't necessarily want to do because it was time consuming." For these internationally educated teachers, teaching was not just a job. It was "what [they] believe in" and what they love for life. As the aforementioned findings indicate, internationally educated teachers possess inherently exceptional work ethic and can be a good role model for both teachers and students by showing them the value of hard work.

4.1.3. Leadership: The participating immigrant teachers demonstrated leadership by reaching out to help other teachers in the school building. Annabel, for example, showed her leadership when she collaborated with two teachers in her school. The following excerpt shows how Annabel demonstrated her leadership when collaborating with those two teachers.

I collaborated [with] two class[room teachers] this year, second and third grade[s]... I have different views and ideas. Sometimes that can be very challenging [when I collaborate with teachers] because some teachers prefer the standard approach in teaching... But ...[although] it was our first year [to collaborate], the second grade teacher who collaborated with me was very pleased with our collaboration and went to our literacy coach and our [school] principal requesting all ESOL children to be placed in her classroom next year. [She also requested that] she would love to work with me again... And also the third grade teacher was very grateful [to me too]. It was her second year [in teaching and] she had a real difficulty with discipline. And I definitely supported her. We both created behavior plan for children to follow. I think it worked very well [for her and her students].

Annabel demonstrated her leadership by giving her best at work and was recognized as a competent teacher by her colleague. She also showed her leadership by reaching out first to the teacher who needed help in her classroom management skill.

Similarly, Mares also reached out first and helped a new teacher in her school. The following excerpt shows how Mares helped this new teacher in her school.

I went to see her class and I said, "Sandy, how are you feeling? Is everything okay? Is there something I can do to help you?" And she started crying and said, "I feel so overwhelmed!" I asked "What happened?" She said, "Mares, this is just too much work!" And I said, "It is. And I will help you. I'm going to help you." And I sat

down and, through the whole year, I mentored her not because they pa[id] me to mentor her or because they told me...but because I think that when a new person comes, I will [help out]. What would you like to happen to you when you started [teaching]? I would tell you [that] I would love to have somebody to help me, mentor me, guide me, and show me the way to do it [right].

This collaborative process helped Mares feel a sense of gratification which is well described in the following excerpt:

How did I feel helping this girl this year? I feel great! I think she felt calmer because every time she was so stressed, I [told] her, “No, don’t worry. This is the way they want you to do it but there is another way that you can do it also. And it’s okay.” So that g[a]ve her so much comfort. It let her breathe and say, “Yes, I can do it. I know how to do it [now]”.

Niang also enjoyed helping and guiding her student teachers in her school by being their role model and showing them what good teaching looked like.

[My] job as a supervising teacher is to scaffold [the student teachers’] learning. If they are not doing something right, [I] need to show them. [Although] I have a student teacher, I still feel that that classroom is under my name. So I’m ultimately responsible for it... Ultimately it’s my name, it’s my reputation that is in stake here. If you make a mistake, I’m not going to throw you in the fire and say, ‘Oh, she’s the one who did it’. It’s my classroom. So I’ll take the blame for it, you know.

Niang was well aware of her responsibility as a supervising teacher and demonstrated her leadership by being a good role model for her student teachers and taking an ultimate responsibility in her classroom.

All three internationally educated teachers demonstrated leadership at school by reaching out to colleagues who needed help and setting a good example by action. Internationally educated teachers can engage in the available professional development activities and take on leadership roles in their schools. (Arun, 2008) Similarly, the three participants in this study took on leadership roles by mentoring a new teacher, supervising student teachers in the school building, or guiding a colleague on student behavior management skills. Carrison (2007) stated that internationally educated teachers demonstrate “the potential to become leaders who can guide others including pre-service and in-service educators in issues relating to the education and welfare of culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families.” As Carrison mentioned, the internationally educated teachers in this study also exhibited leadership by guiding both student teachers and fellow teachers in matters of instruction and academic success of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Internationally educated teachers bring with them an inherent understanding of the backgrounds, attitudes, and experiences of students from certain minority groups and, therefore, can guide majority teachers to effective ways to interact with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Dee, 2003). Thus internationally educated teachers can be perceived as leaders in the school building and can guide teachers from the mainstream U.S. culture in creating a culturally responsive learning environment for minority students utilizing their cultural and linguistic knowledge and experiences.

