

Project Teacher Development: Transforming Lives of Students of Color

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Abstract

Although the challenges of recruiting and retaining teachers of color in American public schools are multifaceted, the College Readiness Report overviews some programs designed to first help close the achievement gap for ethnically diverse students and help prepare those students for college (AASCU, 2012). The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Task force urges colleges to work collaboratively with their communities to identify specific needs and programs. Project Teacher Development (PTD) features a partnership between Millersville University (MU) in Pennsylvania and an urban school district in the same community. The backbone of this project is the well-established Color of Teaching (COT) Mentoring Program that is a college-readiness and support program offered at MU that benefits underserved middle school, high school and college students of color. This teacher pipeline project provides middle school and high school students of color with a college mentor, an opportunity to participate in Side-by-Side seminars focused on careers in education, a residential Summer Academy where students get exposure to college life, and a dual enrollment college course, earning them college credit while still in high school. Upon graduation from the program and successful acquisition of a teaching certificate, candidates are guaranteed a one-year full-time job in the local urban school district. Providing these experiences can close the “opportunity gap” (Milner, 2015) and transform the lives of students of color who want to become educators.

Introduction

This paper describes Project Teacher Development (PTD)- the name of a comprehensive pathway approach for developing future teachers from underrepresented student populations at the middle school and high school level. PTD consists of four unique programs that when combined together create broad experiences for middle school and high school students of color to increase their access into the teaching profession.

The four programs of PTD include: Color of Teaching—a mentoring program for students in grades 7-12; Side-by-Side—which involves in-school teaching seminars and practice teaching for students in grades 9-10; College Readiness Summer Academy—a residential overnight camp experience for students in grades 10-11; and UNIV 103—a first year college credit bearing course offered to students in grade 12 to explore the power of teachers to shape the future, and how careers in education and coaching promote social justice and civic responsibility.

Although the challenges of recruiting and retaining teachers of color in American public schools is multifaceted, the College Readiness Report provides an overview of programs designed to first help close the achievement gap for ethnically diverse students and then details how to prepare those students for college (AASCU, 2012). The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Task force urges colleges to work collaboratively with their communities to identify specific needs and programs.

The Task Force recommends four foundational programs that should be implemented at all colleges: strong teacher preparation programs; curriculum alignment between P-12 schools and post-secondary schools; timely feedback to the high schools about the successes and challenges faced by college freshmen; and dual enrollment classes (AASCU, 2012). Project Teacher Development (PTD), as described in this paper, aligns with these recommendations and demonstrates an effective partnership between a university and a local urban school district.

While making sure all students are academically prepared for the rigors of college is imperative, offering students an opportunity to “improve their own lives and those of others as they work to make meaningful contributions to their families, their communities, and to society” can also empower students to reach their goals and dreams (Milner, 2015, p.8). All too often in the literature, authors write about the achievement gap. The notion of “achievement gaps” assumes a deficit model of thinking for students of color in that their existence is inferior to set standards. “‘Opportunity’, on the other hand, forces [society] to think about how

systems, processes and institutions are overtly and covertly designed to maintain the status quo and sustain depressingly complicated disparities in education” (Milner, 2015, p.8).

PTD provides students of color with opportunities in four key areas: access to mentoring, knowledge and skill building for a potential career, pre-college training experiences to support their future career goals, and a dual-credit, college level course completed in high school that can later be applied to bachelor’s degree requirements. This model could be easily adapted for use by other school-university partnerships as a mechanism for colleges and universities to reach their recruitment and retention goals.

Rationale for Teacher Recruitment Pipeline Programs

The student population in America is more diverse than it has ever been and continues to grow more diverse. While this is widely known, not enough has been done to prepare teachers and to help them to assist the underserved students in their classrooms (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). In order to bridge these gaps between the demographics of P-12 students and those who teach them, universities must identify best practices in developing pathways to teaching for minority groups. Many pathways have been proposed including alternative route programs for people who may want to switch into the teaching career (Boser, 2011) and the Grow-Your-Own programs (Bireda & Chait, 2011). The main goal of Grow-Your-Own programs is for colleges to partner with local school districts to aid individuals in the school or community to become certified to teach in that district (Bireda & Chait, 2011).

One other widely accepted way for local universities and school systems to close the diversity gaps is to develop pipeline programs like *teacher cadets*. These programs target high ability minority high school students to get them thinking about the possibility of obtaining a college degree in education. These early outreach programs open an opportunity for students to develop positive feelings towards teaching that may or may not have existed before. The outreach programs work with P-12 schools to increase students’ awareness and motivation; and work to engage them in thinking like a college student. Many previous programs have involved internships and summer enrichment programs in which high school students were able to explore whether or not teaching might be a career for them. The four programs of PTD focus on students’ awareness, motivation, college preparation, and summer enrichment specifically designed to educate, motivate and inspire underrepresented students to consider careers in education.

A vital aspect of pipeline programs is school system buy in. These schools need to understand the need for a diverse teacher workforce and recommend students whom they know have the ability to not only help fill the gap but also excel at teaching (Torres, Santos, Peck, & Cortes, 2004). The school-university partnership described in this paper has a long partnership history and that allowed for gaining entry into the schools to implement the programs.

Presentation of the Model

The PTD model described here is intended to help students better understand and prepare for college as well as positively shape student perceptions of careers in education. The uniqueness of each program lies in its effort to educate middle school and high school students of color to view teaching not only as a viable career option, but also as a path for strengthening their community and the broader society. The overall framework for the programs within PTD builds upon Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The theory implies that intrinsic motivation can be enhanced in a variety of situations. The hypothesis for PTD is that this theory will extend to potential future pre-service teachers. Throughout this project, students learn how to be autonomous, to understand and build their competence, and to experience relatedness with regard to teaching careers as per the elements of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2013).

