

“Home-growing” Teachers of Color: Lessons Learned from a Town-Gown Partnership

By Jason G. Irizarry

Many institutions that prepare teachers profess a commitment to issues of diversity and educational equity in their mission and vision statements. However, despite the fact that the enrollment of students of color in institutions of higher education has increased by 48% over the last ten years (Harvey, 2002), the racial/ethnic composition of teacher preparation programs has changed relatively little. Although teacher preparation programs have had a larger pool of students of color from which to recruit, they have not been successful in attracting more students of color into the profession through traditional preservice pathways. If diversifying the teaching force is a goal from which people of color as well as Whites benefit, then the active recruitment of people of color into the profession should be part of

the work of teacher preparation programs and district-based teacher recruitment efforts. As such, colleges and schools of education need to develop new approaches aimed at improving the recruitment, retention, and preparation of teachers of color.

This article explores the challenges associated with diversifying the teaching force through preservice teacher education programs and forwards “home-growing”—that is, recruiting individuals to work as

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“Home-growing” Teachers of Color

educators in the communities in which they were raised and educated—as one strategy to do so. It highlights Project TEACH, a town-gown partnership between an institution of higher education and a local community, examining features of the program that were identified by participants as influential to their successful transition into the teaching profession.

Home-grown teachers of color bring many benefits to the classroom that go beyond their racial or ethnic identification. For example, Sonia Nieto (1999) suggests that teachers of color have often experienced marginalization and alienation in their own schooling and can relate to students of color in ways that many White teachers cannot. Jaqueline Jordan Irvine (2003) contends that many teachers of color serve as cultural translators and cultural brokers for culturally diverse students. She writes,

They tend to be knowledgeable, sensitive, and comfortable with students’ language, style of presentation, community values, traditions, rituals, legends, myths, history, symbols, and norms. Using their cultural expertise, they help students make appropriate adaptations for and transitions into mainstream culture. (pp. 55-56)

Many teachers of color have valuable insight into the cultures of their students. Based on their experiences, this particular group of teachers is often well-versed in the sociocultural realities faced by many students in these communities, and they can use this information to inform their practice. In what follows, I present a brief overview of Project TEACH and the emergence of the town-gown partnership and highlight three structural aspects of the program that were central to meeting the goals of the partnership—the home-growing approach, supplemental preparation around issues related to social justice and educational equity, and enhanced support spanning from the pre-application process through their induction years in the profession. I also comment on some of the challenges associated with sustaining such an effort and how these issues more broadly impact the recruitment and retention of teachers of color. Finally, I conclude by discussing some of lessons learned from this partnership that can assist institutions of higher education and others who are committed to increasing the number of teachers of color.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

I approach this work from sociocultural and critical perspectives, remaining cognizant of the context in which attempts to increase the number of teachers of color take place and the sociopolitical factors that shape these efforts. I draw from Critical Race (CRT) and LatCrit theories, which center race in examinations of social phenomena. LatCrit builds upon and extends the scope of CRT to articulate how factors other than race, such as language, ethnicity, and culture, also contribute to shaping the experiences of racialized others including Latinos (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). LatCrit challenges the Black/White binary that often restricts the discourse of race and racism to two groups, thus creating space for Latinos—who

can be of any race—and individuals who may be multiracial. Given the highly racialized nature of this work, this framework is particularly appropriate.

This analysis of a specific model aimed at diversifying a preservice teacher education program and creating a pipeline of diverse teacher candidates for employment in a local urban district also examines issues related more broadly to the recruitment and retention of preservice teachers of color. I attempt to unpack how the cultural and institutional contexts influence efforts to attract and retain teacher candidates of diverse backgrounds. My lens is also shaped by my experiences as a former teacher of color who taught in the district in which he was educated, my role as the Director of Project TEACH, and my work as a teacher educator. While my position as Director undoubtedly had some influence on the collection, analysis, and presentation of the data, it also enabled me to have access to meetings with administrators, discussions with faculty and staff, and long-term relationships with students, thus contributing to the development of a longitudinal perspective of the program. This emic perspective allows for a robust description and analysis of this grassroots effort aimed at promoting diversity in the teaching profession through preservice teacher education.

