For What Purpose?

Making Sense of the Various Projects Driving Grow Your Own Program Development

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Abstract

Grow Your Own programs, with their focus on preparing and placing community teachers, are increasingly being identified as a viable solution for addressing ethnoracial diversity and teacher shortages in schools. Given the heightened interest in these programs, the focus of this article is to consider various "projects," or rather, educational issues or problems attempting to be solved by advancing Grow Your Own program development. These efforts include the economic project, workforce development project, educator preparation project, and justice project. An exploration of these projects is utilized to consider possibilities and implications for the future expansion of Grow Your Own programs.

Introduction

Research on Grow Your Own programs is likely to expand significantly in the coming years if education policy interests and recommendations are matched with financial and institutional commitments in educator preparation and school districts across the nation. Gist, Bianco, and Lynn (2019) raised the significant need for

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research on Grow Your Own programs across each stage of the teacher development pipeline (i.e., recruitment, preparation, and retention). In particular, they noted, based on their review of literature on Grow Your Own programs, that commitments to Teachers of Color, or ethnoracial teacher diversity, vary across Grow Your Own program types (e.g., community leader, paraprofessional, and high school pipelines) and may impact the types of academic and professional supports available to these teachers. A distinguishing factor in their review of literature on Grow Your Own programs was whether there was an explicit commitment to value the community cultural wealth of Teachers of Color, especially those from nontraditional backgrounds. Without institutionalized policies and practices valuing local community ways of knowing and being from culturally sustaining standpoints, the promise of Grow Your Own programs may fall short because they will be unable to successfully prepare, place, and retain nontraditional Teachers of Color in the profession.

But if these policies and practices are employed, Grow Your Own programs can be potentially positioned to take up transformational education and community wealth–centered approaches to teacher development by offering innovation and intervention to current teacher education models. To be clear, potential is not providential and requires explicit commitments to ethnoracial diversity and education justice. Hence, the focus of this article is to consider various "projects," or rather, educational issues or problems attempting to be solved by such programs, and, in doing so, contemplate implications for future program development. It is clear that longitudinal research on Grow Your Own programs is needed (Toshalis, 2014), but equally important is answering the question, for what purposes are these programs designed, and ultimately, who benefits from Grow Your Own program models?

Teacher Development Programs

At the outset of this article, it is necessary to distinguish Grow Your Own programs in relationship to other teacher development programs. To do this, descriptions of teacher development programs (i.e., traditional educator preparation programs, alternative route programs, and Grow Your Own programs) are briefly described in the following section to identify the teacher pools, program leaders, and partners most often associated with the different models. The intent is not to offer an in-depth review of literature on each type of teacher development program but rather to categorize programs for the purposes of better understanding their teacher pools and structures and grapple with how Grow Your Own programs can be situated in the lexicon of teacher development programs. This categorization is described with the understanding that the program model distinctions are porous, overlapping, and at times contradictory, given that anomalies exist that challenge these descriptions. Still, these descriptions offer a useful conceptual starting point for anchoring our understandings of Grow Your Own programs in relationship to traditional educator preparation programs and alternative route programs.

Traditional Educator Preparation Programs

Traditional educator preparation programs are described as agencies primarily concerned with the development and production of teachers through colleges and universities at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). These programs are funded and supported by universities, which are often dependent on federal, state, and private funding allocations. The typical candidate from traditional educator preparation programs at the undergraduate level is White (i.e., 72% of teacher candidates) and female (i.e., 78% of teacher candidates; King, 2018). Traditional educator preparation programs have faculty to serve in schools, design curriculum, and teach courses that lead to a degree in various concentrations for teaching. They are also often associated with accreditation bodies, such as the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation, that advocate for professional standards in order to ensure high-quality preparation of future teachers. Educator preparation programs typically receive sanction to award degrees through program approval at the state level, which may or may not require accreditation from a professionally recognized institution.

