Reimagining Hospitality and Sense of Belonging for Underrepresented Students in Graduate Teacher Education

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Abstract

This article presents findings from a sequential mixed methods study that examines how graduate teacher education students describe the experiences that either enhance or interrupt a sense of belonging before and during the university preparation program. The paper focuses primarily on analysis from two focus groups and demonstrates particular complexity for underrepresented students as they navigate university-based graduate coursework and clinical internship in K–12 schools simultaneously. Theoretical frameworks and research on hospitality and belonging are applied to interpret the results and reimagine the concept of hospitality on a program-wide level. Participant voices from each point of data collection are elevated in the findings and are presented in depth. Findings suggest that underrepresented students need various intentional and structured scaffolds to survive sometimes inhospitable school environments. These scaffolds must begin with the admissions process and be informed by deep partnerships with external community-based organizations who often hold discrete and relevant cultural knowledge.

Keywords: graduate teacher education, hospitality, belonging, underrepresented, community-based organizations

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University program leaders can engage the vast body of research showing how a sense of belonging promotes persistence for both undergraduate and graduate programs (e.g. Freeman et al., 2007; Gardner & Barker, 2015; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). O'Meara et al. (2017) studied graduate students' sense of belonging and academic self-concept, self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and persistence. They argued that a sense of belonging in graduate school differs from undergraduate study due to its focus on the discipline and profession over allegiance to the institution. In graduate teacher preparation programs, the popularity of so-called "fast-track" or accelerated programs suggests that this issue may be even more complex, as graduate teacher education students may only affiliate with their university program for twelve to fifteen months, including an immersive off-site internship in K–12 schools (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], 2018).

Admittedly, a sense of belonging is critical for participation in any organization and ranks only behind physiological and safety needs for most (Maslow, 1954; O'Meara et al., 2017). Certainly, teacher education programs (TEPs) strive to engender a sense of belonging for their students and to create supports for managing the dual roles of graduate student in the higher education institution and teacher candidate at the K–12 school. These supports traditionally include investment in professional development for mentor teachers and university supervisors, orientation activities, and professional learning communities to promote connections and relationships (Feiman-Nemser, 2012).

Students from underrepresented groups have historical legacies to navigate and may benefit from further supports in order to claim a sense of belonging in university programs (O'Meara et al., 2017). In their guest editors' introduction to a special journal issue on the state of teachers of color in education, Jackson & Kohli (2016) explore multiple studies linking the high attrition rates for novice teachers of color with poor

preparation in their mostly white teaching programs. Jackson & Kohli note that "Whiteness frames how pre-service teachers of Color are recognized and treated in their programs" (Jackson & Kohli, 2016, p. 3). Well-intended TEP leaders most likely create these supports and program features themselves, using internal program feedback or reports to guide their work rather than deep and meaningful partnership with community leaders or other non-university-based stakeholders who should have a say in the work of teacher education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018; Guillen & Zeichner, 2018). Community partners hold key cultural knowledge that can help situate graduate students' experiences and enhance the university's efforts to welcome and support their students (Zeichner, 2021). Such collaboration could diminish what Brown (2014) calls the "alienating and ineffective" experience for students of color in TEPs (Brown, 2014, p. 336).

Context and Focus of Study

This study was designed to illuminate the program values, initiatives, policies, pedagogical strategies and community partnerships that would best support equitable and mutually beneficial learning spaces and a sense of belonging for all participants in graduate TEPs. This sequential mixed methods study was conducted at an independent liberal arts university in the Pacific Northwest, where the graduate program has historically attracted students similar to the state's teacher work force (mostly white, mostly female). The TEP includes K–12 state certification plus master's degree, typically earned in fifteen to twenty-four months, depending on when students complete their coursework. The students complete a supervised clinical internship in K–12 schools of varying duration depending on the program route. As the study evolved through sequential data collection and analysis, the focus on "underrepresented" students became students with self-identified racial or ethnic identities and older or "non-traditional" students who are sometimes isolated from their peer group. Some of the participants were Fellows in a community-based organization (CBO) designed to support teachers of color during their preparation