Data were collected through structured and unstructured interviews with Project TEACH participants, program documents, and field notes taken during program meetings. Structured interviews used a standard protocol of open-ended questions designed to engage participants in a discussion of their experiences and solicit their views on an array of issues related to the recruitment, retention and preparation of teachers of color. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed in conjunction with field notes using inductive coding procedures to organize similar responses into themes that emerged across participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Project TEACH

Project TEACH was designed as a partnership among three entities. The first partner was a community-based organization which I will refer to here as the Learning Center. The Center provided, among other services, General Education Diploma (GED) training for students who failed to complete high school. Its director, a civil rights attorney, saw unlimited potential in many of the young people (predominantly African American and Latino males) that were part of the program. He knew that earning a GED only slightly improved their economic opportunities in the workforce and he believed that these young men, because of their identities and experiences, could probably relate to many of the urban students in this community in ways that teachers who were less familiar with the realities of the students could not. Therefore, the organization focused its efforts on creating pathways for Learning Center graduates to pursue higher education. The organization actively sought out funding to cover the cost of college for its students and placed particular emphasis on supporting students who wanted to become teachers.

“Home-growing” Teachers of Color

The Director approached the second partner, a predominantly White, local private four-year college in the city, about developing a partnership to create opportunities for students of color who wanted to become teachers. The college had recently appointed a new president, who was a man of color dedicated to issues of equity and social justice, committed to diversifying an overwhelmingly White student population, and looking to reverse the negative perceptions of the college that had developed over years of less than stellar community relations.

The third partner was the local public school district. The district serves approximately 26,000 students. Latinos account for almost half of all of the students enrolled in the city’s public schools; African Americans and Whites comprise 28% and 20% of the school population, respectively. Approximately one in every five students speaks a primary language other than English, and almost three out of every four students are eligible for free or reduced-fee lunch. The high school dropout rate for the district is reported as 8%, nearly three times the state average. Although the dropout statistics are alarming, they are probably a conservative estimate. Disaggregated data of high school enrollment by grade and by race indicate that on average 50% percent of African American students and 75% of Latino students in the district fail to complete high school in four years.

The financial costs of the program were absorbed at the outset by the college and funding located by the Learning Center. The contribution of the public schools was to make sure that qualified Project TEACH graduates were hired to work in the district. Program participants were given financial aid packages that covered the costs of tuition, books, and miscellaneous fees. In exchange they were asked to give at least three years of service as a teacher in the district upon graduation. In 1994, the first three students enrolled. Two years later the program received a federal grant and was officially named Project TEACH. The goal of the new program was to strengthen existing partnerships between the college, the local school district, and the Learning Center to identify, recruit, admit, and train students of African or Hispanic heritage as teachers for placement in the city’s public schools.

The program lasted for a total of 12 years, but the recruitment of new students was halted in year eight. Over the eight-year period, 26 students were funded as Project TEACH Scholars. Other pre-service teacher candidates of color were recruited and accepted into the college, but due to the limited availability of scholarship dollars, several did not receive financial support and are not included in the data presented here. Of the 26 who entered the program, 22 completed their degree requirements. Thus, 81% of Project TEACH members graduated within four years, a graduation rate higher than the general college population. Three students left the program to begin families; another is currently enrolled as a fifth-year student working toward completing her degree requirements. The final student who did not complete the program encountered financial hardship trying to attend college full time while still earning enough money to contribute to his family. He joined the military and is stationed overseas.

Of the 22 students who completed their undergraduate degrees, 18 are currently teaching in the local school district, two are teaching in early childhood centers in the city that are not a part of the public school system, and two are working as curriculum specialists and educators for local community-based organizations. Although the total enrollment of Project TEACH was relatively low compared to the total number of preservice teacher candidates at the institution (approximately 100) and the total number of teachers in the local school district (approximately 1,900), it did represent a significant increase in the number of students of color enrolled in the teacher education program. In fact, Project TEACH students accounted for more than half of all students of color enrolled in the teacher preparation program. One could argue that adding 18 teachers of color to a district which has almost 1,900 teachers in core academic areas is an insignificant increase. However, it is unlikely that this group of individuals would have entered the profession without Project TEACH. Additionally, the racial/ethnic composition of the district's teaching force mirrors national trends; therefore, I assert that developing a relatively small cadre of certified teachers of color with connections to the community constitutes success and is a noteworthy accomplishment.

