Changing the Face of Teaching:
Preparing Educators for Diverse Settings

By Marta D. Collier

The numbers of African Americans within the teaching force has failed to keep pace with the growing level of diversity clearly present in classrooms across the nation. This trend towards an increasing African-American student population and a decreasing African-American teaching force continues to grow.

An objective study of the shrinking diversity within the teaching force requires answers to several important questions. First, how did we arrive at a state where half the children in our nation's schools could receive 12 years of education without ever facing a teacher of their own ethnic and cultural background (Hudson, 1994)? Second, why have the numbers of minority teachers continued to decline since *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, while the numbers of majority teachers continue to rise? Third, how does the absence of minority teachers affect the teaching and learning of America's schoolchildren? Finally, how are teacher educators responding to stem and reverse this negative trend?

The goal of this article is two-fold. First, I will address these important questions by taking a look at the relevant literature to achieve some insight and

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historical perspective. Second, I will share the story of collaboration between two very different campuses united by a singular purpose: to recruit and train teachers (particularly African Americans) for classrooms in the underserved Arkansas Delta.

Historical Perspective: Barriers

The field of teaching has historically provided a significant means of upward mobility, particularly for African-American women who completed baccalaureate degrees (Irvine, 1988). By 1950, an unprecedented one-half of all African-American professionals were employed as classroom teachers (Cole, 1986). Ironically, the then legal institution of segregated dual-school systems provided job security for African-American teachers (Coursen, 1975). Limited opportunities for employment caused generations of family members to encourage entry into education as a solid pathway into the black middle class.

Historically black colleges and universities developed exemplary departments in the area of teacher training. The flow of candidates (both male and female) was steady and talent rich. This trend became so established as the norm that an African-American male seen wearing a suit in public was generally assumed to be one of two things—a preacher or a teacher.

As we examine the recent pages of our history to comprehend the forces responsible for the significant decline in African Americans in the teaching force, we must begin with the decision handed down by the Supreme Court in 1954 known as *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education.* This historic decision ended legal segregation in school systems throughout this country. The fact that America essentially operated two separate school systems in many parts of our nation (particularly in the South) prior to the *Brown* decision had a significant impact on the growing lack of diversity in the teaching force within this country. Essentially communities supported two of everything for their citizens: one black, one white. This included separate administrative structures, faculties, facilities, budgets, curriculums, sports teams, and, where provided, transportation systems. Under the banner of segregation, many communities preferred to bear the financial burden of two separate school systems rather than allow black and white students to attend school together.

Hawkins (1994) estimates that 82,000 African-American teachers provided instruction for a black student population numbering around two million in 1954. Within a span of ten years, almost 40,000 African-American teachers and administrators lost their jobs through the implementation of the *Brown* decision (Ethridge, 1979; Holmes,1990). The damage continued to mount in the wake of transfer policies which further drained black schools.

> These numbers do not reflect the vast numbers of the black community's most competent teachers, who were reassigned to schools in the white community, a prevalent practice then and now. (Irvine, 1988, p.500)

The civil rights victory achieved in order to increase opportunity for a better education for all children had the residual effect of decimating the African-American teaching force, setting in motion a trend which continues to the present day. Hudson (1994) suggests that the subtle message of *Brown* relayed a sense of inferiority towards black schools and inherent superiority in schools populated and run by whites. It seemed logical to save the best options within the system when faced with the necessity of ending so-called "separate but equal" standards within community schools. Subsequently, many all-black schools along with their administrators and faculties found themselves between a rock and a hard place.