and induction. The Fellows attend sessions on topics such as learning how to assess the safety of the environments they are working in and developing strategies to sustain identity. University partners do not collaborate in the programming delivery but are invited to provide input and insight through intentional shared leadership. Fellows described how this partnership between the university and the CBO enhanced their sense of belonging both within the TEP and in the profession more broadly. Multiple sources of information were collected and examined in order to develop an in-depth understanding of student experiences (Creswell, 2013). As such, student voice and storytelling are central values in the approach to sharing the results of this study (Creswell, 2013). To engage in this exploration of both K–12 and higher education institutions in the United States, this paper uses Delpit's (1988) definition of the dominant culture of power, which highlights both the implicit and explicit beliefs, values, codes, and rules that elevate some individuals and disadvantage others.

Theoretical Framework: Notions of Hospitality and Research Questions

A concept of a *sense* of belonging is ambiguous, because its very construction is subjective. Much is owed to the extensive body of research on identity, subjectivity, and what Ferguson (2008) describes as the particular "problem of assimilation" for oppressed groups in particular. This study acknowledges the broad research on identity but is anchored by the work of Derrida (2000) and many after him, who explore the notion of "hospitality." According to Derrida, a hospitable environment is free of hostility, one in which every person is treated as an ally. An individual can develop an identity and a sense of belonging, and indeed feel "at home" within such a space. Rather than a focus on how TEPs develop and nurture individual students' identities, I argue that a program can engender a sense of belonging through a new application of the notion of hospitality. The theoretical questions about the nature of hospitality in the classroom can be reframed for teacher education to consider the students' experience of hospitality at the program-level.

Reimagining Hospitality and Sense of Belonging

Most recently, Piquemal et al. (2019) built upon Levinas (1969) and Derrida (2000) to construct their own claims about hospitality and responsibility in the classroom. Their study envisioned the individual classroom instructor as the "host" and "giver of hospitality," and the student as the "guest." The researchers also considered Ruitenberg's (2011, 2018) arguments that explored how moments of incivility in the college classroom should be managed through critical reflection and awareness of the instructor's own social positioning in a system still predominantly shaped by dominant culture values. Piquemal et al. (2019) noted the authority associated with the host, the concept of the "stranger" in the classroom, and the sensitive pedagogical choices required within this responsibility. The authors claimed that as classroom "hosts," teachers must balance choosing when to challenge a student's point of view with keeping the classroom a safe space for all learners.

The present study will envision the whole program as the host and giver of hospitality rather than just a classroom or a single instructor (Piquemal et al., 2019) and will extend the metaphor to ask, "Who owns the home, and who is the stranger? How are you invited into the home (admissions)? How do you experience the home while inside it, and what opportunities do you have to survive within the home if it is inhospitable by structural design?" These questions further ground the argument that a more hospitable home for graduate students will lead to a deeper sense of belonging in the program.

Following are the more formal research questions to be answered through the data and findings in the study:

1. Which TEP program experiences and opportunities enhance or interrupt a teacher education student's sense of belonging before and during enrollment in the program?
2. How do racially and ethnically underrepresented students describe their experience in a TEP compared to their dominant culture peers?

Guiding Literature
Reimagining the Subject as well as the Host

Much of the research on the frameworks of hospitality in education is ultimately centered on the self; either the student is the subject or the host and giver of hospitality. These frameworks privilege ideals of the virtuous subject in education: the student who becomes a rational and autonomous individual through careful character development and modeling by instructors. For example, Rogers and Freiberg (1993) describe how a teacher's willingness to model authenticity, trustworthiness, and empathy promotes the student-subject's desire to learn. Ruitenberg (2011) examined the gaps in dominant ethical frameworks in education and proposed a framework anchored in Derrida's (2000) ethics of hospitality, one that envisioned a subject with more agency. She noted that while researchers like Noddings (2002) improved upon virtue ethics, their theories might strengthen the subjects but do not quite go far enough in empowering them. Ruitenberg (2011) distinguishes between virtues and attitudes that the host may employ, such as "being welcoming" or being "welcoming of Blackness" (p. 32), in a multicultural context. These beliefs or actions may empower the guest but do not push the host to remove conceptions of the roles of host and guest. Ruitenberg argued that this new approach to hospitality must accept that the guest may change the space into which they enter.

