Everyone Has a Story: A Collaborative Inquiry Project by Five Teacher Candidates of Color and One White Professor

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Initiatives to increase the number of teachers of color in U.S. public schools must be accompanied by culturally relevant teacher preparation for candidates of color. This study is a cooperative inquiry (Heron, 1996) conceived, conducted, and analyzed by five preservice teachers of color and one of their professors, a white lesbian. The women met biweekly for a year to co-construct meaning from their experiences in a teacher education program. They analyzed data sources together, including meeting transcripts, autobiographical sketches, and reflective writing on themes from the data. Key findings include the complexity of teacher candidates' identities; the importance of support systems for teacher candidates of color, particularly within predominantly white contexts; the connection between teacher candidates' backgrounds and their visions as teachers; and the role others' perceptions, particularly teacher educators, have played in teacher candidates becoming teachers.

Keywords: diversity, teachers of color, cooperative inquiry, teacher identity

When I first started taking education classes, I realized, "Wow, I'm the only Black person in here!" Because I'm part of the minority teacher scholarship program, I knew I had my support system. But I could only imagine not having anybody. Of course you can connect with the people in your class who are of different races. But if you have somebody of your race, or people who look like you, or can identify with you, it's different. (Olivia; Research Meeting)

The "demographic imperative," a belief that teachers' cultural and ethnic backgrounds should more closely reflect the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of their students, has prompted a great number of initiatives to increase the number of teachers of color in U.S. public schools (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010). Such efforts are based on research that suggests that students of color may experience greater academic success when their teachers are also individuals of color

(Dee, 2004). In comparison to their White colleagues, teachers of color tend to have higher expectations for children of color and are more likely to build relationships with families of color (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Sleeter & Thao, 2007). Teachers of color serve as important academic role models; increasing numbers of teachers of color has been correlated with greater numbers of students of color enrolling in advanced-level classes and graduating from college (Hess & Leal, 1997; Klopfenstein, 2005). It has been suggested that teachers of color "teach with a greater level of social consciousness than others" (Dilworth & Brown, 2005, p. 424; Su, 1997). As teachers of color tend to possess greater multicultural knowledge (Dee & Hankin, 2002), they are better poised to teach in culturally relevant ways, taking culture, language, and community into account (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Despite the importance of teachers of color in providing academic role modeling and culturally relevant instruction for the many students of color in U.S. public

schools, teacher education continues to focus on preparing White, middle-class, female teachers and remains largely unresponsive to the needs of teacher candidates of color (Sheets & Chew, 2002; Sleeter & Thao, 2007). To prepare teachers of color for any school, but particularly schools in which the majority of students are individuals of color, teacher education must be examined from the perspective of teacher candidates of color. The purpose of this study, which was cooperatively conceptualized, conducted, and analyzed by teacher candidates of color and one of their professors, was to understand better the experiences of teacher candidates of color in a predominantly White teacher education program. In understanding these experiences, teacher educators can better support teacher candidates of color.

Candidates of Color in Teacher Education

Previous research related to teacher candidates of color and teacher education programs tends to focus on recruitment, with attention to issues of funding, programming, and community partnerships (Flores, Clark, Claeys, & Villarreal, 2007; Lau, Dandy, & Hoffman, 2007; Ramirez, 2009). Such research addresses barriers that prevent teacher candidates of color from entering the teaching professions, including low teacher pay, lack of information about the teaching professions, and high stakes testing (Brown, 2005; Ramirez, 2009; Williams, Graham, McCary-Henderson, & Floyd, 2009). This research also identifies factors that contribute to the decisions of individuals of color to enter teaching, including family support/influence, role models, and a desire to serve their communities (Miller & Endo, 2005; Weisman & Hansen, 2008; Williams, Graham, McCary-Henderson, & Floyd, 2009).

There is little research regarding the experiences teacher candidates of color have after being recruited to teacher education programs (Montecinos, 2004). The existing literature suggests that teacher candidates of color do not see themselves or their experiences represented in teacher education curricula (Sheets & Chew, 2002). Teacher candidates of color feel misrepresented in their classroom interactions with White teacher educators and White peers (Gomez, Rodriguez, & Agosto, 2008). Consequently, teacher candidates of color feel less free to talk about race and racism when in a predominantly White teacher education setting (Johnston-Parsons, Lee, & Thomas, 2007). Despite an increasing focus on social justice in teacher education programs, teacher candidates of color seem ill prepared to identify systemic inequities that have existed within their own educational experiences, and teacher education has done little to enable candidates to do so (Kohli, 2008; Weisman & Hansen, 2008). It seems that the voices of teacher candidates of color are sorely lacking. This study has been designed to highlight the voices of teacher candidates of color through the use of cooperative inquiry (Heron, 1996).

Cooperative Inquiry

Cooperative inquiry aims to "create social and individual change by altering the role relations of people involved in the project" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 181). We draw upon cooperative inquiry as both a methodology and a theoretical framework, as this type of inquiry promotes a distributed approach to power. Foucault (1978) argued that power can never be unilaterally held, because, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (p. 95). Rather than setting in opposition the traditional roles of researcher and subject, cooperative inquiry disrupts binaries of researcher and subject, affirming the right of all people involved in a study to make decisions about methodology and about conclusions drawn. From an epistemological perspective, cooperative inquiry minimizes the gap that commonly exists between the concerns, knowledge, inner feelings, and modes of awareness of the people being studied and the thinking of the researcher that studies them (Heron & Reason, 2001; Oates, 2002). "It avoids their being disempowered, oppressed and misrepresented by the researcher's values implicit in any unilateral research design" (Heron, 1996, p. 21).