Increasing the number of teacher candidates of color was facilitated by three features of the program identified by the participants as key factors related to getting them to consider teaching as a career and, more specifically, for entering the Project TEACH program and becoming teachers, which are discussed in the following sections.

Home-growing Teachers of Color

I am from this community. I knew I wanted to teach here, so it made sense to apply to Project TEACH. This way I could do my student-teaching and such in the district I wanted to work in. I think I can relate to the kids [in this district] in ways that some other teachers can't. I know where they are because I've been there. I attended school here. I've dealt with some of the same stuff they are dealing with. That knowledge can help me get them where they want to go—to college and beyond. (Project TEACH graduate)

A prominent feature of the program was the use of "home-growing" as its primary strategy for recruiting applicants for admission into the program. That is, to be eligible for admission into Project TEACH, applicants had to be residents of the city or have significant connections to the community. Since PK-12 students in the district were rarely educated by teachers of color from the local community, the Project TEACH Advisory Committee (which was comprised of college officials and representatives from the school district and local community) asserted a philosophy and structure to address the gap between community and teaching force. The underlying philosophy proposes that teachers from the community might be able to better relate to the students and, thus, promote academic achievement in ways that perhaps other teachers could not. The committee also hypothesized that cultivating teachers from the local

“Home-growing” Teachers of Color

community might increase the likelihood that these teachers would remain in the district for the duration of their career. This was a salient point since many teachers left this district for what they perceived to be more desirable locations and communities.

In addition to the obvious advantages associated with recruiting students of color locally to teach in their home communities, there were also several more subtle benefits for program participants. As noted earlier, the majority of Project TEACH students were successful at completing their degrees and earning teacher licensure, and many graduated with honors. Several participants attributed part of their success to staying connected with family and friends for support when they felt isolated or overwhelmed by being one of the few students of color at a predominantly White institution (PWI)—whose climate was not always welcoming for non-White students. They were able to combat the isolation by spending time with other people of color off-campus. One student referred to this network of family, friends, and city residents as her “community of support.” Several participants who were active in faith-based organizations continued to attend their local churches. Most continued their participation in other community activities such as athletics, arts and political organizing throughout their college years.

Furthermore, recruiting locally allowed Project TEACH to recruit a diverse array of students because they could commute to the college as opposed to living on campus. As a result, the program attracted both “traditional” students—those students between the ages of 18 and 22 entering a four-year college from either high school or a community college—and “non-traditional students”—older individuals who were working in school settings as paraprofessionals or in other community-based organizations who wanted to continue their education and become teachers. The ages of the participants ranged from 18-35.

Recruiting teacher candidates of color locally was mutually beneficial for the college and the community. While this was a PWI located in a racially and ethnically diverse community, there were relatively few opportunities for people of color in the community to attend college with the financial, academic, and social support offered to Project TEACH students. The mutual interest of the various constituents was the foundation of the town-gown partnership. The Learning Center created opportunities for students to pursue higher education, the college was able to increase the percentage of students of color, and the local district benefited from a pipeline of highly qualified diverse teacher candidates.

Developing Social Justice Educators

I see that the system is not set up to help my [students]. It is my job to teach these kids what they need to know to change the system so that it works better for them and other people. Like [Paulo] Freire said, you have to teach them how to “read the words” so that they can “read the world.” (Project TEACH graduate)

Few teacher education programs have truly incorporated multicultural and social justice education as core aspects that permeate their curricula, and many still approach teacher preparation from a monocultural perspective that often fails to acknowledge power relations (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Vavrus, 2002). If White teachers are prepared poorly and leave their teacher education programs without the skills necessary to promote the academic achievement of all students, then it would follow that many teacher candidates of color are also graduating from teacher preparation programs with similar gaps in their training. Recruiting teachers of color, yet 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 tokenistic and not transformative. Representation, while important, is not enough.