Fifth-year master's of arts (MAT) programs are also collapsed in the category of traditional educator preparation because students often transition from undergraduate education programs, or other degree-granting undergraduate programs, to pursue an advanced degree in teaching. In the case of the latter group, these students graduate with degrees in other content areas at the undergraduate level and emphasize teaching and learning after graduation in the MAT program. Clinical preparation is a key factor in this program model and requires strong partnerships with local school districts. Across the field, there are various conceptualizations of what this looks like (Burns, Yendol-Hoppey, & Jacobs, 2015). More recent descriptions of grant-funded clinical work in educator preparation describe a residency year in which candidates are steeped in preparation for an entire year (DeVan, 2018). This model is similar to traditional educator preparation programs committed to yearlong clinical experiences in school districts where teacher candidates may eventually become teachers of record (Zeichner & Bier, 2015).

Alternative Route Programs

Alternative route programs are often described as programs that recruit and place in classrooms college-educated teachers who have not completed an educator preparation program. A key distinction for alternative route programs is those tied to, or in partnership with, institutions of higher education, and those not affiliated with institutions of higher education. Though some alternative route programs are initiated and administered by state departments of education or school districts (Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein, & Mayfield, 2013), many are organized by private organizations that are associated with broader neoliberal education policies (Ku-

mashiro, 2010). They are mostly funded through private organizations, foundations, and charter school networks (Zeichner & Sandoval, 2015). Given their autonomy, they may or may not associate with traditional educator programs for teacher development support. In lieu of partnerships with traditional educator preparation programs, they can hire curriculum and training expertise from charter schools and other for-profit vendors that are closely aligned with their programs and place teachers in their own school networks.

There are also a range of differences in alternative route programs related to the timing and amount of preparation required before entering the classroom (Grossman & Loeb, 2008). In some instances, teachers may only receive 6 weeks of training in schools or complete a series of online courses before entering the classroom. There are also other models, such as residency programs, that recruit potential teachers with college degrees to become teachers by first placing recruits as teacher assistants in schools for at least a year before allowing them to become a teacher of record in the classroom (National Center of Teacher Residencies, 2018). Candidates enrolled in alternative route programs are more likely to be ethnoracially diverse (e.g., an average of 43.5% students of color in alternative programs in comparison to 28% in traditional educator preparation programs; King, 2018) and male (e.g., an average of 34% men in alternative programs in comparison to 22% in traditional educator preparation programs; King, 2018).

It is worthwhile, in addition, to note the distinction between the term *alternative certification* and alternative routes to teaching. *Alternative certification* refers to a teacher licensing mechanism that does not require typical certification protocols associated with traditional educator preparation programs. In many cases, this means a person can take a series of exams and training courses and be certified to teach in an expedited fashion. This differs from the term *alternative route to teaching*, because this term refers to an entry point into the profession that may or may not allow for immediate certification or may require a longer preparation process to be certified. For instance, an alternative route residency program designed to attract a teacher pool of college graduates may require candidates to engage in a yearlong clinical preparation experience before they are certified to teach. On the other hand, a state alternative route program may only require prospective teachers with college degrees to take basic skills and praxis exams along with a series of online training models before immediately awarding alternative certification. The key point here is that alternative route programs, and the certification processes associated with these routes, are distinguished from traditional educator preparation programs (Gist, 2017).

Grow Your Own Programs

Grow Your Own programs have historically been tailored to recruit the community teacher. Murrell (2001) described the community teacher as not only based in the local school community but distinguished by his or her commitment to operate

on the meso, micro, and macro levels of educational life to execute transformative work in local school communities in light of the unjust sociopolitical and historic treatment of communities of color in the United States. Grow Your Own programs committed to community teachers have this as a core focus of their work. Gist et al. (2019) described Grow Your Own programs for Teachers of Color as

> an integrated system taking place across the teacher development continuum—recruitment (i.e., mechanisms that support entry into program), preparation (i.e., curriculum, pedagogy and structures that support learning), and retention (i.e., mechanisms, such as professional development and mentorship, that support teachers to remain in the profession). We also conceptually situated GYO programs as grounded in grassroots racial and justice movements or initiatives (Irizarry, 2007; Skinner, Garreton, & Schultz, 2011) committed to the academic and professional development of local community TOC (Murrell, 2001). This is connected to the idea that TOC possess a form of "community cultural wealth" that imbues them with "an array of knowledge, skills, [and] abilities . . ." (Yosso, 2005, p. 77) to effectively teach Black and Brown youth. (pp. 14)