Empowering and fairly representing all participants in research is particularly important in studies in which participants come from traditionally marginalized positions. Said (1978) developed the term "other" to refer to those positioned as inferior and alien within dominant cultures. Similarly, Foucault (1978) used the terms "deviant" and "normal" to discuss the tendency of institutional and societal discourses marginalize some identities and ways of being. Within teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates of color experience otherness in their divergence from "normal" teacher candidates: white, middle-class women from the suburbs (Morell, 2010). Cooperative inquiry empowers those who identify as "other" through positioning all involved in the inquiry as decision-makers, as researchers, and (to the extent desired by individuals) as reporters of findings.

Critics of cooperative inquiry and other forms of participatory research express concerns that "it lacks scientific rigor, confusing social activism and community development with research" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003, p. 338). Most feminist and critical theorists, however, resist the notion that scientific rigor and social activism are mutually exclusive, calling for research that methods that have the potential to "create social and individual change by altering the role relations of people involved in the project" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 181). Cooperative inquiry's potential for personal and social transformation is particularly important for studies involving marginalized individuals (Kasl & Yorks, 2010).

The teacher candidates of color who participated in this study did so not only as objects of study, but also as researchers. Shared decision making characterized this inquiry, promoting the empowerment of teacher

candidates of color (Heron, 1992). All group members participated in conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, and reporting of findings.

The group engaged in cyclical movement between experiencing a teacher education program and reflecting upon those experiences. As detailed in the methodology section, the four stages of a cooperative inquiry are an initial reflection stage, an initial action stage, a stage of continued action with greater awareness, and a second reflection stage. This use of cooperative inquiry to forefront the voices of teacher candidates of color was particularly important given the underrepresentation of teacher candidates of color in teacher education programs and in the literature.

Methodology

This cooperative inquiry began with an invitation from a faculty member (Laura), the initiating researcher (Reason, 1988), to all of the students in her preservice teacher education courses. Five female teacher candidates of color responded to this invitation to explore the experiences of people who are "the other" in teacher education programs. The call was intentionally broad, with the initiating researcher aiming for clarity and flexibility, to allow the group to determine a specific focus of mutual interest (Heron, 1996). Each group member decided upon her level of involvement. While all members contributed and consented for their stories to be told, three (Laura, Rachel, and Sejal) have collaborated to prepare this manuscript and to reconstruct the voices of the remaining group members. A fourth author (Amanda) joined the project to assist with the development of this manuscript.

Upon gathering to determine our purpose as an inquiry group (Heron, 1996), the group created the name the Cultural Research Group (CRG) and crafted research questions: How do teacher candidates of color self-identify? What draws teacher candidates of color to the education professions? In what teaching contexts do teacher candidates of color hope to become teachers? What forms of support and what barriers do teacher candidates of color encounter in their path to becoming teachers?

Participants and Context

CRG members were part of an education department at a regional state university. During the two semesters over which the study took place, Fall 2009 and Spring 2010, there were an average of 604 undergraduate students enrolled in the education department. While specific ethnicities were not available, 12.6% were designated as ethnic minority students. The education department had 12 full time faculty members, two of whom identified as ethnic minorities and one of whom (Laura) identified as lesbian.

In the entire university, there were 7,366 undergraduate students. The majority of students were White, 69.3%; 12.5% were Black; 5.6% were Hispanic;

2% were Asian; 0.3% were Native American; 0.5% were designated as non-resident immigrants; and 9.7% were unclassified. There were 407 full time faculty members at the university. Sixty-six full time faculty members (16.2%) were ethnic minorities; 0.5% were Native American; 6% were Asian; 6% were Black; 2.7% were Hispanic; and 1% were unclassified ethnic minorities. Statistics regarding sexual orientation were unavailable.

CRG members represented diverse backgrounds, with most having complex ethnic identities. They came from urban, suburban, and rural schools and a variety of family structures and socio-economic strata. Some were bilingual; others spoke only English. All were educators in varying stages of their careers, and all identified as "the other" in a teacher education program. The student members were women of color and the faculty member was a White lesbian. CRG members co-constructed autobiographies during this research. Each group member wrote her own story. The group cooperatively refined and edited the stories, which are included here in an abbreviated format. Pseudonyms were used for the CRG members who did not wish to be authors on this paper.

Rachel Watanabe Tate. I come from a very diverse family. My mother is Spanish and English. My father is Japanese and White. My mother, a paraprofessional, has always taught in urban schools and is one of the few teachers who are bilingual. My mom has been an asset at every school she has worked in. After observing how much my mother was needed, I decided that I wanted to be in a community where I felt I was necessary. The community I fell into place with was the teaching community. My cultural background has played a huge role in my life. That background has inspired my desire to teach in an urban setting. I came from a poor single parent family, but being surrounded by good role models helped develop my good character. I believe that I can offer urban school students the chance to see a positive role model, as I did. I hope to provide them with the knowledge and encouragement they need to thrive and develop into positive role models themselves.