Doing the Work of Welcoming

For the purpose of this study it is important to develop an application for a whole teacher education program, and for possible actions by program leaders as hosts and givers of hospitality. Likewise, the program leaders must engage in philosophical discourse and program development that somehow imagines greater agency for the collective student.

One possibility for programs to engage in the work of welcoming is to provide a space for students to participate in affinity groups or cultural communities. A recent ethnographic case study (Pour-Khorshid, 2019) shows how a racial affinity group in one TEP grew organically out of a need to survive

the systems of Whiteness described earlier by Brown (2014) and developed into a community of healing that even supported the retention of its novice teachers of color. While this group was a grassroots, student-led group, another possibility for TEPs to engage in the work of welcoming is through deep investment in university-community partnerships. Ostensibly, local communities are the best positioned experts on their own K–12 students and their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). Recent research shows that effective, university-community partnerships can increase teacher candidates' access to culturally responsive and sustaining teaching practices (Guillen & Zeichner, 2018; Hong, 2019; Ishimaru, 2019; Lee, 2018). Though this has not been the focus of these studies, certainly, these partnerships could extend to the program's ability to welcome and sustain the teacher candidates themselves.

If universities can prioritize resources for building meaningful relationships with community partners, it could not only enhance the sense of belonging for graduate teacher candidates, but also encourage democratic accountability for the program as a whole (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018). This is of critical importance because of the university's tendency to reproduce hierarchical relationships rather than disrupt them (Guillen & Zeichner, 2018; Zeichner, 2018). In sum, the theoretical frameworks on hospitality in education can be radically reimagined when we consider a less linear and less university-centric approach.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

During the period of this study, I served as an administrator of the program being studied. It was critically important to bracket assumptions about and relationships with the participants, the data, and the results, not only for validity in the findings (Richards & Morse, 2007), but because the research questions anchor my core values as an educator. The research design provided natural opportunities for me to pause and engage in methodical reflection, so at times these will be described in the first person for transparency and authenticity.

This study employed an explanatory sequential design in two phases: quantitative ➝ qualitative (Biesta, 2012; Creswell, 2015) and was selected in order to develop a full picture of the graduate teacher education student experience. As seen in Table 1, the first phase included a quantitative survey with both closed- and open-ended questions, and the second, qualitative phase, included two focus groups that helped to explain the survey results in more depth (Creswell, 2015). While the study was always designed for sequential mixed method data collection, this approach became even more appropriate when the response rate for the survey was quite low, and the quantitative responses did not provide enough data to draw meaningful conclusions from the survey alone.

TABLE 1
Data collection and participation

Data Source	Date(s) of collection	Participants
Survey	February–March, 2019	45 graduates between 2017–2019
Focus group #1	June, 2019	Three alumni self-referred in survey
Focus group #2	March, 2020	Four current students of color

The survey in phase one (see Appendix A) included a 5 point Likert-scaled section as well as open comments for each question and general comments at the end. The survey was administered via Survey Monkey in February and March, 2019. The survey was sent to 271 graduates who completed a graduate teacher preparation program (certification plus Masters' in Education) within the past three years. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted prior to administration.

The items in the survey were designed to gather more data on the student experience in the program, rather than student perceptions about their preparation for classroom teaching, which are measured in program assessments. As such, a selection of closed questions with response alternatives were developed to promote valid and consistent responses (Fowler, 2013), while the open questions allowed respondents to enhance their answers in their own words. This survey was not piloted in advance; however, multiple steps were taken during

item development to reduce bias and enhance validity and reliability.