The *Brown* decision and the desegregation strategies implemented seemed to suggest that the White education system was intrinsically better than the Black education system. The latter was deemed expendable in the interest of public school desegregation (Hudson, 1994, p. 389). The advent of desegregation irrevocably changed the face of education in our nation. The partial autonomy enjoyed by black schools under segregation gave way to institutions controlled by whites who previously ignored the activities of black faculty and staff (Irvine, 1988). This peculiar relationship was aptly described by Sowell (1976). He speaks of the lack of interest of white school boards in the affairs of black districts, allowing great deference to black personnel in managing their schools. This relationship changed abruptly with the implementation of *Brown*. According to Irvine:

> The 1954 Brown decision dictated that white school boards and superintendents were now in control of critical personnel decisions, such as hiring, firing and transfers in previously all-black schools.... Personnel decisions resulted in the firing and transferring of many black teachers after desegregation. (1988, p. 504)

An in-depth review of the research reveals additional factors as contributors to the decline in the number of African Americans in the teaching force. These include declining college enrollments, state and national teacher competency testing, increased opportunity in other professional fields, and the lack of competitive incentives to enter the teaching profession (including low wages). These are all legitimate topics for further research and discussion. However, these factors pale in comparison to the effects of the *Brown* decision. A valuable resource that the nation had in its black teachers was reduced to a fraction of its former size within a decade. *Brown* introduced an era fraught with displacement, hostility, and even elimination of African-American teachers. A critical review is required if we are to fully understand the impact of *Brown* upon the African-American teaching force in the drive to end legal segregation of public schools.

The Effects of Absence: Missing Black Teachers

The implementation of *Brown* more than any other development in our history may account for the disparity in percentages of African-American teachers and African-American students. A serious shortage has developed of African-American

teachers uniquely equipped with the cultural, ethnic, and pedagogical knowledge required for diverse 21st century classrooms. Hudson (1994, citing Hawkins, 1994, p.388) aptly states:

> Forty years after *Brown,* most U.S. students go through 12 years of schooling without ever having met a minority teacher, and approximately 70 percent of all minority students continue to attend predominantly or exclusively minority schools. (Hawkins, 1994)

Hudson (1994) concludes that many African Americans with high aspirations, expectations, and dreams for fair and equal education failed to achieve this reality despite the *Brown* decision, particularly in light of the absence of Black teachers. Should we be concerned? If so, why?

The impact of African-American teachers on student performance has drawn a great deal of attention. The work of Brophy (1983), Evertson (1986), and others support the idea that classroom teachers exert tremendous influence on the level of student achievement. Stewart, Meier, and England (1989) suggest a possible link between similarities in teacher-student ethnic and cultural backgrounds and a higher level of equity and student performance in the classroom. Teacher expectations and commitment to student success tend to be higher for black students when, as Foster (1993) asserts, ethnicity, cultural, and social norms are shared by teacher and students. Foster suggests the following profile for successful teachers of African-American students, drawn from her study of 18 effective African-American teachers:

> It is my contention that the teachers who participated in my study are successful because they are proficient in community norms—that is, they are able to communicate with students in a familiar cultural idiom. Moreover, their success is also due to their understanding of the current as well as the historic social, economic, and political relationships of their community to the larger society. These teachers are not merely educating the mind—they are educating for character, personal fulfillment, and success in the larger society as well as for competence in the local community. (Foster, 1993, p. 391)

Foster would ask that we accept the reality of shared cultural connections and understandings that bind a people together, allowing them to communicate and process information necessary for survival, development, and growth. The teachers in Foster's study exhibited behaviors that resembled family ties or "kinship" (Foster, 1993). They identified with, connected to, and exhibited solid support for their students.

Mitchell (1998) refers to theorists who identify a culturally-relevant pedagogy as key to the success of some African-American teachers. These expert teachers possess knowledge and a keen understanding of the communities and backgrounds that shaped their students lives. Mitchell further contends in her study of eight retired African-American teachers that their roles demanded that they mediate, become activists for, and actively support the growth and development of their

students. These teachers understood the importance of their roles and performed them with skill due to their awareness of the students' experiences within and outside of school and the parameters that defined these experiences (Mitchell, 1998, p. 104-105).

Irvine (1988) referenced the work of Adair (1984), Gottlieb (1964), Griffin and London (1979), and Beady and Hansell (1981) demonstrating the need for African Americans in the teaching force. Adair (1984) found the presence of African-American teachers to be beneficial on a number of levels, including but not limited to (1) interpreter of school culture, (2) protector from systemic injustice, and (3) model for majority teachers in successful ways to interact with, motivate, and instruct African-American students.