Olivia. I identify with the African American race. My mother's side of the family is from the French side of St. Martin. Her mother descends from Europe and her father is from the Dominican Republic. My father's side of the family is believed to have come from Ethiopia. I think that my cultural background connects to my teaching because I will be teaching to children who look like me. I may be able to connect with them on a different level than teachers who are not a minority. Children of color need more role models who are like them. They need to be able to see, talk, and connect with someone who looks like them. This sends a message that they are able to achieve goals and they are able to strive for better. People of color are not failures, they do not need to fit into stereotypes and they are able to help and influence other people of color and give back to their communities.

Sejal Mehta. I am an only child, and come from an Indian background. Both of my parents were born in India, so I am the first generation of my family to be born in the U.S. It is extremely difficult to be a first generation Indian-American. At times I find myself struggling with which culture to identify with. Many youths in the inner city do not have positive role models or people to believe in them and push them in the right direction. I want to be able to teach children who are going through the same difficulties I did while growing up. I want children to know that they are not alone in their experiences, that they have a teacher who truly understands them. I feel that the urban setting is in need of caring and productive teachers who give their time and energy into molding future leaders and quality citizens.

Sheena. Growing up with a complex hyphenated identity makes it hard to explain what I am sometimes. I am Chinese by descent so I am technically Chinese, but my family is from Taiwan, and I identify with the Taiwanese. To make the situation more complex, I was born in the U.S. Therefore, technically I am American; but am I Taiwanese-American or Chinese-American? Being Asian-American, I am expected either to become a doctor, lawyer, engineer, or business person. I have never had any intentions of fitting these stereotypes and have no interest in any of these professions, which really disappointed my family. Knowing this, I still decided to become a teacher. Because I grew up in a very diverse and urban-like community, it feels more natural and comfortable for me to teach in an urban setting. Being able to relate to students allows me to have more fun with the students. I believe that only when everyone feels safe and secure does real learning take place.

Zoe. I was adopted by a Spanish family when I was three years old. Growing up, I lived in both urban and suburban communities. When I was younger I never wanted my mother to tell me about my biological family, because I did not want to feel like I was an "ugly duckling." For years my adoption was kept a quiet and a secret. I came in contact with my biological family learned many things about myself including the fact that I am bi-racial, African American and Irish. Since then I have given my biological family another opportunity and have invited them into my life. I have decided to go into teaching because I enjoy educating others in any way that I can. I have noticed that the people who have gone into teaching are not very ethnically diverse. I want to change the status quo. I have decided that I want to teach in an urban community, because I feel like those communities need better teachers. I intend to work hard to educate students in those communities.

Laura Bower-Phipps[1]. For me, teaching is a family profession. Nearly half of the people on both sides of my family are teachers; I am a fourth generation teacher on my mother's side of the family. While I grew up middle class in a rural area with very little ethnic diversity, I chose to become a teacher in large, urban, culturally diverse schools. I taught Spanish in what was the fifth largest school district in the country. As far as I know, I was the only White, non-Mormon Spanish teacher in the entire school district. I experienced a period of adjustment, but I felt more comfortable in a diverse setting than I had in my homogenous hometown. The reason for this was my sexual orientation; I am a lesbian. In a diverse context, I am one "other" among many. I believe that my sexual orientation heightens my sensitivity to other forms of difference within my classroom. This may be a reason that I sought out students who are the "other" in the education department, so that we could learn together about making teacher education more responsive to all students.

Stages of Inquiry and Data Sources

CRG followed Heron's (1996) stages of the cooperative inquiry cycle to move between experiences and reflecting on those experiences. The first stage, as described above, was an initial reflection to determine a purpose for the inquiry, develop research questions, and discuss parameters of the study. CRG became what Heron (1996) called "a self generating culture" (p. 4). CRG was "a society whose members are in a continuous process of co-operative learning, and whose forms are consciously adopted, periodically reviewed, and altered in the light of experience, reflection, and deeper vision" (Heron, 1996, p. 4).

The second stage was the first action phase, during which members continued to engage in roles within the education program and met once or twice each month, for a total of eleven meetings during the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 semesters, to discuss and analyze experiences. Record keeping of experiences was accomplished through audio recording and transcribing discussions.

Heron (1996) described the third stage as "full immersion in stage 2 with great openness to experience" (p. 49). CRG accomplished this in part through integrating reflective writing alongside continued meetings. Additionally, the practice of meeting while simultaneously engaged in classes prompted group members to view their experiences more deeply.

Stage four of the inquiry cycle was the second reflection phase in which group members shared data and made sense of the data. Part of each meeting was

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[1]As a White woman and a professor, I continually questioned my place within this group. I felt that the stories of the student members of this group were far more important than mine, which was characterized by various forms of privilege. Yet the students and I decided that including my story allowed us to develop important knowledge of each other and to provide context.

dedicated to this reflection. Several group members also contributed written reflections on themes from the data. Another element of stage four in the inquiry was planning for and writing several professional proposals and presentations (Bower et al., 2010; Bower et al., 2011; Bower, Mehta, Watanabe, & Chang, 2011).