Project TEACH worked to bring about curricular changes that would enhance all teachers' ability to work with students of diverse backgrounds. However, it was very difficult to implement significant structural changes within the teacher education curriculum. Therefore, while simultaneously advocating for changes to the program, Project TEACH students received additional professional development aimed at preparing them to be social justice educators by meeting monthly for "working lunches" throughout the year. The working lunches focused on creating PK-12 curricula to address social justice issues in the local community and beyond. These supplemental sessions included reading assignments and discussions aimed at issues related to urban education, such as critical pedagogy.

Many of the program participants described public education as a system that fosters the oppression of poor people of color. For example, during one of our conversations, Rhonda Reid, referring to the lack of resources and deplorable conditions in the building in which she taught, stated, "We do everything we can with what we've got, but you know they would not let this happen in [a suburban community.] They don't care about my kids." The participants' critique of schools as exemplified by Rhonda's comments resonates with the work of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1973), Pierre Bourdieu (1986), and Jean Anyon (1997), who contend that schooling often does more to reproduce rather than reduce educational inequality. If the system of public education in the United States is indeed designed, as Bowles and Gintis suggest, to reproduce race and class-based stratification, then in order to transform the system so that it works in the best interests of all students, a primary function of teacher preparation should be to prepare teachers to work with students to change the system. Addressing these issues was of particular importance to the participants in Project TEACH because they saw themselves as the targets of that oppressive system and, consequently, were transforming the system and creating access to higher education opportunities for more students from their community. While the college in which the program was housed was committed to diversifying the student body, it demonstrated less commitment to transforming the

“Home-growing” Teachers of Color

curriculum to address issues of diversity and social justice. The supplemental professional development was instrumental in helping achieve the program goals.

Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004) proposes that teacher preparation programs train teachers to “teach against the grain” and challenge assimilationist notions of teaching and practices such as high-stakes testing that may be harmful to students. She contends that teachers should be taught how to promote social justice and equity through their teaching. Perhaps if institutions that prepare teachers address some of concerns raised by Cochran-Smith (2004) and others (see Nieto, 2000; Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Vavrus, 2002; Milner, 2003; and Duncan-Andrade, 2005), the experiences (educational and otherwise) of marginalized students might be positively transformed.

Expanding Support for Teacher Candidates and Teachers of Color

If it wasn't for the financial package, the support, and my friends in the program, I don't know if I could have made it through. Even now [that I have graduated], the mentoring meetings help me stay sane . . . without that support, I probably would have left teaching already. (Project TEACH graduate)

Students of color are disproportionately underrepresented in higher education institutions and particularly at four-year colleges and universities. Although African Americans and Latinos account for approximately 20% of all undergraduate students, half of those students are enrolled in community colleges (Carter & Wilson, 1995). In addition to affording access to undergraduate programs, significant efforts are required to help students of color complete their programs of study. Support mechanisms to aid student recruitment and retention become particularly salient when recruiting students of color to a four-year, predominantly White institution. To that end, Project TEACH sought to expand the support traditionally provided for undergraduate students. A unique feature of the support system was that it spanned from pre-admission into the program through the induction years to provide an array of support mechanisms including financial, academic, and social support, as well as mentoring.

Program participants were awarded full-financial aid packages that covered the costs of tuition, books, and associated fees. Their academic progress was buttressed through progress reports completed by their instructors and regular advising meetings with the program director. Students were supported socially through the use of a cohort model. Students were members of a cohort based on their year in the program (1st through 4th). Each cohort, which typically consisted of four to five members, took classes together. Students were able to help each other and work collaboratively to establish peer support. Additionally, because the number of teacher candidates of color in the teacher education program was relatively small, having classmates who were also racial/ethnic minorities helped create a sense of critical mass in the classroom. That is, one individual student was not looked to as

the representative or spokesperson for their racial/ethnic group. Rather, having several students of color in one class created a diversity of perspectives among students of color to emerge. In sum, the cohort approach helped combat the isolation often felt by students of color at PWI's.