Gottlieb (1964) discovered wide disparities in the use of adjectives to describe the actions of black students by a set of black and white teachers, with the positive adjectives attributed to black teachers. A questionnaire designed by Griffin and London (1979) revealed a majority of the black teachers polled believed their students possessed adequate or better ability for school success. White teachers in the same study viewed a majority of the black students below minimum levels of ability for achievement. Finally, Beady and Hansell (1981) discovered black teachers held substantially higher expectation for college success for black students than white teachers did.

Hudson and Holmes (1994) raise some important issues related to the absence of African-American teachers in the teaching force. First, the development of the deficit image of black students can be attributed to the post-*Brown* era where many white teachers lacking experience with black students accepted stereotypes of limited ability to explain school failure. Second, black students began to experience problems in such areas as low self-concept, low teacher expectations, and a significant increase in assignments to special education classes. Furthermore:

> The 95 percent White teaching force that is projected by the year 2000 will mean almost all of the teachers of African-American students will work in communities where they do not reside. The establishment and maintenance of a connection similar to that of the pre-*Brown* era between white teachers and their African-American charges may prove increasingly problematic. (Hudson & Holmes, 1994, p. 391)

Hudson and Holmes reinforce their findings with the work of Smith (1982), who suggests that the goal of this discussion is not to indict white teachers as incapable of delivering quality instruction to African-American students. Rather, there exists a need to understand that the relational transactions which occur between the teacher and community may cease as classrooms are filled with more teachers who are ethnically different from and do not reside within the communities where they teach. Furthermore, the very interactions that naturally occur between teachers, parents, and children outside the context of school within churches, community organizations, and the like will be cut off.

The effects of the implementation of *Brown* present a mixed bag of benefits and deficits in the African-American community. It would seem that those best able to capitalize on the benefits were those already prepared and mentored under a system of segregated schools staffed and administered by African Americans.

> The most significant gains occurred among those African Americans who were "ready" to participate, contribute, and play leadership roles in the more open society wrought by the civil rights movement that followed the 1954 decision. Unfortunately, many were left behind. Somehow, the sense of empowerment and enabling fostered in African-American schoolchildren and youth by the by-gone, segregated Black school systems did not carry over to the White-dominated systems those students found themselves in after *Brown.* (Hudson & Holmes, 1994, p. 392)

We must refrain from drawing rash conclusions from statistics even as compelling as those previously referenced. The shrewd observer understands the need for critical analysis if data is to serve a valid and useful purpose. However, it is perhaps acceptable to suggest that African-American teachers may possess some knowledge, backgrounds, perspectives, and strategies that inform their work with black students and may well enhance the results of majority teachers who must rely on fewer cultural connectors.

The role of African-American teachers in the educational development of all children, particularly African-American youth, requires additional study to isolate the beliefs and philosophy embedded in the practice of these educators that guide their professional behaviors. Furthermore, careful study must be devoted to clarify the impact of these professional behaviors in terms of their ability to enhance student achievement. Perhaps then we can more effectively articulate the importance of the role of African Americans in the teaching force not only in their ability to affect student outcomes but to also inform and enhance the interactions of their white colleagues with a student population that grows increasingly more diverse.

Teacher Educators Respond

The need to increase the presence of African Americans in the teaching force has been met with a diverse package of strategies and ideas to reverse what is seen as an increasingly dangerous trend. The responses include formulating programs that aggressively recruit and train members of minority groups to become classroom teachers. Jones and Sandidge (1997) charge all teacher education programs with the responsibility to help teachers develop a level of comfort in multicultural settings to encourage their support of and sensitivity towards students who do not share their ethnic heritage. These programs must be able and willing to train teachers who can meet the challenges of educational environments that are increasingly more culturally diverse (Jones & Sandidge, 1997, p. 199).

Su (1994) cites the changes in student profiles and infers the need to design teacher education programs for older African-American candidates, those married

with children and those who must work full-time jobs as they pursue their training to become licensed teachers.