Heron (1996) envisioned these stages as cyclical and continuous. CRG research meetings tended to incorporate multiple stages of action and reflection. After establishing a purpose as an inquiry group, meetings consisted of four parts: member-checking of transcripts from the previous meeting; response to initial qualitative analysis of transcripts as compiled by the faculty member; discussion of a research question or related discussion question; and selection of a question for the subsequent meeting. The first two parts of the meeting were reflection, the third part was action, and the final part was planning for inquiry.

Throughout the inquiry, CRG gathered three forms of data. The primary data source was transcripts of research meetings. A secondary data source included cultural and professional autobiographies. A third data source was reflective writing completed in relation to various themes from the initial analysis.

Data Analysis

Following each meeting, the faculty member transcribed the meeting and sent the transcript to all group members. Then she created inductive categories for the transcript; these categories were verified with group members at the next meeting. New data from each meeting were added to the previous categories or used to create new categories. Together, CRG refined the categories, with attention to the name, content, and definition of the category, through a constant comparison method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Whenever there was dissention regarding a category name or definition, CRG engaged in discussion until reaching an agreement. This process resulted in six categories: complexity of ethnic identity, others' perception of race, not wanting to disappoint, cultural pride, support systems, and "standing up for what you believe in."

After data collection was complete, CRG engaged in a second level of analysis, which involved creating subcategories for each category. This level of analysis allowed group members to refine categories and to move data into more suitable categories. In a final level of analysis, the authors (but not the other members of CRG) compared subcategories, regrouping data and finalizing categories to align best with the research questions (Merriam, 1992). The authors triangulated these categories with the autobiographies and reflective writing. This process resulted in four categories: identity, vision, challenges, and support.

Findings

Four categories of findings were developed to respond to the research questions: identity, vision, challenges, and support. The category of identity addressed the research question pertaining to how teacher candidates of color self-identify. Vision corresponded both to the research question about what draws teacher candidates of color to the teaching professions and the research question about the contexts in which teacher candidates of color hope to become teachers. Both the support and the challenges categories related to the research question regarding the forms of support and barriers teacher candidates of color encounter in their path to becoming teachers.

Identity

The identities of CRG members were evident within their abbreviated autobiographies found in the methodology section of this paper. The unabridged CRG autobiographies, in addition to the meeting transcripts, and reflective writing pointed to a complexity of identity and desire to be authentic in self-identification

Complexity of Identity. Each group member had a rich, and often complicated, cultural background. Sheena captured this in her reflective writing:

> After dissecting our stories, we found we all have an identity crisis. We are a bunch of prospective teachers and a university professor teaching college students to become teachers, with an identity crisis on our hands. Yet it is our dilemmas that make us unique and make us fit to teach students of diverse backgrounds. We have experienced the other side and have struggled to find a place for ourselves in this world.

Student members self-identified as multicultural individuals. In a meeting dedicated to discussing cultural background, Olivia described herself as "a mutt," yet clarified "I think it's easier for me. Because I know I have a lot in me but I always identified with the Black race. That African American umbrella is just easy for me." Many were multiracial, and all group members intentionally lived their lives in culturally diverse settings. In talking about her dedication to diversity, Laura stated, "My wife and I like our neighborhood, because it's a very multicultural neighborhood. We will not send our kids to a school that's all White. There's no chance!"

CRG conversations about identity extended beyond race and culture. During the cultural background meeting, Sejal described differences between generations in her families. "My parents, aunts, uncles, they're like, 'You have to be like this, you have to follow these rules.' Me and my cousins, we're growing up in completely different worlds. It's kind of hard being the first generation here." Sheena described the different expectations in her family for boys and for girls. Laura's experiences with marginalization pertained directly to her identity as a lesbian. Gender, generation, and sexual orientation were three factors beyond culture that contributed to the complexity of CRG members'

identities.

Authenticity. Despite this complexity, group members want to be authentic and truthful in the way they defined themselves. Zoe, during the meeting dedicated to describing cultural background, talked about her desire to be authentic, "I just have this big identity crisis. I really want to tell everyone the truth. But I don't want my family, my adopted family to feel bad. And I don't want this other family to feel bad." Sejal talked about making sure she described her background clearly.

I knew that I was Jain. Every time I'd say, "Oh, mom, I told someone I was Hindu." She'd be like, "You're not Hindu!" That's the option on the paper. I check Hindu. And that's another thing; I didn't know when I was little that India was part of Asia. India is India. I didn't know I was Asian.

CRG members lived a careful balance between simple, authentic, truthful self-identification and honoring the complexity of their identities.

Vision

CRG student members had a clear vision of the teachers they wanted to be. This vision centered on teaching in urban schools, being academic role models for children of color, and valuing diversity.

Urban Schools. CRG teacher candidates expressed a desire to teach in an urban setting, as evident in their autobiographies. Reasons for this desire included comfort, levels of cultural diversity in urban settings, and a desire to support students and promote equity in urban schools. This was further illustrated in a meeting dedicated to talking about the context in which CRG student members hoped to teach. Zoe suggested, "I think I would feel more comfortable in an urban setting, because I look more like them. And I feel like the students and the parents would just understand me." In contrast, CRG teacher candidates expressed reluctance to teach in suburban settings, as expressed by Sheena.