4.2. Providing Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ladson-Billings (1995) notes that a key criterion for culturally responsive teaching is

nurturing and supporting competence in both home and school cultures. The three participants in this study used the students' home cultural experiences as a foundation upon which to develop knowledge and skills. For example, having lived in two different countries, Annabel has gained not only knowledge of the lives and experiences of diverse cultural groups but also comprehension of how different cultural experiences shaped attitudes and perspectives of varied groups, including her own. Through her multicultural experiences, Annabel showed her understanding and sensitivity for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The following excerpt shows that Annabel supplemented instruction with resources rich in diversity and sensitive in portrayal of individuals from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds.

I used special project called 'Digital Story Telling' ...[that] students had to write something about them. The project's name was 'All About Me.' The students stated their interest, country of origin, something about their cultural background, [and] family background. And it was scanned ... [and] through the microphone they read their stories and it was projected as a movie on a SmartBoard. The children were really proud [of themselves] ...[for] where they came from, where their parents came from, who they are, their roots and their language, their religion, culture, [and] customs they bring to our school every day.

By promoting self images and brief autobiographies of culturally and linguistically diverse students, Annabel capitalized on the strengths her English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students brought to school. Richards, Brown, and Forde (2006) pointed out that culturally responsive teachers implement classroom activities that are culturally supportive of their students. Annabel showed this trait of a culturally responsive teacher by validating students' cultural identity in classroom practices and instructional materials.

Mares also showed a trait of a culturally responsive teacher as she worked with Spanish speaking families and their children at her school. For instance, the following excerpt shows that Mares recognizes Spanish language as part of those students' cultural knowledge, and instills pride in her students about their cultural heritage.

When I meet my Hispanic parents, what I have realized about Hispanic culture is that once they learned English, they never go back to Spanish. I think that is so wrong. I think you [should] never lose your identity and...where you come from. I always tell my students and [their] parents, "Don't you let them forget their native language. It is as important as English." You don't imagine how many opportunit[ies] you are going to lose in life if you don't know another language... If you have another language...that will give you so much abilities to move on...and [you will] not be embarrassed about what your country is, if you happen to have different color of skin, different color of hair, different accent when you speak... As a teacher, we need to make that happen because sometimes kids think that because they are immigrant, it is not okay to use their [home] language. And I think that is so not right.

Carrison (2007) suggested that teachers who work with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds "must work to instill pride in students whose cultures deviate from the mainstream dominant cultural group, which is Anglo, native English-speakers" (p. 46). Understanding the value of bilingual and bicultural knowledge through her culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Mares instilled pride in her Hispanic students through her culturally responsive teaching that valued their culture and their home language.

Niang also demonstrated culturally responsive teaching in the following excerpts. I did a United Nation Unit [with my students]. When I was [teaching] in the International Baccalaureate school [in Singapore], I did that also. So why didn't I do it here? And ... I had students from different countr[ies]; Poland, Korea, and Japan. ... I talked about [Singapore as well]. And then [my students and I] talked about food, you know, the kids love to eat. [We] talked about music, pictures, [and] a video tape of each other's country [of origin]. I wanted ...them to share [with each other] about what children in that country [are like], what they do, and what their houses look like... And then they have to go home and teach their parents and tell them about it.

Niang made meaningful connections between school and the world outside the United States by using her students' diverse cultural experiences to develop new knowledge of the world. Culturally responsive teaching uses the students' personal experiences to develop new skills and knowledge in order to make meaningful connections between school and real-life situations (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002). Content learned in this way is more significant to the students and facilitates the transfer of what is learned in school to real-life situations (*ibid.*) Niang's teaching described in the above excerpt shows this trait of culturally responsive teaching.