On the other side of this argument we find Sianjina, Cage, and Allen (1996) calling for measures that insure more qualified African-American candidates for teacher education programs emerge from high school and are encouraged by their community (including family members) to pursue careers in teaching. They assert that measures must be taken to enhance the perception of the teaching profession, including higher salaries and improved working conditions.

Johnson (1986) reiterates the importance of perception at a time when negative images of teaching seem prominent in the black community. He questions why blacks fail to see opportunities in teaching when at the same time white females are entering the field in unprecedented numbers despite the prevailing disincentives. Johnson argues that the serious decline in African Americans entering the field of education poses significant problems for our communities in meeting the needs of the children they must serve.

Gordon (1994) points out that teacher education programs may fail to attract more black candidates due to lack of aggressive recruitment programs. She contends that the pool of minority candidates is much deeper than enrollment in teacher education programs would suggest. The problem appears to be the lack of effort or inadequate efforts to reach out to African Americans.

Dandy (1998) presents one example of an effective recruitment program for minority candidates based at Armstrong Atlantic University in Savannah, Georgia, where candidates for the teacher education program are drawn from the pool of teacher aides assigned to local public schools. The program, known as Pathways, seeks to address the shortage of minority teachers by offering financial, academic, and counseling resources to non-certified school staff, empowering them to pursue a college degree (Dandy, 1998). Key aspects of the program include scheduling all classes on Fridays, with substitutes provided by the district (facilitating class attendance while reducing the time missed from work), a program to monitor the students' academic progress including intrusive monitoring of the GPA, training sessions on making the transition from a school aide to a full-time teaching employee, incentive awards, and time to have dialogue with colleagues on issues of mutual concern.

Since the beginning of Pathways in 1993, 40 participants have completed the requirements for the teacher education program with 36 of this group going on to employment as teachers in the Savannah-Chathan County Public School System (Dandy, 1998).

Haberman (1989) points to community colleges as a prime source of candidates. He recommends the formation of working partnerships between two-year and four-year institutions willing to adapt their structures in order to create viable linkages. Haberman points to the fact that nearly 50 percent of all African Americans pursuing postsecondary study are enrolled in community colleges. These institu-

tions appear more accessible to minorities and provide more in the way of support, including remedial courses and counseling services. Haberman contends that community colleges are more successful in assisting African Americans in the transition from the secondary to the collegiate level of study. Minorities have found that two-year colleges are less expensive and are often located closer to home. Moreover, such colleges provide a more personal and supportive environment than many four-year institutions. Minorities perceive that they are being given an opportunity in two-year colleges. Four-year institutions might be more successful in attracting and educating minority students who have already had positive experiences in two-year colleges than in dealing with poorly prepared minority youths directly out of high school (Haberman, 1989, p. 775).

Teach for Arkansas

A linkage between The University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (UAF) College of Education and Health Professions (COEHP) and Phillips Community College (PCC) in Helena, Arkansas, exemplifies the model proposed by Haberman (1989). The program, known as Teach for Arkansas (TFA), is designed to deliver the Bachelor of Science in Education (BSE) and Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degrees through a combination of distance education capability and on-site instruction to candidates drawn from the predominantly African-American community of Helena, Arkansas. The COEHP, the Graduate School (UAF), and the Division of Continuing Education (UAF) responsible for off-campus programs work cooperatively with PCC to administrate TFA.

The Childhood Education Program (CHED), which includes the BSE/MAT degrees, is a dynamic five-year teacher certification program designed to prepare teachers to work with children from the preschool level through the elementary grades. The first four years of the program combine studies in educational foundations, liberal arts, pedagogy, and child development with field-based experiences. The fifth year offers an integration of graduate level coursework and an intensive internship/mentoring experience under a veteran classroom teacher. TFA students complete their first two years of coursework at PCC and transition into the final three years of the five-year program transmitted from UAF through the use of articulation agreements and procedures developed to streamline the transfer process from a two-year to a four-year institution.

