Approaches to Diversifying the Teaching Force:
Attending to Issues of Recruitment, Preparation, and Retention

By Ana María Villegas & Danné E. Davis

The widening cultural chasm between teachers and students in elementary and secondary schools is a serious problem in American education demanding concerted action. As the works in this special issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* make clear, the shortage of teachers of color has real consequences for all students, but especially for students of color. Despite the urgency, programs of teacher education are not giving this matter the attention it deserves. In this context of relative inattentiveness to the need for teachers of color, it is encouraging to read a collection of articles that feature a variety of carefully designed and well documented approaches to diversify the teaching force. Our goal in this commentary is to place the approaches described in this issue within the broader discussion of recruiting, preparing, and retaining prospective teachers of color.

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Bringing People of Color into Teaching

Programs of teacher education have historically played a passive role in student recruitment. It has generally been assumed that the market need for

teachers will automatically draw students into teacher education. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 inadvertently challenged this approach to recruitment, however. Prior to the enactment of this legislation, teaching was one of the few careers available to women and people of color. As a result, programs of teacher education—whether at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) or Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)—had a captive pool of talented people from which to draw students. As professional opportunities opened up in this country for women and racial/ethnic minorities, undergraduates from these groups began to defect in large numbers from education to other fields such as business, engineering, and the health professions (Carter & Wilson, 1992; Urban, 2000). The declining popularity of teaching, coupled with increased demand for teachers over the past fifteen years, has pushed programs of teacher education to take on a more active and thoughtful role in recruiting students. Below we discuss the major approaches used during this time to bring candidates of color into teaching, weaving throughout our discussion the approaches described in this issue. Such approaches are distinguished primarily by the population targeted for recruitment, as we explain below.

Enrolled Undergraduates with Undeclared Majors

Teacher education programs seeking to diversify their enrollments often recruit undergraduates of color at their institutions with undeclared majors. An advantage of this approach is that potential recruits are on campus already and generally eager to give direction to their professional futures. Unfortunately, because the number of students of color who matriculate directly at four-year colleges is limited, programs of teacher education must compete aggressively with other fields on campus for this small population. To promote interest in teaching, recruitment efforts are crafted to help identified students understand the valuable contributions that educators make to society, the many opportunities available to someone with a teaching credential, and the type of preparation and support the teacher education program is ready to provide.

This recruitment approach is exemplified by the teacher preparation program Wong, Murai, Avila, White, Baker, Arellano, and Echandia describe in this issue. Although the Multilingual/Multicultural Teacher Preparation Center (M/M Center) at California State University, Sacramento, was designed as a fifth-year credential program, the recruitment of potential students begins as early as their freshman year in college. The Freshman Seminar, sections of which are taught by M/M Center faculty, exposes students to the merit of a teaching career. Faculty from the M/M Center also offer an undergraduate minor in Multicultural Education (into which the pre-requisites to the teacher credential program are built) and teach capstone courses for Social Science majors with an interest in teaching. These contacts enable program faculty to effectively nurture the young people's interest in a teaching career and to help them begin to envision themselves as the type of social justice teacher the program aims to prepare.

Once admitted to the program, participants receive support services designed to help them navigate the intricacies of the higher education bureaucracy, such as connecting student to sources of financial aid, providing assistance with their application to the teacher education program, tracking their progress through the program to ensure the timely completion of requirements, and creating a built-in network of peer support through the use of cohort groups. Beyond recruitment and support services, students benefit from exposure to a coherent, race- and language-conscious curriculum that is thoughtfully designed to prepare teachers to create learning opportunities for poor students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and to advocate on their behalf. In fact, one of the more important contributions of this article to the literature is the attention it gives to the content of the preparation participants receive in the program to enable them to act as agents of change in schools. In so doing, the authors move the discussion about the diversification of the teaching force beyond the customary focus on issues of recruitment and support services needed.