First, the initial items were drafted based upon a review of program handbooks and end-of-program assessments. Overall those data lacked the narrative power of the student experience, especially for underrepresented teacher candidates. The analysis of program materials informed the survey questions regarding particular program policies and perceptions of climate in the program; this analysis also offered the first opportunity to examine my bias as a researcher, as I was initially expecting and looking for particular responses based on my knowledge of the program. One way to mitigate this bias was to co-construct the items with other teacher educators not involved in the study. Accordingly, each item was evaluated and substantially revised in collaboration with two education faculty colleagues of color and further revised by the university's Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion prior to administration. Finally, each item was aligned to the school of education's conceptual framework and stated vision, mission and commitments, including an important link to hospitality (see Appendix A). Additional steps were taken during the item development to ensure consistent meaning for respondents (see Appendix A for these steps).

45 of 271 potential respondents participated, yielding a 16% response rate. 11 of 45 respondents identified as "underrepresented" and 34 selected "not underrepresented." While this low response rate certainly impacts the findings and limits generalizability, the open-ended responses in particular provided useful anchors for the first focus group of graduate student alumni. In addition, the participants for the first focus group self-referred in the survey. Table 1 summarizes the data collection and participants for each data collection point and also shows the purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013) developed for this study, which started broadly with a survey to all recent alumni, then volunteers in focus group one, and finally invited participants in focus group two. This sampling was a direct result of inquiry and analysis as this sequential study evolved.

The first focus group of three graduates was conducted in

the summer of 2019 on the university campus. Of the three participants, two identified as a racial/ethnic or linguistic minority, and one as white. The participants ranged in age from 28 to 45 and included one male and two females. The session lasted for 65 minutes and followed focus group protocols outlined by Creswell (2013) and shown in Appendix B.

Questions for the first focus group (see Appendix B) were developed from analysis of the survey in addition to end of program assessment data. Data from both the survey and the first focus group surfaced questions and concerns regarding structural programmatic supports for racially and ethnically underrepresented students. As such, a second focus group was organized to develop a deeper understanding of the student experience in the existing partnership with the community-based organization (CBO) described in the introduction. The second focus group was comprised solely of current Fellows and was conducted in March of 2020 at the university. This group was recorded for 28 minutes.

Questions for the second focus group were drawn from analysis of the first, as well as the researcher's knowledge and interest in the Fellowship partner program. Specific participant racial and ethnic identities are not discussed here to protect participant confidentiality and all names have been changed. Participants of both focus groups represented a range of teaching content areas and grade levels, including elementary and secondary science, math, and humanities teachers.

Both focus group recordings were converted to transcripts using Temi software. Both descriptive and topic coding were conducted separately for each transcript, while the codes were combined in order to develop resulting overall themes for the study (Creswell, 2015; Richards & Morse, 2007). This will be further discussed in the results.

Integration of Data and Triangulation of Methods

As previously described, the questions for the two focus groups were drawn in large part from the analysis of the survey conducted in phase one. This was a natural point for the integration of data in this mixed methods study. Creswell's (2015)

claim that integration is the moment in the study where one thing "dissolves into the other" (p. 82) is aptly applied here, as the survey provided valuable data that informed the questions for the focus groups. In a sense, the quantitative findings from the survey "dissolved into" and were animated by the narrative power of the qualitative focus groups.

Additionally, the inclusion of multiple discrete forms and points of data collection in Table 1 allowed me to triangulate the information that contributed to the overall themes, and each point of data collection allowed an opportunity to bracket assumptions that may have impacted the analysis. The research and analysis of program documents during item development, the survey itself, and data from two focus groups provided varied sources for evidence regarding how students perceived and described their sense of belonging in the program. This triangulation of data sources and research methods (Creswell, 2013) helped to develop a framework for how TEP programs can enhance hospitality and sense of belonging, as well as to broaden the description of the importance of community partnerships.