As the excerpts from all three internationally educated teachers indicate, they demonstrated traits of culturally responsive teaching by using their students' home cultural experiences and multilingual experiences as a foundation upon which to develop new knowledge and skills. Carrison (2007) explains one of the internationally educated teachers' strengths as "approach[ing] the profession from a culturally responsive perspective that not only influences their instructional practices but also their advocacy for students. (p. v)" To affirm Carrison's observation, this researcher also found that, through their personal multicultural and multilingual experiences, these participants recognized and valued the language and culture of those students who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. By doing so, these internationally educated teachers instilled pride in their students of their home language and culture. These participants also helped students make meaningful connections between school and the world outside the United States using their multicultural and multilingual experiences.

5. Conclusions

This phenomenological study provided for an insider perspective of the internationally educated teachers' lived-experiences in terms of their qualities and strengths. As mentioned in the introduction, the U.S. school administrators, parents and students from the U.S. mainstream culture do not have profound understanding about internationally educated teachers. This lack of understanding about internationally educated teachers may be resulted in prejudices and discrimination against these teachers in the U.S. public school systems (Ozbarlas, 2008; Yee, 2008). In order to bring an in-depth understanding about internationally educated teachers in terms of their personal traits and strengths to the professional teaching field, this study attempted to illuminate internationally educated teachers' qualities and positive traits they bring with them to the U.S. public school system.

In this study, the review of the teaching experiences of internationally educated teachers has given insider stories of the nature of their qualities and strengths, such as culturally responsive teaching and being a role model for their colleagues through the traits of extraordinary work ethic, leadership, tenacity and passion for teaching. The three internationally educated teachers in this study utilized their multicultural and multilingual backgrounds and exhibited understanding and sensitivity for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. These teachers

supplemented instruction with resources rich in diversity using their students' home cultural experiences as a foundation upon which to develop new knowledge and skills. As a result they not only instilled pride in their students of their home cultures and home languages, but also helped their students make meaningful connections between school and real-life situations. In addition to providing the culturally responsive teaching, these internationally educated teachers demonstrated qualities and strengths by being a role model for their colleagues at schools. First, these participants possessed inherently exceptional work ethic and took pride in working harder than anybody in the school in order to be the best teacher they hope to be. Second, they demonstrated outstanding leadership skills by mentoring a new teacher, supervising student teachers in the school building, or guiding a colleague teacher on student behavior management skills. Lastly, the three internationally educated teachers exhibited their passion for teaching through tenacity. Unlike other teachers from the U.S. mainstream culture, these internationally educated teachers had to undergo many challenges, such as prejudices and discouragement from a supervising teacher during the student teaching period, negation of their teaching credentials and years of teaching experiences in their home countries, starting from the bottom in the U.S. public school system, and time-consuming and costly visa process. In spite of the challenging circumstances that asked for sacrifice at the expense of their time, money, and emotion, these internationally educated teachers chose to work in the U.S. public school systems because of their passion for teaching. Although passion for teaching is a trait that most teachers in the U.S. possess, these participants demonstrated passion for teaching at an extraordinary level as they endured the aforementioned hardships that the teachers from the U.S. mainstream culture do not usually experience.