Targeting students of color already admitted into four-year colleges/universities for recruitment is an approach best suited for institutions that serve large numbers of racially and ethnically diverse students, such as HBCUs and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Because the overwhelming majority of teacher education programs in this country are housed in PWIs, settings with consistently low enrollments of students of color, this recruitment approach alone—while helpful—is not likely to alter the overall racial/ethnic composition of the U.S. teaching force in any appreciable way. To significantly increase the representation of people of color in teaching, the pool of potential candidates must be expanded beyond those who are already enrolled in four-year colleges/universities. It is not surprising, then, that most efforts to diversify the ranks of teachers recruit non-traditional candidates—pre-college students who might not otherwise go to college, community college students, paraprofessionals in elementary and secondary schools, and people of color who already hold a bachelor's degree and are open to making a career switch. The literature shows that such recruitment approaches are tailored to the targeted population and provide recruits with the necessary support to experience success, as we describe below.

Pre-College Students

One way of expanding the pool of potential teachers of color is to identify likely candidates prior to their senior year in high school, even as early as the middle grades, and involving them in intervention programs that aim both to cultivate the students' interest in teaching and to facilitate their admission to college. Project FUTURE, described in this issue by Stevens, Agnello, Ramirez, Marbley, and Hamman, is illustrative of the early recruitment approach. This Texas Tech University initiative targets students enrolled in sixth grade through senior year in high school and involves them in an array of activities over the years to strengthen

their resolve to go on to college and to promote their teaching self-efficacy. As Stevens et al. detail, Project FUTURE advances these two goal by bringing students on campus frequently to give them a window into college life, involving them in exercises that allow them to better understand the relationship between having a college degree and earning potential, providing information about financial aid for college as well as the college application process, offering workshops that focus on the development of test-taking strategies, engaging students in teaching simulations to give them practice with instructional strategies, and exposing them to different teaching styles and having them reflect on those experiences. As described by the authors, this initiative builds on the collaboration of members from the university community, the school districts in which the participants are enrolled, and the broader communities in which those schools are located. Other types of activities used in early recruitment efforts, as reported in the literature, include Future Educators Clubs, introductory teacher education courses that offer college credit to high school juniors and seniors, inspirational speakers who give students information about the teaching profession and encourage them to become part of it, summer programs that provide students intensive teaching experiences in addition to academic support, and work study programs in which upper high school students of color tutor younger children in community programs (Zapata, 1998).

While teacher cadet programs, such as Project FUTURE, have the potential to bolster the pool of racial/ethnic minorities for teaching, they are long-term efforts that take minimally five to eight years to produce results, and typically much longer. Equally important, while such programs have been shown to increase the number of racially and ethnically diverse college entrants, they do not necessarily guarantee that college recruits will actually seek admission into teacher education or that those who are admitted continue in this field through graduation (Clewell et al, 2000).

Community College Students

Community college students represent another important, yet largely untapped pool of prospective teachers of color (Hudson, Foster, Irvine, Holmes & Villegas, 2002). After all, the overwhelming majority of people of color who pursue a post-secondary education first enroll in community colleges. Since teachers must earn a bachelor's degree before they can be certified, students who start at community colleges must transfer to four-year colleges or universities to become teachers. Sadly, the transfer rate from two- to four-year institutions is disappointingly low (Nettles & Millet, 2004). As discussed in the literature, part of the problem is the lack of clear articulation agreements between the partnering institutions that establish which community college credits will be accepted at the four-year institution. As a result, community college students often lose credits upon transfer. The difficulty of the transfer process is confounded further by a general lack of support services to facilitate the students' successful integration into the teacher education program at the four-year institution once the transfer occurs.

The Teacher Academy Learning Community at the University of Texas, San Antonio—featured in the Busto Flores, Riojas Clark, Claeys, and Villarreal article—typifies initiatives that focus recruitment efforts on the community college student population. This program was designed primarily to meet the needs of students transferring into teacher education from San Antonio College, the largest two-year college in the geographic area serving a largely Latino population. (The University of Texas component of the program is also open to incoming freshmen and students with undeclared majors at the institution.) The article focuses on the support structures put in place to facilitate the integration into the university system of transfer students pursuing teacher education. A key element of the support structure is a collaborative network of student service offices at the partner institutions through which transfer students are identified for program participation. Support begins with careful advisement of students at the community college to ensure they take the appropriate courses prior to their transfer into teacher education at the University of Texas. Upon transfer, students are involved in a Summer Bridge Institute that gives them an orientation to university life and exposes them to other activities intended to strengthen the academic and problem-solving skills they will need to succeed at the university.