Results

Together, perceptions reported by graduate and current student participants of varied gender, age, racial, and ethnic identity and across K–12 disciplines identified both effective and problematic values, policies, behaviors, and structures present in the graduate TEP program. All of the data helped illuminate the degree to which the university as host and giver of hospitality (Piquemal et al., 2019) promoted or inhibited a welcoming and hospitable environment that cultivates a sense of belonging for teacher candidates (TCs). The results will be reported sequentially per the research design.

Hospitable for Some, Not for All

The results in phase one are reported primarily to describe their role in enhancing and improving the research questions and to triangulate the research methods and strengthen data collection in phase two. This is necessary given the low

response rate and the fact that the participant demographics did not match the desired demographics for the study. Further, the data itself provided incomplete and conflicting insights. For this reason, the survey questions seen in Appendix A are not a direct match to the research questions, which evolved after survey analysis. Descriptive statistics were gathered for each item and included a mean, median, and mode as well as frequency and percentage. Responses were disaggregated into two groups based on self-identified membership in an underrepresented group and non-identification in an underrepresented group (see Appendix A for demographic selection options). Although each question clearly stated the directions for completion based on demographic self-identification, participant responses were uneven and inconsistent. Some participants seemed to skip questions randomly, which skewed results and limited statistical power. Nonetheless, in an effort to gather group comparison data, a two-sample t-test was run for questions that all respondents replied to. No statistical significance was found.

Two respondents reported microaggressions by faculty and three reported microaggressions from peers, but eight respondents responded to this prompt in the survey: "Please consider describing one or more event that you experienced or observed (without naming names). Concrete examples within the SOE will help us learn and improve." These eight responses varied from, "I was lucky. I didn't experience any microaggressions" to, "In class, people (colleagues and professors alike) would look to me to speak from the perspective of people of color as if I should 'speak on behalf of all people of color,'" and also, "One student in particular made multiple disparaging statements during a course taught by a minority professor. I felt compelled to address these indiscretions several times in a polite manner to correct misconceptions even though I appreciated hearing his perspective." The disparity in these results and the obvious difference in student experiences compelled further review. It could be that students who had graduated from the program several years earlier were not motivated to provide answers for every question and focused only on items of the most interest to them. Nonetheless, the inconsistent survey data helped to

directly shape the questions developed for each focus group (see Appendix B).

Both focus groups revealed several positive patterns for the program leadership, including reported satisfaction with communication about equitable policies and response to feedback. Students reported an overall sense of appreciation for faculty who worked to model equitable teaching pedagogy. While the survey provided an opportunity for alumni to report on many forms of underrepresentation, the self-referred participants for group one were most interested in describing their observations or experiences regarding race/ethnicity. As such, the following themes emerged. They are reported together, though the specific group is indicated for context. The emphasis on student voice demands inclusion of direct quotes from participants in various stages of the study (see Table 1). A summary of the themes with corresponding data source and research questions is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Summary of themes from all data sources and alignment with research question

Theme	Data Source	Research Question
Theme One: The application and interview process centered dominant culture knowledge and skills that sometimes carried into the classroom	Survey, Focus groups 1, 2	1
Theme Two: Students experienced or observed exclusionary grouping during the program	Focus groups 1, 2	2
Theme Three: Student teachers of color working in predominantly white spaces need a place to process identity	Focus group 2	1, 2
Theme Four: Learning the rules of the profession may need particular scaffolding and coaching for teacher candidates of color	Focus group 2	2

The themes were developed using both topic and analytic coding methods (Richards & Morse, 2007). Analysis of the transcript from the first focus group produced twelve topical codes. The most frequently occurring codes related to positive

or negative experiences with program and/or classmate communication, culture, and climate. As previously noted, this analysis informed both the sampling and the question development for the second focus group. After the second group, topic coding was repeated and became more analytic (Richards & Morse, 2007) as the thematic categories emerged. For example, it became clear that some of the initial data from the survey and first focus group showed idiosyncratic experiences for particular students that did not appear to be generalized. The analysis of the most frequently occurring codes shaped the final describable themes and represents broad discovery regarding graduate student experiences.