Based on their review of literature, Grow Your Own programs typically last between 2 and 8 years; reflect a partnership between local schools, higher education institutions, and nonprofit organizations; and are funded by a variety of entities, including private foundations, federal grants, and state development grants (Gist et al., 2019). Many of these programs often have an explicit commitment to Teachers of Color, and due to their commitments to recruit from communities of Color with rich cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and epistemological perspectives, these programs are characterized as having a more diverse teacher base in comparison to traditional educator preparation programs.

Differentiating Grow Your Own "Projects"

A quick exploration of Grow Your Own program descriptions circulating in the field will reveal a plethora of reasons they can possibly contribute to current teacher development reform efforts. Toshalis (2014) noted that due to the wide range of uses of the term *Grow Your Own*, it is difficult to know how many programs currently exist. To sift through the various rationales articulated for why Grow Your Own programs are valuable, the following section explains the "projects," or rather, the education and social issues designers are attempting to solve, through the advancement of these models. This addresses the central question framing the article title: For what purpose are Grow Your Own programs designed, and ultimately, who benefits from these programs? Before implementing teacher development reform efforts, such as Grow Your Own programs, rumination on the various projects shaping program development can be productive. In doing so, perhaps the teacher development field can avoid unintentionally reproducing models that sustain, opposed to disrupting, educational inequity in educator preparation and schools. Paying close attention to the "project" commitments in which Grow Your

Own programs are most strongly vested can offer clues to their possible influence on the experiences of and outcomes for students, schools, and communities.

The project missions outlined for developing and advancing Grow Your Own programs are based on reoccurring ideas and values about these programs that occur in public discourse and also emerged in Gist et al.'s (2019) and Toshalis's (2014) reviews of literature on Grow Your Own programs. The four projects are as follows: the economic project, the workforce development project, the educator preparation project, and the justice project. Though these projects are not typically separate and distinct in public discourses on why Grow Your Own programs matter, attending to the project mission distinctions can be a helpful heuristic device to delve into the varied purposes behind advancing Grow Your Own programs.

The Economic Project

The purpose of Grow Your Own programs, not surprisingly, is often connected to addressing the economic project, or rather, the supply-and-demand needs of a teaching profession that experiences a significant amount of teacher turnover (Learning Policy Institute, 2016). Scholars have argued that the supply-and-demand issue is better understood in relation to specific content areas and teacher shortages in low-income schools and districts that are commonly described as hard to staff. Dee and Goldhaber (2017) suggested that there has been a clear cyclical relationship between increases in news coverage on teacher shortages during periods of economic expansion and decreases in periods of economic downturns. Yet, they noted that issues related to teacher shortages have more recently become particularly acute, and they argued,

> First, policy efforts that are not targeted toward where those shortages actually exist are likely to be unnecessarily costly and relatively ineffectual. Second, the challenges of recruiting teachers in hard to staff schools and subjects are longstanding, indicating that existing policies and practices have failed to address them. (pp. 5–6)

It is within this context of teacher shortages that Grow Your Own programs are suggested as a possible solution to this perennial issue because these programs recruit people from the community who are interested in working in their communities. And with such commitments and community rootedness, the rationale is that they may be more likely to remain in the profession. There is not enough extensive retention data on Grow Your Own teachers to conclusively argue that this is in fact the case, but this is a key aim of many Grow Your Own program efforts. This is because continuous teacher turnover results not only in significant shortages in marginalized and disenfranchised school systems who need teachers but also in a significant amount of monetary loss due to teacher attrition (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007). Thus, advancing Grow Your Own programs as an economic project can possibly work to reduce teacher turnover, thereby retaining monetary funds that can be reallocated for resources and programs to better educate students.