Once on campus, participants receive a variety of supports including monitoring of their progress through the teacher education program; referrals for assistance with time management, study skills, and tutoring when such needs are identified; counseling with personal issues that present a threat to their persistence in college; activities that guide them through an exploration of their professional dispositions; and mentoring and coaching on professional matters both throughout the teacher education program and during their initial year of teaching. These support services not only smooth the transfer process to the university, but also enhance the capacity of the teacher education program at the University of Texas, San Antonio to produce teachers of color who will persist in the profession. Particularly noteworthy in this initiative is the mentoring and coaching support graduates of the teacher education program receive during their initial year of teaching, a time in which teachers are most vulnerable to attrition. There is little in the literature about the mentoring of new teachers of color.

Residents of Communities of Color

Partnerships between teacher education programs at colleges and universities and various types of organizations/agencies in communities of color have been established with the goal of increasing the supply of certified teachers of color for schools in those communities. This "grow your own" recruitment approach builds on the belief that people of color who live in the community are particularly well suited to teach children from that community. These individuals are said to bring to teaching personal insight into the lives of the students and a commitment to improving the young people's academic performance. Indeed, there is much

evidence in the literature to support these claims (Villegas & Davis, in press). Most of this work has focused on paraprofessionals in schools. Programs of teacher education that recruit paraprofessionals work closely with the school districts that employ them. As part of these "career ladder" initiatives, paraprofessionals continue their salaried positions while enrolling in courses each semester toward the completion of requirements for teaching certification, and usually a bachelor's degree as well. Such programs, which typically take a minimum of three years to produce teachers, offer a variety of support services to enable participants to make it through graduation and obtain their certification (Villegas & Clewell, 1998).

The Pathways Program at Armstrong Atlantic State University (AASU), described by Lau, Dandy, and Hoffman, is a good example of a career ladder program for paraprofessionals. In this initiative, AASU collaborates with the Savannah-Chatham County Public School District (SCCPS) to select participants for the program. The selection process gives attention to a variety of indicators of ability and future success as teachers, including exemplary track records as paraprofessionals in schools and commitment to teaching in high need school environments. Because one of the goals of the program is for completers to be hired as teachers in the partner district, recommendations from SCCPS teachers and administrators carry special weight in selection decisions. To address the needs of paraprofessionals—many of whom bring academic lags resulting from inequitable schooling, have children to support, and shoulder major financial responsibilities for their households—the program offers various services. These include tight monitoring of participants' academic progress, tutorials and other academic supports for those experiencing difficulties in courses, a system of peer support promoted by the use of cohort groups, test-taking preparation for certification exams, and financial assistance in the form of tuition scholarships and textbook vouchers. Among the many salient features of this nationally recognized program, two stand out. One is the creative arrangement that the partnering school district and institution of higher education have worked out to secure release time with pay for paraprofessionals to attend classes at the university, thereby shortening the time they would otherwise need to complete the required coursework. The second is the successful restructuring of the student teaching experience so that participants can complete this certification requirement without having to lose salary and benefits during this time.

Two other initiatives featured in this issue—the Hopi Teacher for Hopi Schools (HTHS) program described by White, Bedonie, De Groat, Lockhard, and Honanie, and Project TEACH described by Irizarry—also use the grow your own recruitment approach. But instead of limiting recruitment efforts to paraprofessionals, these two programs targeted adults in the community with an interest in teaching, including paraprofessionals. This broader reach was possible because the partnership involved formal relationships with the community beyond the local schools. A community-based organization committed to creating pathways into higher education for community residents was a key collaborator in Project TEACH, helping

to identify potential participants and securing funding to cover the cost of tuition for some of them. Similarly, the HTHS program was planned and implemented with direct input from representatives of the Hopi Nation. Given the sense of program ownership on the part of the communities involved, the strong critique of the university curriculum evident in both articles is not surprising. In the university/tribal collaboration, for example, the program was pushed to make the coursework for participants more inclusive by adding elements of "red pedagogy" to the curriculum. In Project TEACH, participants were offered "supplemental" professional development activities to compensate for the relative lack of attention given to issues of diversity and social justice in the teacher education courses they took.