The target population for TFA is PCC students who will commit to a career teaching elementary school in the region of the country known as the Mississippi River Delta. This once rich agricultural region is striving to reverse the effects of economic downturn, out-migration due to lack of employment, and an under-educated population. The COEHP and PCC recognized an opportunity to enhance the development of Phillips County by recruiting and training teachers who were committed to remaining in the region to build their professional careers. Eleven

students are currently enrolled in the first cohort group, receiving instruction in the fifth year of the MAT degree program. Nineteen students are enrolled in a second cohort, taking courses in the fourth year of the BSE degree program. Of the thirty TFA students enrolled, well over half are of African-American descent. A third cohort is currently being formed.

Numerous efforts including onsite visits from UAF faculty and staff, monthly visitations by the director of TFA, student interest meetings, information meetings for area superintendents and principals, onsite visits to area schools, and videoconferencing were utilized to inform and build community support for TFA. District administrators with Phillips County and bordering communities have pledged their support to this effort.

Several school partnerships have been established and implemented to facilitate practicum (fourth year) and internship (fifth year) experiences for the current TFA cohorts. These combinations of coursework and field experiences are hallmarks of the BSE/MAT degree programs, providing authentic opportunities to enhance the growth and development of preservice teachers.

The director of TFA based at UAF and the Dean of Arts and Sciences based at PCC took responsibility for recruitment, implementation, supervision, and monitoring of the program. A TFA office has been established at PCC with an administrative assistant hired to work under the direct supervision of the Dean of Arts and Sciences. This office works jointly with the Director of TFA and UAF to coordinate activities, including recruitment, registration, technical support for courses, college/community relations, program communications, and student support. The most recent addition is that of an onsite liaison to monitor both cohorts and closely supervise the internship experiences of the fifth year or graduate level students. The onsite liaison also works with a UAF faculty member to implement a grant funded through the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, which provides professional development training for mentor teachers assigned to supervise TFA interns. Presentations are made on a variety of topics. Trips are planned to professional development institutes. Finally, participants receive assistance in developing a dialogue between themselves and university faculty and staff.

The technological breakthrough of distance education played a pivotal role in the success of TFA. Because a significant portion of the curriculum is taught via compressed video, PCC students are able to remain in their communities, maintain their employment, and continue to support their families while pursuing a license to teach. The coordinators for distance education facilities at UAF and PCC work cooperatively to schedule and produce the compressed video telecasts in the late afternoon and evening to accommodate the work schedules of TFA students. In addition, periodic videoconferences are scheduled between UAF and PCC to increase communication and improve the effectiveness of program operations. The distance education facility coordinators at UAF also provide training and support in the use of the distance education classroom to instructors unfamiliar with the

compressed video technology. This service in professional development assures the future growth and increased capability of COEHP professors to meet the educational needs of a wider audience around the state of Arkansas and the region.

The financial support to make TFA possible has in large part been provided by generous grants from Southwestern Bell, the Walton Family Foundation, and income generated through tuition. The Southwestern Bell grant supports students through the third and fourth years of study to completion of the BSE degree. The Walton Family Foundation has pledged support for students completing the fifth year (MAT degree) dedicated to internships within local partnership schools.

Delivering a terminal degree program to the people of Phillips County demonstrates the commitment of UAF, PCC, Southwestern Bell, the Walton Family Foundation, and all supporters of TFA to progress and prosperity through educational training and professional development. As we approach the new millennium, we believe that TFA will make a significant impact in the effort to increase the presence of African Americans in the teaching force and improve educational opportunities for the citizens of Phillips County, both now and in the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

I have attempted in this review to examine the pivotal events contributing to the decline in the number of African Americans in the teaching force, identify why their presence is necessary for African-American students in particular and all students in general, and explore ways in which teacher educators are responding to close the gap and increase the level of diversity in the teaching force. I have also introduced Teach for Arkansas (TFA) for your consideration as a model to advance diversity and increase the numbers of qualified classroom teachers serving minority populations by forming partnerships between four-year institutions and community colleges and utilizing distance education to assist in the delivery of instruction.

As the stakes continue to rise in this battle to educate the next generation, teacher educators are challenged to develop instructors equipped and committed to teach *all* children to achieve their potential. There are programs, strategies, and models being developed and implemented to address this critical need. Our will to respond effectively to this great challenge will impact not only our future but that of generations to come.

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