Reduced teacher turnover also works to ensure students have access to experienced and effective teachers who can work to improve the quality of the education system in ways that have long-term effects on student achievement and graduation rates. This would mean school communities have more people with the ability to pursue higher education or skilled labor opportunities. In this sense, employing and retaining local community teachers, as an economic project, may have healthy impacts on education, and ultimately, on financial capital, via increases in education mobility and opportunities in geographic school communities.

The Workforce Development Project

The workforce development project, connected to human resource efforts, is often concerned about ethnoracial representation in the profession, at times from an intersectional lens (e.g., class and gender/ sex), related to parity (i.e., similar racial/ ethnic representation) between students and teachers in the profession. Putnam, Hansen, Walsh, and Quintero (2016) offered a detailed analysis of parity arguments, suggesting parity is unlikely in the near future without explicit and tailored projects that infuse a significant number of educators of color into the educator workforce. The value Teachers of Color offer to schools and students is well documented in the research literature (Villegas & Irvine, 2010), and as such, the workforce development project is committed to facilitating and sustaining their presence in the teaching profession. Grow Your Own programs can be well suited to advancing the workforce development project of representation because these programs often recruit from local school communities as well as nontraditional teacher pools that are racially, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse (Valenzuela, 2017).

Furthermore, the workforce development project is not only about representation but also about parity in representation between teachers and students (Putnam et al., 2016). Looking at national data, there is a significant racial/ethnic gap, with Teachers of Color representing close to 20% of the workforce in comparison to over 50% students of color in our nation's schools (Taie & Goldring, 2017). And while these parity gaps persist, there are also significant numbers of Teachers of Color exiting the profession at a higher rate than their White counterparts in many major urban areas throughout the United States (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015). The working conditions have been found to be a significant issue in this mass exodus (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Yet, some research has suggested that Grow Your Own teachers draw on their resistant, navigational, social, and familial capital to persist (Gist, 2018a). It could also be related to their commitments to schools and local community over their personal ambition, or the significant increase in income in comparison to their previous financial status. Currently there is limited research differentiating Teachers of Color within group (e.g., ethnoracial diversity, class, regional affiliation, and school experiences) experiences in these programs or cross-program analysis that closely examines differences across models (e.g.,

paraprofessional, community leader, or middle and high school pathways) in relation to impacts on learning and school communities. Still, current arguments framing the value of Grow Your Own programs suggest that they can contribute to the workforce development project of representation and parity.

Finally, Grow Your Own programs can be seen as a workforce development project because district, regional, and local school-based policies and practices can be employed to advocate for equity in hiring, placement, and professional development practices. D'amico, Pawlewicz, Earley, and McGeehan (2017) found evidence of discrimination in the hiring rates of White in comparison to Black applicants as well as the segregation of significant numbers of Black teachers to what are frequently characterized as struggling schools. Given the nontraditional backgrounds of Grow Your Own teachers, attending to equity in placement, hiring, and professional development is vital. Conceptual models from the field of human resource development, such as Hughes's (2010) people as technology and Hughes's (2016) diversity intelligence, can be useful for holding workforce systems accountable for how they value Teachers of Color in general (Gist, 2018b) and, in particular, nontraditional Teachers of Color who enter the profession through Grow Your Own pathways.

The Educator Preparation Project

The purposes of educator preparation have been described and researched by many of the leading teacher education scholars in the 20th and 21st centuries (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Milner, 2008; Moll & Arnot-Hopffer, 2005; Shulman & Shulman, 2004). A legacy of traditional educator preparation that continues to haunt the field is that it provides the smallest number of Teachers of Color in comparison to other teacher development programs. When considering the shrinking numbers in the profession, and its fight for legitimacy and value, the educator preparation project, in partnership with Grow Your Own program efforts, can be seen as an opportunity to reform a broken system of recruitment that prioritizes preparing teachers who are less representative of the student population. Sleeter (2001), in a seminal article that still is true for many programs, problematized overwhelming Whiteness in teacher education. King (2018) noted that in fields that produced more than 20,000 bachelor degrees in 2015–2016, education ranked close to the bottom, just ahead of agriculture and natural resource degrees, with only 22% of students of color earning degrees in education.