I have worked in urban schools, and that's what I'm comfortable with. If I were to go into a suburban school, I would feel very out of place. I know a lot of people want to go to suburban schools, because they are afraid of the students [in urban schools]. I'm not afraid of the students in the suburban schools. I'm more afraid of the parents.

Olivia explained, "I like the diversity in the urban setting. Plus, that's what I'm comfortable with. I feel like you have much more fun. You can so many more things when you have a plethora of children in the room."

Further, CRG teacher candidates wanted to teach in urban settings to promote equity. Sheena explained. "I don't think the urban children have an equal opportunity. I don't want to sound like I want to go and save them, because that's not what I want to do. I want to give them the opportunities to be on equal ground with other children." Olivia's experiences in urban schools fostered her desire to support children in urban settings.

Being at a public school opened my eyes to different types of families that people come from and the lack of resources and support that people have. Some people don't have any support from their family, but they had this one teacher who really pushed them and helped them and really supported them. They just thrived, and I believe that it's because of that teacher. If they have one teacher to push them into the right direction, that's enough to put somebody's life on track.

Serving as a Role Model. CRG student members anticipated being role models as teachers in urban settings. Sejal explained her perspective that students would see teachers who looked like them as role models when she talked about the students in her fieldwork, "I think that students see, 'Oh, you're like me, so I want to do well.' You know, like when you see people who look like you." And Rachel explained her ability to serve as a role model, "A lot of these urban kids come from poor homes, single parent homes. And for a long time, that's where I came from. I understand a lot of the things that they go through." These conversations emerged in response to the question, "Why did you decide to go into teaching?"

CRG student members focused in particular on modeling cultural pride, especially as they talked about their own cultural backgrounds. Sejal expected to "tell children of our amazing experiences and how we might have had a time when we did not understand why we were different, but we learned that being different is special." Olivia talked about her message for children of all races and ethnicities.

You should be proud of who you are. No one has the right to make you feel a certain way. You were born Black, you were born White, and you were born Asian. That's what you're supposed to be. Why not have pride [in your race]?

Valuing Diversity. Beyond serving as role models, CRG believed their openness to diversity made them effective teachers. Laura, talking about her identity, said, "I think [me being gay] is another thing that is important to be clear about because it is something that makes you more sensitive to difference and to multiple forms of difference." The group discussed the importance of openness to diversity during a research meeting.

Laura: Do you think teachers of young children should be colorblind?
Rachel: You can't be. No way!
Sheena: Because you're trying to get them to a level they can perform. You may need to do different things at the younger grades to get them where they need to be.
Olivia: Not only that, just to prepare yourself.

You have to deal with their families, their problems, their issues. So you need to know their background and cultural customs and different things you're going to need to be aware of just to get through the day. You can't be colorblind with elementary kids.

Part of the group members' commitment to diversity was a belief in diversity as an asset within a classroom. In talking about teaching aspirations, Olivia explained, "Each culture has something different to bring to the table. If [teachers] notice that, students can learn more and bring something from their backgrounds, education through the people that you have in your classroom." As teachers, CRG members made a commitment to being open to diversity within their current and future classrooms.

Ultimately, CRG student members' collective vision was to make a difference in the field of education by teaching in urban contexts, by serving as a role model for children urban contexts, and by valuing diversity.

Challenges

Despite CRG student members' clear vision of the teachers they want to be, they faced significant challenges in their paths to becoming teachers. These challenges included insufficient attention to diversity in teacher preparation courses, isolation, tokenism, and silencing.

Lack of Diversity as a Topic in Teacher Preparation Curriculum. Student CRG members had worked with faculty who supported them and integrated diversity into courses; however, they had more experiences in which diversity in general and race in particular were strikingly absent from course discussions. They discussed this during a meeting dedicated to their perceptions of education professors' perceptions towards teacher candidates of color.

> Olivia: The problem is the professors and the other people in your class, because they're the majority and they don't go through what you go through. They see it completely different than how you see it. When you say something or you bring something to their attention, they're like, "You're overreacting. It's not like that." But it really is.
> Sejal: Or the fact that race is not really targeted or talked about.
> [Several]: That's true. It's true.
> Rachel: It's such cliché. Don't bring up religion, don't bring up race. To be politically correct, you just avoid it instead of it being talked about.

Sheena suggested, "I think really, professors don't think about race. It's mostly about special ed. and special needs, and not so much on preparing teachers for ethnic diversity or cultural diversity or anything else." Olivia shared her perspective of faculty priorities, "I feel like the majority of professors, well it seems like this. They don't really care about your color. They're just trying to make you better educators and to learn the field."

CRG discussed the importance of teacher educators learning about diversity and promoting classmates' work in diverse settings. Rachel suggested, "I think that there could be written an appropriate curriculum for professors. You guys have your standards you have to meet. I don't know if diversity falls in there somewhere, but I'm sure it does." CRG student members expected faculty to address diversity in classes, so that teachers were prepared for diverse contexts. Olivia explained, "You have to put them in that [diverse] context until they're comfortable with it and they know it's not the stereotypes they've heard about. If that deepens their stereotypes of diverse children, they shouldn't be working with children." Sheena expressed, "I think diversity should be a greater dimension in teacher prep courses."