Readers of the Irizarry article, in particular, walk away with a clearer understanding of the difficulties involved in respectfully integrating into existing programs of teacher education people from historically oppressed groups who are committed to returning to their communities to work toward changing the many inequities built into the everyday fabric of schools. For this to happen, programs of teacher education need to attend to issues of recruitment and provide support services to see the recruits through graduation. But equally important, if not more so, programs must be willing to rethink the curriculum in fundamental ways. As Irizarry astutely explains, recruiting people of color into teacher education, while "failing to prepare them to promote educational equity does little to alter a system of education characterized by significant disparities in opportunity and achievement. Solely focusing on the representation of teachers of color in university or K-12 classrooms is tokenism and not transformative. Representation, while important, is not enough." Unfortunately, most of the literature on diversifying the teaching force continues to focus on representation, without giving sufficient attention to the type of preparation new recruits of color need to serve as agents of change in schools. We were pleased to see that the Wong et al. article in this issue dealt squarely with this topic.

Holders of Bachelor's Degrees

People of color who already hold bachelor's degrees in fields other than education comprise another important pool from which to draw new teachers. In fact, schools with severe teacher shortages, overwhelmingly urban schools, routinely fill vacant positions with candidates from this pool, either by issuing them provisional certificates or bringing them into teaching through an alternative route program. The latter option generally allows recruits to take on instructional positions in subject areas with teacher shortages, contingent on their successful completion of a program that provides some preparation in pedagogy and an internship experience in classrooms. The provisional certificate approach allows individuals without preparation in pedagogy to work as teachers for a period of time, usually three to six years, during which they are expected to complete the requirements for certification. While these two pathways into teaching receive a fair amount of criticism in the literature, they are nevertheless used widely to fill vacancies in urban

schools. In fact, without them, teacher shortages in those settings would be even more severe than they currently are. Clearly, traditional programs of teacher education must work harder to produce more teachers for urban schools, regardless of their race/ethnicity. In addition, they need to assume some responsibility for ensuring that those who enter teaching in urban schools with provisional certification or through alternative routes have the preparation they need to teach students successfully. Project 29, highlighted in the Sakash and Chou article, is an example of such an effort.

The goal of Project 29, a collaborative initiative involving the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), was to enable provisionally certified bilingual (Latino) teachers in the partner district to secure their standard teaching credentials while receiving in-class support to speed their development of pedagogical skills for teaching English language learners (ELLs). Several elements of the program contribute to its documented success over the past 13 years. To begin with, participants are carefully selected based on attributes that program staff have found predictive of future success as teachers, such as parenting experience, involvement in activism and leadership activities, and perseverance in overcoming problems, in addition to having an acceptable grade point average. Participants receive an individualized plan of study after a careful review of their transcripts. They meet regularly throughout the program in small "advisory" groups for peer support on academic, professional, and personal issues of concern to them. The curriculum focuses on assisting the Scholars, as participants are called, to see connections between what they learn at the university and what they experience daily as teachers of ELLs in urban schools.

Ongoing observations of the Scholars' performance in their classrooms by university field instructors serve two critically important functions in the program. They provide participants support and guidance for improving their pedagogical skills and enable the faculty to continuously modify the content of the education courses to address the specific difficulties Scholars are experiencing in their teaching. The redesigned "student teaching" experience — which calls for participants to complete inquiry projects in their own classrooms and to conduct a project on issues related to the education of ELLs jointly with a general education monolingual teacher from the school—provides a more authentic learning experience for this population of teacher candidates than the traditional student teaching. This curricular modification also allows participants to complete the "student teaching" requirement without experiencing an interruption in salary and benefits. In brief, the article by Sakash and Chou shows how a teacher education program committed to improving the conditions of urban schools can do so.