Another area of needed reform is traditional education preparation's tendency to focus on production over teacher development and placement (Labaree, 2006). In the past, erecting such boundaries in responsibility may have been permissible, but as market competition over the production of teachers outside traditional educator preparation increases, all programs are being scrutinized based on the effectiveness and retention of their program graduates. Grow Your Own programs, depending on the teacher pool recruited, may have candidates at the beginning of their degrees seeking journeys that

will require intensive, in-depth preparation prior to entering the classroom as teachers of record, in addition to consistent and tailored supports once they enter into schools. In this sense, educator preparation will have to become more adaptable to meet the academic and professional needs of students in these programs.

There is also the issue of what ideologies guide programs and teacher development and how they may elicit productive or destructive outcomes for the schools, students, and communities they serve. Educator preparation may see their learning orientation toward teachers as focused primarily on technological, academic, practical, critical, or some combination of these orientations (Feiman-Nemser, 2012), and the ways in which these orientations are embedded in the structures of programs have important implications for teacher candidates and how they are able to be responsive and effective in school communities. As such, Grow Your Own programs can be seen as an educator preparation project because Grow Your Own models foster a chance to reimagine teachers and their teaching and learning orientations to be more meaningful and relevant for all teacher candidates, in particular, nontraditional Teacher Candidates of Color.

The Justice Project

Framing Grow Your Own programs as a justice project is couched in arguments associated with the need for equitable educational opportunities for all students and teachers, especially those who are impacted by historic and current disenfranchisement practices in education systems. Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) defined justice in education as enabling

> people to develop the critical analytical tools necessary to understand oppression and their own socialization within oppressive systems, and to develop agency and capacity to interpret and change oppressive patterns and behaviors in themselves and the institutions and communities of which they are a part. (p. 2)

In this current era of teacher development reform, multiple and varying social justice traditions inform approaches for transforming education systems. Despite variance in approaches, a commitment to our nation's children, most acutely, those impacted by the historical legacy and contemporary manifestations of marginalized educational opportunities in schools, should be a justice anchor that is uniform across differences. Creating opportunities for teachers to actualize pedagogical practices that are meaningful and transformational for students is a key part of this commitment. These practices, such as culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012), are distinct from assimilationist and technical approaches to teaching in that they grapple with the nuances of honoring and building on students' assets, challenging the complexities that emerge from that process, and responsively supporting student learning in ways that are sustaining of their development as critical beings in society.

Another part of the justice project for Grow Your Own programs can also in-

volve recruiting nontraditional community–based Teachers of Color (e.g., local high school students, community activists and leaders, crossing guards, cafeteria workers, social service workers, teacher aides, religious leaders, custodial staff, and parents) who themselves may have received limited education opportunity (i.e., lack access to rigorous course work and experienced teachers), been overlooked (i.e., those not middle class, in their early twenties, attending college full-time, and performing at the top of their graduating class), and subsequently discounted in potential teacher pools. A nontraditional approach to teacher pools of Teachers of Color frames Grow Your Own programs as a justice project that builds on and draws from community knowledges and practices from within opposed to developing teacher pools that are not indigenous and rooted in the communities and practices of the students they serve.

A less mentioned facet of this justice project also involves the economic empowerment that takes place when disenfranchised and low-income communities of color are given access to education careers (Mercado, 2011). Grow Your Own programs committed to addressing antiracist structures and valuing community cultural capital to create access and advancement for nontraditional Teachers of Color can build career ladders that previously did not exist for this teacher pool. For example, community-rooted paraprofessionals who start off making extremely low wages can become teachers and administrators, which can significantly increase their financial capital over time. In other words, Grow Your Own programs create opportunities for education careers that may have been previously viewed as inaccessible by local community members. In many ways, this is linked to a broader goal of education system transformation (Rogers-Ard et al., 2013) that sees beyond the school walls by setting forth policies and practices that can potentially reshape aspects of the education system to combat inequity in society. In this case, Grow Your Own programs as a justice project recognize that it will not be enough only to place nontraditional Teachers of Color in schools; rather, simultaneous efforts toward system transformation must also characterize these programs. This requires reimagining recruitment and selection protocols, the types of mentorship offered, the sequence and content of pedagogies in teacher development, the nature of community and school partnerships, and the types of teaching and learning supports available that are responsive to the academic and professional needs and strengths of Teachers of Color. The school system must implement antiracist structures and practices that embrace, affirm, and advance Teachers of Color to realize their pedagogical potential and leadership practices in schools and communities. Grow Your Own programs, following this line of reasoning, can be viewed as a justice project to address equitable educational opportunities for students, teachers, schools, and communities.