Description of Color of Teaching Mentoring Program

The Color of Teaching Mentoring (COT) program is a college-readiness and support program offered by the university that benefits middle school, high school and college students. In this program, faculty and college students serve as mentors for 7-12 grade students. The mentors provide support for the students as they navigate middle and high school, and arrange for student attendance to college campus events such as public lectures, films, and symposia.

Typically, the focus of many college readiness programs is heavy on academic instruction and professional

development opportunities for teachers. COT fills a void by providing relational and emotionally appropriate supports for students to learn the soft skills necessary for success in college. COT mentoring serves as the backbone of the PTD model by undergirding the other programs and providing students with the opportunity for a college student mentor throughout middle school, high school and even in college when they can be matched with a faculty mentor.

Description of Side-by-Side Program

Side-by-Side (SBS) is an enrichment program within the PTD model that specifically generates interest in the teaching profession among underrepresented 9th and 10th grade high school students. The SBS program takes place during the regular school day rather than as an after-school program. Teachers and guidance counselors nominate students for SBS. The students receive a hall pass and are dismissed from their regular classes to participate in weekly seminars dedicated to exploring careers in education and future goals. University faculty and university student mentors facilitate the seminars. The goal of SBS is to identify, educate, inspire, and mentor urban students who show promise to become educators.

Description of College Readiness Summer Academy

The third program of PTD is called the College Readiness Summer Academy. It is a residential pre-college experience designed to address the more salient issues of becoming a teacher such as aptitude for careers in education and succeeding in a teacher preparation program. For one week, students attend classes taught by volunteer college professors that are focused specifically on the needs of this target group. They eat meals in the campus food court and sleep in the residence halls. One main purpose for the Summer Academy is to alleviate fears students may have about college. Special instructional sessions are offered for scholarship and financial aid opportunities, library resources, bursar, campus recreation, and the admissions office in order to develop the foundational knowledge for how colleges operate.

Description of College Course taught in High School

The fourth phase of PTD is a First-Year Seminar college course in which high school seniors will have an opportunity to enroll. The purpose of this course is to build on the vision of Horace Mann, who is best known for promoting universal public education. Mann is often quoted as saying, "Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity." Students in the college course will explore the power of teachers to shape the future of education and examine how teachers can work effectively with diverse students within a framework of culturally responsive pedagogy. Students also evaluate educational technologies, classroom management, student assessment, communication skills, and other skills needed to support learning activities in P-12 schools.

Students in PTD have the opportunity to be mentored continuously, theoretically from 7th grade through college graduation, as they navigate the college going process. Once admitted to college, newly entering students can be trained to serve as mentors to high school students at their alma mater while they continue to be supported by the COT faculty and students at the university level. Upon earning their bachelor's degree and teaching certificate at the end of PTD, graduates may return to their home school district for one-year of guaranteed employment as a teacher as stipulated by the school-university partnership.

Data Analysis and Findings

The methodology for this study involved multiple research procedures to explore student self-determination and interest for pursuing careers in education. The objective of this research approach was exploratory. As is usual with ethnographic research, several types of data were gathered. These included interviews, pretest and post-test open-ended survey questions, student demographic profiles, teacher nomination forms, photographs, video, and field notes to inform the research. A conventional content analysis approach was used. Students' consent was obtained via verbal consent forms and written parental permission slips in English and Spanish. Selection of participants was limited to those electing to participate in each program. Data for this paper was collected August 2014 - December 2016. The school district student profile where the study took place consists of 59% Hispanic, 18% African-American, 14% White, 5% Asian, 4% multi-racial. 88% of the population qualifies for free-reduced lunch.

Results from pre-test/post-test surveys suggest student interest for pursuing careers in education increased. Two major themes materialized: (1) positive mentoring relationships, and (2) fixed student mindsets and a

need to develop a growth mindset (Dweck, Carol, 2006). Two primary attributes emerged as reasons for not attending college: (1) lack of financial resources, and (2) poor grades. Primary reasons for not pursuing a career in education included (1) disrespectful students, and (2) the curriculum being too difficult. Three major themes emerged from the Summer Academy: (1) participants can see themselves as college students, (2) participants want to be better students because they know how difficult teaching can be, and (3) financial aid for college is available. The table below outlines the participants in each phase of PTD to date.

Table 1

	Color of Teaching mentoring program Grades 7-12	Side-by-Side In-school seminars Grades 9-10	College Readiness Summer Academy Grades 10-11	UNIV 103: First Year Seminar course (3 cr) Grade 12
Year	Aug. 2014- Dec. 2016	Fall 2015	August 2016	Approvals pending
Participants	37	31	6	0
Findings	1. Positive mentoring relationships promote a sense of belonging and relatedness. 2. Visualization of students' future selves became evident.	1. Reasons for not attending college: lack of financial resources and poor grades. 2. Reasons for not pursuing careers in education: disrespectful students and difficult curriculum.	1. Participants can see themselves as college students. 2. Participants want to be better students because they know how difficult teaching can be. 3. Financial aid is available.	

Conclusion

PTD is designed to recruit and retain middle and high students of color to become future educators; therefore, this paper provides a unique opportunity to inform the educational research community about early findings and the developmental process used in one school-university partnership to potentially diversify the teacher workforce. The on-going mentoring support throughout the PTD program ensures that students' individual needs can be met which is a strong feature of this program. Mentoring makes a difference in the lives of underserved youth.

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