Tokenism. At the same time CRG members wanted faculty to be aware of their identities, CRG student members were wary of teacher educators' responses to race. These responses were particularly troubling when the responses involved tokenizing teacher candidates of color. In talking about their perceptions of education professors, the student CRG members discussed facing tokenism frequently.

> Olivia: I've had professor before, she was White and she would bring up racism within the classroom, but to me she was only saying this to make it seem like she's not racist. And not to say that she was racist, but…
> [Several]: Yeah, I've had that too.
> Olivia: And then she would use me as an example all the time. [Laughter]
> Rachel: We're the example.
> Sejal: I was just going to say, we're the example.

As evident, CRG student members were highly suspect of some faculty members' motives in discussing diversity. Rachel responded to Laura's question about how best to address racial issues in class, "If it was anyone but you in the department asking me that, I would think, 'You don't give a shit. Why are you even asking me that?' Some of the older Caucasian women, I really couldn't imagine them asking me that." It was not that CRG student members did not want teacher educators to discuss all types of diversity in class. It is simply that they did not want to be the example or the spokespeople for their races. They were willing to assume the role of teacher, as Sheena expressed, "I tend to volunteer when it comes to questions like that, because I have experience and other people might not. And it might give other teachers an experience that they don't have." But they agreed that they did not want professors to assume that they wanted to talk about diversity. CRG student members preferred that professors talk to teacher

candidates of color individually rather than publically singling them out.

Isolation. CRG members' experiences with being tokenized reinforced their existing feelings of isolation. Zoe's experiences, captured as she explained her cultural background, were similar to other group members, "We moved to Wisconsin, and that was all suburban. I went to school there. I was the only person of color. Everyone else was White. We moved back here, but at this school, mostly everyone is White." Sheena, in talking about her own cultural background, discussed the pressure she has felt as the only person of color in her classes.

> When I first went in the class, I said, 'Oh, my god, there are so many White people!' It really does add pressure on you. It takes you out of your comfort zone as opposed to when you know that there are other people like you.

Rachel, in reflecting upon her perception of education professors' attitudes towards diversity, complained, "You look at the education department. Why aren't there more students like us? Why aren't there more students with diversity? You look around in one of our lecture classes. Everyone's White but maybe like two." CRG student members felt disconnected from their classmates, their professors, and from class discussions. Having different previous experiences and background knowledge made many CRG members reluctant to participate fully in class discussions. Similarly, in talking about the invisibility of her otherness, Laura expressed her feelings of isolation through self-editing, "I've had conversations with professors and with friends and with my wife about how out and open I should be. If I'm with my wife, I'll introduce her to anyone as my wife. But I don't say anything in class."

Another aspect of isolation came from CRG student members' experiences within their cultures and families. No CRG student members knew peers from their neighborhoods or cultural communities who were also going into teaching. In talking about her desire to be a teacher, Sheena shared that her career goals were culturally transgressive for a first generation Asian-American and caused family conflict.

> Being a teacher is accepted in my country. In Taiwan it's an honorable thing, because you're teaching children. If I were in Taiwan, they would be very happy. In this country, it is not so. Some people think that a lot of people who go into teaching don't have other options. They failed at whatever it was that they originally intended to do. That's why they became teachers. So with that kind of connotation, it's not exactly the best.

Silent Advocacy. CRG members' feelings of isolation often translated into silence within coursework and fieldwork. They carefully edited and often silenced their own opinions. This self-silencing was another barrier to CRG members achieving their vision of themselves as teachers who would value diversity and serve as role models to children in urban settings. As CRG members talked about their vision for teaching and valuing diversity, Laura had initially identified a theme of advocacy, but the other members of the group were quick to distance themselves from the title "advocate." When Laura presented themes from the previous meeting for member checking, Rachel contested, "I don't want to call myself an advocate. When you're trying to protect other people and be an advocate for other people, it shines the limelight on you like you're perfect." During the same discussion, Olivia expressed her reluctance to advocate for diversity while in university classes, "Sometimes I feel like, 'Oh, we're on this topic [diversity] again. I'm going to keep my mouth shut.' I don't want to be the colored person preaching and stuff. I'm just, 'I'm going to let this go by.'" Rachel added, "I won't speak up, because I don't want to be the angry minority that's like, "I went through racism. Damn you White people!" [Classmates] just remember that stereotype. You're trying to break stereotypes, but then you are the stereotype."

Because of not wanting to reinforce stereotypes, CRG members who were visibly identifiable as "the other" because of race tended to advocate surreptitiously. Olivia explained her strategy for standing up for "the other."

> I think that you don't intentionally go around trying to be an advocate, especially if it's your race. But you just being confident in who you are and loving yourself shows up in your personality and who you are and what you do. You secretively put that onto other people, especially the children that you're teaching. In a way, you're advocating. But you're not intentionally advocating.

Laura, on the other hand, was able to hide her "otherness" by not talking about her personal life or sexual orientation. She justified her reticence as a means to stand up for diversity.

> The reason I don't say anything in class is because I'm afraid that the moment I do, when I bring in diverse books, it's going to be, "Oh, yeah, here's the gay teacher. And she's only saying we should read these books about diverse families because she's 'one of those'."