6. Implications

From the conclusions discussed above, this study has implications for (1) school administrators, and (2) parents and students. First, this study expands school administrators' understanding of internationally educated teachers in terms of those teachers' positive traits (*e.g.*, extraordinary work ethic, leadership, tenacity and passion for teaching) and contributions to the U.S. public school education (*e.g.*, providing culturally responsive teaching). In spite of the qualities and strengths of internationally educated teachers possess, many school administrators are reluctant to hire internationally educated teachers as this study pointed out in the introduction. It is important that school administrators take a risk and keep an open mind towards internationally educated teachers as these teachers take risks to become a teacher in the United States. If school administrators do a good interview and let internationally educated teacher candidates talk about their lives and teaching experiences, they can surely tell what kind of teaching they are going to provide in the classroom, what kind of person they are going to be, and how they are going to be interacting with children, parents, and staff members. It is important that principals are not afraid of interviewing internationally educated teachers and try to recognize the qualities these teachers have with an open mind during the interview. Myles, Cheng, and Wang (2006) asserted that "school should become more inclusive and accepting of the experiences and identities" (P. 244) of internationally educated teachers and should view these teachers as someone who "would significantly enrich not only lives of the children they teach, but also the broader educational communities into which they become immersed" (p. 243). Based on this claim, it may be a good idea that internationally educated teachers educate other teachers by offering professional development to share their knowledge of cultural diversity. Having internationally educated teachers share their experiences of

becoming a teacher in the United States may give other teachers an opportunity to learn educational beliefs and practices of other countries. Through this learning, teachers from the mainstream U.S. culture may expand their understanding of people from different cultures and appreciate internationally educated teachers' multicultural and multilingual knowledge. In other words, when school administrators create a school environment where internationally educated teachers are encouraged to share their funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) through professional development, internationally educated teachers are likely to be perceived as competent and resourceful professionals.

Second, it is important for those parents and students from the U.S. mainstream culture who have never worked with internationally educated teachers, to be aware of the positive traits these teachers bring with them to the U.S. schools. As discussed in the findings of this study, internationally educated teachers exhibit the trait of culturally responsive teaching in their instruction; they value students' home culture and help their students make meaningful connections between school and real-life situations. It is important that parents and students judge internationally educated teachers by their teaching competence, not by the way they look or sound. By doing so, parents and students can perceive internationally educated teachers as professionals who have a lot to offer to the field of education in the United States and who deserve their respect. In order to learn more about internationally educated teachers, parents and students may simply talk to internationally educated teachers themselves and get information about who they are, where they are from, why they came to the United States, and what they can offer for parents and their children at school. Especially, the more parents and students understand who internationally educated teachers are, the more they respect these teachers as professionals. There are several things that schools can do to help parents and students understand internationally educated teachers better. Inviting an internationally educated teacher as a guest speaker or as a facilitator of a workshop, can give parents and students a chance to interact with, and learn from, an internationally educated teacher. Another way to help parents and students expand their understanding of these teachers is having them talk to parents and students during teacher-parent conferences or Meet and Greet Nights at school about their life stories that encompass multicultural and multilingual experiences and knowledge.

In addition, as the world becomes more globalized in the 21st century, more parents are aware that their children are affected by diversity in languages and cultures (Lustig & Koester, 1996). Parents in the United States, who are interested in multicultural education, understand the significance of having their children exposed to teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Quiocho and Rios, 2000). Consequently, it is important that students from the mainstream culture interact with culturally and linguistically diverse professionals at school in order to help eradicate racism (Tomlinson, 1990) and racial and ethnic separation (Hawley, 1989). Thus it is important to acknowledge what internationally educated teachers bring to the host society, contributions which include "constructive images of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds of color, a realistic understanding of our growing multicultural society and sheer understanding of learning from people of different backgrounds" (Shaw, 1996, p. 488).

Going back to the research question, 'What are the qualities of internationally educated teachers working in the U.S. public schools?', this study faithfully answered the question using personal stories of internationally educated teachers about the qualities and strengths they possess from their perspectives. While stories of the three internationally educated teachers do not represent every internationally educated teacher in U.S. public schools, the account offers a framework for reflecting and/or further examining the qualities and strengths of internationally educated teachers. Through the examination of

insights gleaned from the lived experiences of the three multicultural and multilingual teachers, this study was an attempt to expand the U.S. school administrators,' parents,' and students' understanding of internationally educated teachers' strengths and their contributions to the U.S. public schools.

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