Conclusion: Implications for Grow Your Own Programs

At the outset of the article, I endeavored to explore the various projects that may be driving interest in Grow Your Own program development and consider who benefits.

A core aim of this effort was to make sense of how these projects may influence the advancement of Grow Your Own program development. In the contemplation of the four projects, though Grow Your Own programs are a type of teacher development model that prepares and places teachers, it was apparent, in different ways, that Grow Your Own programs do not simply support individual advancement of teachers but also support community development and advancement in ways that could have powerful and positive impacts for students, schools *and* communities. This suggests that Grow Your Own programs should be developed in ways that center local community voices and cultural capital in the program design. This moves beyond the traditional recommendation for Grow Your Own programs to form a partnership between a community-based organization, institution of higher education, and school district that is merely transactional and often characterized by power relations that minimize local community interest. Instead, community development and advancement, along with the individual advancement of the teacher and school, should be considered in tandem and not as separate disassociated ideas. Teacher development efforts that advocate for Grow Your Own programs can explore and consider synergies with the local community members in authentic and meaningful ways.

It seems as though Grow Your Own programs, while existing in various formations for quite some time, are also attempting to serve the dual purposes of innovation and intervention in recent teacher development reform narratives. They have distinct features in contrast to other teacher development models (i.e., alternative route to teaching and traditional educator preparation) in their commitment to the community teacher. Still, there are obvious overlaps between these teacher development models even when distinctions are made, which is why it will be important for Grow Your Own programs to be explicit about who their program commitments are designed to support and develop. For example, a Grow Your Own program committed to (a) recruiting community-based Teachers of Color from nontraditional backgrounds, (b) revitalizing economic opportunities for marginalized groups in school communities for upward mobility, and (c) centering community voices in program development in thoughtful and strategic ways, is a multifaceted model that envisions partnering with and serving the community in a layered and complex fashion. Other Grow Your Own program models may have different orientations and approaches for developing the community teacher. As such, for Grow Your Own programs committed to recruiting, preparing, and retaining nontraditional Teachers of Color, it appears important to place the justice project at the core of their efforts. This positioning is not meant to disregard the other projects but rather view them as overlapping and interconnecting with the justice project (see Figure 1).

Placing justice at the core seems a rational step given that placing nontraditional Teachers of Color in schools without attention to broader policy, program, and practice structures in need of transformation will likely not only limit the success of the teacher but do little to transform school systems in meaningful ways for students. This means that the justice work for the educator preparation project must at minimum involve

addressing some evidence of the high attrition rates of nontraditional Teachers of Color in teacher education programs as well as ensuring the program structure is designed to support their successful matriculation and development in schools. The workforce development and economic projects are also well suited to address the professional learning needs of nontraditional Teachers of Color as they interact with school systems. Ensuring equity in the hiring and placement of nontraditional Teachers of Color, for example, advances justice in the workforce development project. Furthermore, the economic project, with its commitment to placement, can advocate for policies and supports for Teachers of Color to be retained in the profession through professional development, leadership, and/or mentorship structures. Increasing the economic stability of Teachers of Color in the community by retaining teachers and supporting their career advancement also contributes to the justice project of strengthening local school members' financial stability, development, and growth. By situating the justice project as interconnected with the economic, educator preparation, and workforce development projects, transformational education and community wealth–centered approaches can be utilized to restructure and redefine current Grow Your Own models. This requires being clear and explicit about the purposes driving various types of Grow Your Own program development. Centering the justice project in these efforts can work to ensure that such models are designed for the community teacher and meant to benefit local school communities.

Figure 1

Centering the Justice Project in Grow Your Own Programs

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