Another method employed to support teacher candidates of color was the establishment of a mentoring program. Beginning in 2000, Project TEACH students enrolled in the undergraduate teacher preparation program were paired with graduates of the program who were teaching in the city. In-service teachers who served as mentors were paid a small stipend to attend group sessions and meet with the teacher candidates monthly. The mentoring meetings had a social component (such as serving food and networking across discipline areas) that allowed for the program alumni who were teaching in the district and the teacher candidates enrolled in the program to build relationships. Mentoring pairs also maintained contact in between monthly meetings.

There was also an academic component to the meetings that focused on improving urban education. In addition to the working lunches described earlier, students also participated in a critical inquiry group. At the beginning of the school year the group selected a book for text-based discussions during mentoring meetings. The book was also supplemented with research articles. Each meeting included structured time to discuss excerpts from the assigned text and how it related to their work as teachers in the district. At the end of the school year the author of one of the texts was invited to campus to address the entire student body at the college and spend time engaging participants of the Project TEACH mentoring program. Program participants had the pleasure of conversing with leading scholars in the field of urban education including Pedro Noguera and Jeff Duncan-Andrade and master teachers such as Jaime Escalante. In this way, the mentoring program was valuable to both the undergraduate participants and the in-service teachers who were continuing their professional development through the program.

The experiences of the participants suggest that home-growing as a strategy for increasing the number of teachers of color also has potential benefits for teacher retention. Approximately one-third of all teachers fail to complete more than three years in the profession, and almost half of all teachers leave teaching within five years (Ingersoll, 2001). All of the program graduates who entered the teaching profession are still teaching or have taken positions as administrators within the school district. Based on this evidence, I suggest that teachers who either come from or have significant ties to the communities in which they teach often have a deeper sense of connection to their students and their communities, are invested in developing the potential of students from these neighborhoods, and, consequently, more likely to remain teaching in that district.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Although the program was successful in attracting high-quality students of

“Home-growing” Teachers of Color

color into teacher preparation and providing the support they needed to complete their undergraduate degrees and enter the teaching profession, the last cohort graduated in 2005. There were several reasons for the conclusion of the program, and in what follows I briefly describe some of the obstacles the program encountered and the “lessons learned” through the process as guideposts for others working to increase the number of teachers of color committed to issues of social justice and educational equity.

There were several challenges that the program overcame. One challenge was the state’s institutionalization of a licensure exam for teachers. Assessing a teacher’s knowledge is not a negative thing per se, but unfortunately these efforts often use standardized tests as the primary assessment tool. Many standardized tests are narrow in scope, measuring a specific type of Standard English literacy, and have been accused of being culturally biased, yielding consistently lower scores among teacher candidates of color (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Smith, 1987). The state licensure exam was intended to serve as an exit exam, testing candidates who had completed teacher preparation programs and were applying for state licensure. Despite the fact that more than half of all of the test takers failed at least one portion of the test the first time it was administered in 1997, the state mandated that teacher preparation programs achieve a minimum pass rate of 80% among students in all of their licensure programs. As a response, the college made the state licensure exam a pre-requisite for entering the teacher preparation program, thus ensuring they would always have 100% of their teacher preparation candidates pass the exam. This meant that students had to pass the exam prior to beginning their field placements in their junior year. If a student had a stellar grade point average and demonstrated strong potential to become a teacher, but did not pass the test, he or she was not admitted into the program.

The first time this particular test was given, data were disaggregated and published, revealing a disproportionate percentage of failures among test takers of color (Flippo & Riccards, 2000). The results were so skewed that the state never published the results on the teacher licensure exam by race of the test taker again. Passing scores on teacher licensure exams do not guarantee that a teacher will be effective, nor is a failing score on the exam necessarily indicative of a less competent teacher. As G. Pritchey Smith (1987) concluded in his study of the impact of licensure exams on teacher candidates of color:

There is clear evidence that disproportionate numbers of minority candidates are being screened from the teaching profession. This exclusionary trend is evident regardless of the state and regardless of the type of examination—admission or exit; standardized or customized; basic skills, general knowledge, subject matter, or professional knowledge. In no state was a trend to the contrary found. (p. 134)

In the 20 years since Smith’s study was published, little has changed. It is obvious that using a test that is potentially biased as a gate-keeping mechanism creates

another institutional barrier to increasing the number of teachers of color. All but four Project TEACH students enrolling after the state mandate passed the test. While it is important to highlight the success of this majority, students who did not pass were able to complete their content major but were barred from enrolling in upper-level courses in the department leading to teacher licensure. Financially supporting students who, as a result of not passing the licensure exam, would consequently not be eligible to complete their original program of study and obtain a teaching license, became an issue of contention that contributed to the demise of the program.