It is interesting to note that the majority of people of color entering teaching over the past 15 years did so either as provisionally certified teachers or through some form of alternate route (Allen, 2003). This is explained, at least in part, by the challenges involved in getting candidates of color from non-traditional teacher pools into and through traditional teacher education programs. We suspect, however, that another

explanation is the blasé attitude toward diversifying the ranks of teachers that prevails in many programs of teacher education. Even when publicly claiming to be committed to that goal, little energy is actually devoted to making this happen.

Looking across the Approaches

From reading this collection of articles, several conclusions can be drawn about how best to diversify the teaching force, all of which are consistent with the existing literature on this topic. Collectively, these works suggest that to increase the proportions of teachers of color will require more than luring college-bound students of color away from financially profitable fields into teacher education. A true expansion will necessitate developing the potential of others who might not otherwise go on to four-year colleges. A comprehensive recruitment approach, one that targets different pools of potential talent—pre-college students, community college students, and others who serve children and families within the community in addition to college students with undeclared majors—is needed. The article by Landis and colleagues, in this issue, underscores this conclusion.

Another lesson learned is that programs of teacher education seeking to diversify the teaching force must collaborate with different organizations/agencies to successfully recruit candidates from diverse racial and ethic backgrounds. To recruit from the pre-college student population calls for the involvement of the school districts in which those students are enrolled. Partnerships with school districts are also needed to recruit employed paraprofessionals. Clear articulation agreements that spell out which community college courses will be accepted by the partnering four-year college are essential to tap the large pool of students of color in two-year colleges. Collaborations with organizations based in communities of color—including churches, civic organizations, and various types of service agencies—are also helpful in identifying potential recruits with an interest in teaching and a commitment to return to their communities as teachers. (For a detailed explanation of the central features of such partnerships, see Clewell & Villegas, 2001.)

To successfully recruit teacher candidates of color from non-traditional pools, tuition assistance is essential. Several articles in this collection emphasize this point. Without financial incentives, few candidates from non-traditional teacher pools can afford to complete an undergraduate program of study. To address this need, teacher education programs could secure scholarships through grants from private foundations and/or government agencies. Forgiveness loans that are erased after graduates have taught in schools for a specified period of time are similarly helpful. The recent difficulty finding funding sources for this purpose presents a major obstacle to diversifying the teaching force, as the authors of several articles in this issue rightly point out.

From the works published in this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* we also learn that teacher education programs must work diligently to retain students of

color from non-traditional pools through graduation and certification. As the authors explain, this involves offering a comprehensive network of academic and social support services, including orientation to the college/university, a strong advisement and monitoring system, prompt referrals to academic support services for students experiencing difficulties with their coursework, workshops designed to help participants develop test-taking skills, and the use of structured groups or cohorts to promote peer-support.

Looking Ahead

Upon reflecting on the literature, it is clear to us that we already know much about how to recruit people of color into teacher education and how to support them through graduation and certification. We know relatively little, however, about how to adequately prepare prospective teachers of color and how to facilitate their successful transition into the profession. Part of the rationale for increasing the diversity of the teaching force is that people of color bring to teaching knowledge about the lives of students of color and insider experiences that enable them to relate well to students of color and to build the necessary bridges to learning for them. However, unless teacher candidates of color are appropriately prepared to draw on this unique knowledge and insight to shape their pedagogy, the yield of those resources will be limited at best. Similarly, unless teacher candidates of color are appropriately prepared to act as change agents, their commitment to making schools more equitable and just for students of color is not likely to produce the desired results. Unfortunately, there is little in the literature that speaks directly to these two important topics.

We have argued elsewhere that the addition of large numbers of teachers of color represents our best chance to make schools in this country more democratic and just (Villegas & Davis, in press). But to maximize the benefits that could be derived from having a diverse teaching force, programs of teacher education must go beyond issues of recruitment and retention and attend to the preparation candidates of color need for the task. That is the immediate challenge ahead for those who are truly committed to diversifying the ranks of teachers.

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