Her identity remained hidden, but her advocacy did not. None of the CRG members felt that they could promote understanding and awareness of difference and live a life of difference without being accused of self-promotion and reinforcing stereotypes. CRG members continually felt pressed to choose between their identities as teachers, as advocates, and their ethnic or sexual identities. This

choice was often painful and difficult.

Choosing between identity and advocacy was one of several challenges faced by CRG members. Other challenges CRG student members faced in their paths to becoming teachers included, isolation in teacher preparation courses, in fieldwork, and from cultural communities; tokenism within teacher preparation courses; and insufficient attention to diversity in teacher education curriculum.

Support

Despite the significant challenges faced by CRG members in their professional paths, they drew upon multiple forms of support. In navigating experiences as self-identified minorities in a teacher education program, CRG members discussed the importance of structural support and communities of people who "could connect on some level".

Membership in a Community. CRG members' sense of support was often fostered through membership in various communities. As she talked about her cultural background, Sejal talked about her communities in terms of family and culture.

If I would come home sulking about how I wanted to fit in with other kids or asking why we do things certain ways, my mother's response would always be, "Be proud of your heritage. You are Indian. Why should you be ashamed?"

Olivia also talked about her culture, "I love my culture, the food, the music, the people, the attitudes. Everything of the people. I just love that." Sheena discussed her academic community, "When you know that there are other people like you, it makes you more comfortable. In the education classes [at a different university], there were a lot of minorities, especially Chinese and Korean. It made me feel really comfortable in class, because we could connect on some level."

CRG members believed that their participation in the Cultural Research Group provided membership in an important community. In reflecting upon the research in the final meeting of the inquiry, Rachel shared, "I think that the Cultural Research Group has impacted me profoundly, because when I originally came to [this school], I felt like I was overcrowded by a sea of White people." Zoe also discussed the CRG community as a form of support at the final meeting.

You realize that you're not the only one going through these things. That's how I felt basically all my life. I think it's made me a little comfortable with who I am. It's nice to know that other people have the same issues. I didn't talk about it for a really long time, and not talking about it made me feel like I was the only one experiencing those things.

In considering the importance of membership in a community, Sheena stated, "that bond with the community, it's that safe feeling that makes you able to stand up and do something. Because we have this group right here, we're being activists. Because we know that there are people just like us who want the same cause. But if you don't have that, it's very hard."

Structural Support. There were specific ways student CRG members experienced support through existing programs or policies; there were other ways CRG members envisioned increasing structural support. Olivia discussed her Teacher Preparation Minority Scholarship as a means of support. "When I first started taking education classes, I realized, 'Wow! I'm the only Black person in here.' Because I'm part of the teacher prep minority scholarship, I knew I had my support system."

A structural supports that student members found missing pertained to finances, both in terms of salaries and financial aid. Sheena explained money as a barrier to entering teaching when she talked about her teaching aspirations.

I come from an immigrant family. My parents worked so hard to put me through school so I can have a better life, so I can have more money. Because money is what's emphasized to us. And teaching is definitely not on the top of the list.

And Rachel, discussing teacher educators' roles in promoting diversity in teacher preparation programs, insisted that pathways should exist to encourage students from urban schools to attend universities, with attention to the students' financial means.

Especially going into urban schools and offering kids that opportunity. Going in prepared, though. Being like, this is how you do FASA. These are the scholarships that are available. You can't go in like, "Come to [this university]. Oh, by the way, it's about $10,000 a year."

Whether support involved financial support or programmatic support, membership in a community, or finding a sense of belonging, CRG members found that support was an essential component in becoming and remaining teachers.

Exploring identities, vision, challenge, and support provided a deeper understanding of the identities of teacher candidates of color, what drew them to the education professions, the contexts in which they hoped to become teachers, and the forms of support and barriers they faced. More importantly, this inquiry provided five teacher candidates of color with a sense of community and belonging and a sense of empowerment.

Discussion and Implications

Any response to the many calls for an increase of individuals of color in teacher preparation programs and in the teaching professions must be accompanied by a greater understanding of teacher candidates of color, their identities, their visions for teaching, and the support and challenges they have encountered in their paths to

becoming teachers. Teacher educators must become a key form of support to teacher candidates of color. The Cultural Research Group included members who self-identified as culturally complex. CRG student members wanted to teach in urban settings as a means of serving as role models, valuing diversity, and standing up for what they believed in through challenging cultural norms and race-related expectations. In their journey to realizing this vision, CRG student members faced isolation, silence, underrepresentation in teacher education, and tokenism. These challenges were not unlike those reported by other underrepresented teacher candidates, including men (Weaver-Hightower, 2011), speakers of other languages (Gomez, Rodriguez, & Agosto, 2008; Weisman & Hanson, 2008), and other groups of teachers of color at predominantly white institutions (Johnston-Parsons, Lee, & Thomas, 2007). What sets the CRG findings apart was that the teachers of color were the people reporting the findings rather than a researcher doing the reporting on their behalf. The teachers of color were empowered to speak for themselves about their challenges.