Theme One. The Application and Interview Process Centered Dominant Culture Knowledge and Skills that Sometimes Carried into the Classroom

In the first focus group, participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences with the admissions process. For context, the admissions process at the time included application review and an interview day, comprised of a group interview with five to eight candidates and a "Seven minute mini-lesson" designed to hear how candidates communicate and engage a group of "learners." Several participants noted that the day favored extroverts, while Morgan, the only woman of color in the group, shared a particular version of this dynamic:

> [For a person of color] entering into spaces where you have discussion can be difficult because of the layers and levels of power in the room… It's like the people cooking up the admissions process are all dominant culture, you know, kind of extrovert people-person, thinking, "Oh, we just want to see how these people perform in this setting and kind of what ideas they have," and it, it feels much lower stakes [to them]. (Please see the full text of Morgan's profound comments in Appendix C).

The participants were asked to reflect upon discussion norms while in the program, and whether or not they felt that they had an entry point for being heard and a place to hear other

perspectives. One (dominant culture) participant, Aly, noted that her smaller disciplinary cohort had four students who tended to dominate discussion, but the instructors paid attention and invited diverse perspectives. "I think it had to do with people being aware of themselves, but we became aware of ourselves because of our instructors, kind of making us aware of ourselves." Conversely, participants in group two described weighing the benefits or costs of pushing back on their peers in class. Raya noted, "I felt like it was going to make my classmates so uncomfortable for me to push back that I just let it be and I didn't, you know?"

Theme Two. Students Experienced or Observed Exclusionary Grouping During the Program

Another theme that emerged from group one was the perceived exclusionary grouping that developed somewhat organically in the program when unchecked. Morgan noted an "inner circle" in her cohort that she was not part of, while Daniel noted that he was excluded from program events due to childcare, which caused coursework registration challenges that persisted during the program (see Appendix C for these comments). Aly seemed to realize one of the exclusionary realities as she talked, which was the unintended discrimination of older students by their peers in the program. Aly processed this out loud,

> I think if I remember it too, that person was older, and they didn't come to as many of our social events....And it was someone who wasn't really a part of the group. And I don't know if maybe they weren't a part of the group because they didn't identify as being a part of the group. Right. Yeah. Cause they're much older and they weren't, they were not a young white female.

Morgan and Daniel relayed similar reflections of their cohorts (all three were different) with Morgan finally exclaiming, "Not having childcare for students in this program is a microaggression." As the focus group progressed, it became clear that students with children, older students (possibly also parents) and students of color were all perceived as outsiders in some way.

The experiences and observations of Morgan, Aly and Daniel prompted a more in-depth exploration of supports and structures in place for current students who identify as racial or ethnic minorities. As previously noted, one of the primary structural supports for students of color was a partnership program with an external organization that supports teacher candidates of color. The invitation for current students to participate and offer feedback on their experiences was accepted by four of six current Fellows: Raya, Mina, Marcus, and Lee. Their racial and ethnic identities are not shared to protect their confidentiality. The focus group session was shorter and focused only on observations and experiences in the Fellowship, however the conversation illuminated two key themes with relevance for all teacher candidates of color.

Theme Three. Student Teachers of Color Working in Predominantly White Spaces Need a Place to Process Identity

Each Fellow described moving through their internship in a predominantly white profession as a person of color. However, two Fellows noted the ways that the fellowship helped shape their new teacher identity, particularly through discussion and collaboration with other Fellows. Raya shared:

> I'm more aware of my low confidence in being in spaces, and the Fellowship allows me to reflect on reasons why. [It also shows why] it's important for POCs to be in classrooms and for students to see themselves as possible teachers and or even people doing this sort of work. So it empowers me in that way, especially when I'm feeling like [I should go back] to making a living as a barista. I feel like there is a sense of like, there's worth in the work that we're doing. It allows for me to just walk into these spaces a little bit more comfortable and to understand why I felt uncomfortable to begin with. I feel like a lot of times there isn't a language that we learned while growing up and as we enter adulthood. Like, there isn't anybody really saying you're going to feel uncomfortable for these reasons, but you do end

up feeling like that. I personally always felt, not always, like some days I was just like, why am I hesitating to do this? Why? You know? So I feel like that space has allowed for me to just kind of explore and be able to then explain it to my own children who may or may not have those experiences.