An additional challenge faced by the program was isolation of students of color at a predominantly White institution. Students of color have a markedly distinct experience from their White counterparts at these schools (Bennett, Cole, & Thompson, 2000; Powell, 1998; Turner, 1994), and according to a recent study, “minority status bestows an additional burden of stress on ethnic minority students and would be associated with an increased risk for negative outcomes beyond that which is attributable to the stresses of being a student at a highly competitive academic institution” (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002, p. 23). The climate at predominantly White institutions of higher education is not always welcoming for people of color. In fact, the number of hate crimes on college campuses has risen significantly in the past decade, and college campuses are the third most popular site for hate crimes (Pewewardy & Frey, 2002). The same lack of exposure, ignorance, and stereotypes that impede many White teacher candidates from working effectively with racially/ethnically diverse students also contributes to the climate on campus that may be hostile for students of color. Many of the program participants had to deal with being the targets of overtly racist comments or actions, institutional racism, and more subtle ways that racism was manifested by individuals. Based on these experiences, I suggest that programs designed to increase the presence of pre-service teachers of color at PWI’s need to address campus climate. It is not enough to give students of color a check and a handshake. Work needs to be done to create a campus climate that is conducive to these efforts. Students’ experiences would have been enhanced by interacting more often with faculty and staff who had some training or professional development that informed their work with diverse students. Therefore, future efforts to diversify teacher preparation programs need to look beyond the students that are being recruited and simultaneously address issues related to the development of the broader campus population.

The most daunting challenge was securing funding for the program. The primary grant that funded Project TEACH ended after three years and was not renewed. The end of the funding cycle coincided with the emergence of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the intensification of the high-stakes testing movement. Consequently, funding opportunities aimed at increasing the number of teachers of color were no longer a priority, replaced by requests for proposals to provide funding for test preparation and other programs more aligned with the NCLB agenda. While the program did receive a \$200,000 grant from a private foundation,

“Home-growing” Teachers of Color

the cost of attending the college exceeded \$20,000 per year per student, thus limiting the number of new students that could matriculate into the program. Without significant financial incentives to offset the high cost of tuition, it proved extremely difficult to recruit students of color from low-income families, the very community that Project TEACH aimed to serve.

Moreover, a change in administrative leadership at the college was accompanied by a shift in institutional priorities. In the middle of the program’s tenure, the college hired a new president. Increasing racial and ethnic diversity on campus, a priority of the outgoing president, was not at the forefront of the agenda of the new administration. While the college committed to continuing support for the students who were already enrolled in the program, the administration halted recruitment efforts, citing limited financial resources to support the program. Despite the reported lack of funds to continue to recruit and support preservice teachers of color, financial resources were allocated for other so-called high priority projects. While I do recognize there are certain budgetary constraints that limit which programs institutions can support financially, I contend that programs that get funded reflect the values and priorities of an institution. Unfortunately, institutions that are committed to increasing the number of teacher candidates of color in teacher preparation programs are more often the exception than the norm. Since the program was dependent on grant funding and institutional support, as resources were reallocated by funding sources and the college, the program was phased out. Even though the program is no longer a part of the college, Project TEACH graduates still continue to support each other by meeting regularly and working collaboratively to improve public education in the city. As evidenced by the “lessons learned,” establishing pathways within teacher preparation programs to increase the number of teachers of color can’t rest solely on outside funding or the good will of administrators. Such efforts need to become institutionalized in such a way that they are not dependent on the priorities of specific administrators and the availability of funds.