In contrast to the challenges they faced, CRG members experienced support through their communities, existing programs, and participating in this cooperative inquiry. The support that CRG members discussed was similar to that reported by Williams, Graham, McCary-Henderson, and Floyd (2009) in their discussion of African American teacher candidates at historically Black institutions. It was particularly striking that CRG members were able to find these forms of support at a predominantly White institution.

Understanding the identities, vision, and challenges of teacher candidates of color can allow teacher educators to provide essential support. The teacher candidates of color in this study valued structural support within their university and communities. The implication for teacher educators is the need to become aware of structural supports that exist for teacher candidates of color, including financial aid opportunities and campus and community organizations. Financial concerns frequently serve as a barrier to individuals of color entering the teaching professions (Ramirez, 2009). Equipped with information about scholarships and financial aid, teacher educators can reduce this barrier. Supporting and encouraging teacher candidates of color may also involve teacher educators creating structural supports that do not currently exist. Cooperative inquiry groups, like the Cultural Research Group, represent one means of doing so. As evident through CRG members' comments, groups such as this one reduce the isolation so commonly felt by teacher candidates of color.

Another step in supporting teacher candidates of color involves understanding that these candidates' identities are complex and moving beyond the limited view of diversity as White vs. non-White (Dilworth & Brown, 2001). CRG members struggled with self-

definition. They wanted to authentically represent themselves, yet they acknowledge their sense of "identity crisis." This challenge of self-definition was intensified as teacher candidates of color were asked to be spokespeople for their races during class discussions. Teacher educators must avoid the practice of tokenism, for it only heightens teacher some candidates' senses of isolation. In contrast, the teacher candidates in this study appreciated teacher educators who asked teacher candidates of color privately if they would be willing to talk about their experiences. The teacher candidates resented being "used as the example" without their consent. This was similar to findings from Johnston-Parsons, Lee, and Thomas's (2007) study in which teachers of color felt extreme discomfort when asked to serve as "cultural consultants" by teacher educators.

The desire to avoid being the example caused CRG student members to advocate silently rather than overtly. It is not that CRG members did not want to advocate, but rather that they intended to do so discreetly. It may be helpful for teacher educators to understand and be able to discuss perceived challenges of open advocacy. These conversations could center on teacher candidates' desires to be role models and serve to unpack definitions of role model and of advocate. Kohli (2008) suggested the use of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a means to unpack the experiences of teacher candidates of color and to make these teacher candidates more aware of educational inequities they have faced. CRT aims "to expose the way in which racial inequality is maintained through the operation of structures and assumptions that appear normal and unremarkable" (Rollock & Gilborn, 2011, p. 1), making CRT an important tool for teacher candidates of color.

Importantly, teacher educators cannot expect that teacher candidates of color will automatically serve as advocates for children of color simply because of the candidates' own cultural background. As Faez (2012) asserts, shared cultural background and empathy are not sufficient qualifications; teachers must also have proper preparation to meet the needs of diverse learners. Another concern regarding the assumption that teachers of color must be advocates is that teachers of color already experience higher rates of attrition than their White colleagues (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010). Positioning teachers of color, but not White teachers, as advocates for children of color seems unjust and counter-productive (Settlage, 2011). In addition to recruiting additional individuals of color to teacher preparation programs, these programs must also focus on developing White teachers who are culturally competent and willing to serve as advocates for all children (Sleeter, 2001).

In addition to issues of advocacy, teacher educators must spend time learning about teacher candidates' professional goals to more adequately support them. For teacher candidates of color who hope to teach

in urban settings, this support should include increased opportunities for fieldwork in urban schools. Additionally, CRG members challenged teacher educators to include diversity in teacher preparation curriculum. Discussions of diversity should move beyond diverse learning styles and special needs to encompass diversity of culture and ethnicity. During these discussions teacher educators must speak to all teacher candidates, not only to teacher candidates who do not have cultural synchronicity with the students they teach. For too long, teacher education has focused on preparing White, middle class teachers to enter culturally and linguistically diverse settings (Sleeter & Thao, 2007). The teacher candidates in this study shared the goal of teaching in diverse urban settings. To achieve their vision, they need teacher educators who will prepare them to teach in these settings.

Limitations and Future Research

This inquiry provided a snapshot of the experiences of six women in a teacher education program over the course of one year. This snapshot did not include multiple stages of teacher development. Future research could involve cooperative inquiry that commences upon entry into a teacher education program and continues into teacher induction. An additional limitation of this inquiry was that it did not tell the stories of teacher candidates whose voices were similarly absent from teacher education for reasons other than ethnicity. Based on CRG members' assertions that they were shaped through membership in a cooperative inquiry group, more diverse inquiry groups could form within teacher education programs. These diverse inquiry groups could be a means of promoting teachers as researchers, as recommended by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) and as a means of empowerment and consciousness raising for teacher candidates. Ultimately, these longer, more diverse inquiry groups could represent research that will "create social and individual change" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 181).

Conclusion

The vision articulated by teacher candidates of color is encouraging: to teach in urban settings, to serve as role models, and to value diversity. At the same time, this vision cannot be realized without significant support from teacher educators, as expressed by Villegas and Davis (2007).

> 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. (p. 146)

Teacher educators must recognize that "everyone has a story," and to work with teacher candidates of color to unpack their stories in ways that prepare them to be role models in diverse settings.

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