Conclusion

It is estimated that U.S. public schools will need 220,000 new teachers each year until 2010 to fill the anticipated vacancies due to retiring teachers and growth in the school-aged population (National Center of Education Statistics, 1997; Recruiting New Teachers, 2000; U. S. Department of Commerce, 1996). General information about the teacher shortage is alarming and points to an opportunity to transform the demographics of the teaching force. However, the situation in my opinion is even more dire, given the fact that approximately 30% of all teachers of color in the field have been teaching for more than 20 years (American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 1999). Therefore, the current population of teachers of color will be significantly diminished by retirements in the near future. If policymakers, institutions of higher education, school districts, and other

constituents are serious about addressing the teacher shortage and issues of diversity, emphasis needs to be placed on creating a pool of well-prepared teachers of color. This can be a daunting task, but there are programs such as the one described here that have achieved some success in addressing teacher diversity. As we move forward, those who are committed to developing and supporting teachers of color must work collaboratively in mutually enriching partnerships with communities, community-based organizations and school districts to overcome the institutional barriers that have impeded progress in this regard.

The case of Project TEACH demonstrates that creating partnerships aimed at addressing the dearth of teachers of color and using home-growing as a recruitment strategy can be an effective approach for attracting more teachers of color into the profession through teacher education. The data presented here suggest that serious recruitment and retention efforts must address the support students of color need to successfully complete their undergraduate degrees and teacher licensure programs. This is particularly salient for students of color attending PWIs. Institutions of higher education also need to address possible shortcomings in the curricula of their teacher preparation programs to more adequately prepare all teachers to work with learners of diverse backgrounds, especially in urban settings. Attracting teachers of color requires a commitment from the institution to supporting these students in a variety of ways. These levels of support should include: financial support—making teaching an attractive and affordable career path to pursue; academic support—providing students with access to the resources they need to be successful; social support—transforming the campus climate into a safe multicultural learning environment that affirms the identities of all students; and professional support—providing mentoring and induction support for new teachers.

Addressing equity and access by creating opportunities for more people of color to enter the teaching profession is an important endeavor. Diversifying teacher education programs utilizing the home-growing approach also offers potential benefits for other teacher candidates and the schools in which these teachers of diverse backgrounds will work. As noted earlier, the majority of preservice teachers are educated in racially/ethnically homogenous programs that disproportionately produce teachers who are White and middle-class. Many White teacher candidates, enter pre-service education programs with little knowledge of cultural differences. They often possess stereotypes about students of color in urban schools, and they have little knowledge of multiple forms of oppression such as racism and classism (Sleeter, 2001). Although I strongly advocate the need to make curricular changes within teacher preparation programs to better prepare all preservice teachers to work with students of diverse backgrounds, it is important to note that the most meaningful learning happens among students rather than through transmission from teacher to student. Institutions of higher education that do not actively recruit and retain students of color are potentially compromising the personal and professional development of their students. Many of the participants now teaching

“Home-growing” Teachers of Color

in urban schools noted how they often served as resources for many of their fellow teachers. They referred to countless examples of serving as bridges or cultural brokers to assist other teachers, students and families communicate more effectively with each other. Therefore, the beneficiaries of Project TEACH and similar programs are exponentially greater than the cadre of home-grown teachers.

Finally, although urban communities are often depicted as places that lack wealth and resources, there are “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992)—potential resources for educational change and improvement—that often go untapped. In many ways, these teachers and the communities from which they come are, as Luis Moll suggests, funds of knowledge that serve as “cultural and cognitive resources with great, potential utility for classroom instruction” (Moll, et al, 1992; p. 134). Moll and his colleagues (Gonzalez, Moll, Floyd-Tennery, Rivera, Rendon & Amanti, 1993; Moll & Greenberg, 1992) note that as resources in poor communities, like the Latino communities described in his research, become scarce, mutual reliance among community members increases to meet the needs of the community. Moll posits that clusters of households develop linkages and share information and resources to ensure the well-being of the group. While institutions of higher education are typically viewed as institutions where knowledge is created and “housed,” poor urban communities and their inhabitants are rarely viewed as sources of knowledge and expertise. As the need for teachers increases due to retirement, an increasing student population, and attrition, urban schools will continue to disproportionately bear the brunt of the teacher shortage (Howard, 2003). Valuing the funds of knowledge in urban communities by home-growing teachers of color has the potential to contribute to the diversification of the teaching force and improve the educational aspirations and outcomes for all students.

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Jason G. Irizarry

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