Lee noted:

I was talking to another Fellow, [who has] like me never even thought about microaggressions until he was in the Fellowship. Like I'm just thinking maybe I just have thick skin, I just ignore things, what not. But like I realized that some of the things in life were maybe some of the things that I did experience. Also microaggressions [I've done] towards other people.

Theme Four. Learning the Rules of the Profession May Need Particular Scaffolding and Coaching for Teacher Candidates of Color

Related to the theme of creating a space for exploration of identity and experiences in white spaces is the reality that teacher candidates of color may also need differentiated coaching and support to learn and cope with the "rules" of the profession. Said Raya:

The Fellowship definitely gives us ways to ask questions instead of being super direct where people might be offended or a little bit more sensitive. I personally feel like as a first-generation person working in a white collar job, I didn't take a course or didn't learn from anybody on how to ask these questions. For example, even to ask a [a colleague, a boss, a presenter] can you clarify this for me? I heard you say this and this is how I interpreted it (see Appendix C for full text).

Further illuminating this theme, Marcus described the difficulty of moving between professional spaces:

For me, I think when we go into seminars [for the Fellowship] and whatnot, it's like we're there, we have that experience. But then to translate that into my school where I work at, it's very hard for me to do that

cause it's like the space totally changes. I think there
needs to be some kind of help in transitioning.

Discussion and Implications for TEPs

The research questions in this study sought to answer what
kinds of program experiences will enhance or interrupt a
TEP student's sense of belonging, and how racially and ethni-
cally underrepresented students describe their experiences in
particular. These questions can be answered together through
the lens of student experiences with hospitality. As the only
person of color to speak about the admissions process (Theme
One), Morgan's voice represents an objective truth about the
design of the interview day: it privileges applicants who walk
into a room where most people look like them. The doubt and
lack of confidence that Morgan described is echoed in some of
Raya's stories about her transition to teaching and an environ-
ment that no one prepared her for. These stories demonstrated
an overall inhospitable "home" in the program, which is a
structural problem that administrators must tend to. Certainly,
there are opportunities to put candidates at ease and manage
"talk time" much like Aly notes that her professors did in class.
Pedagogical choices that classroom instructors make can also
be used more deliberately on interview day, such as establishing
discussion norms, training interviewers to check personal bias,
and auditing the interview performance criteria and evaluation
process. As noted by Ruitenberg (2011), strategies like these
will convey a sense of welcome to the guests and will hopefully
prevent interviewers and program leaders from inadvertently
making applicants the "stranger." Another striking opportunity
to reimagine the ethics of hospitality for teacher education is to
consider how the program/host can (and should) be aware of
its indebtedness to the guest. This must be especially true for
programs run by dominant culture administrators who are pre-
paring underrepresented teachers for service in diverse school
settings. According to Ruitenberg's (2011) reading of Derrida,
hospitality must be offered unconditionally and with awareness
of indebtedness to the guest (p. 31). Indeed, this theory must be
carefully explored so that programs do not inadvertently ask

more of its underrepresented graduate students.

The results articulated in Themes Three and Four show evidence of problematic exclusionary grouping in the TEP but also that programs *should* provide a separate space for Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) students; these contradictions must be explored. Admittedly, students in a professional teaching program will not have the same needs around community. As O'Meara et al. (2017) found, all graduate students feel a sense of belonging when both their peers and faculty members care about them and they feel valued by the greater community. The stories from each focus group demonstrate that the problem isn't necessarily grouping, but rather a particular exclusionary grouping that isolates or diminishes the student experience.

In group one, Aly and Morgan both described social events that older students or students with children seem to be excluded from, while Daniel and Morgan identified the barriers related to lack of childcare for even basic program participation. While it might be challenging for a program to offer childcare for all of its events, it could be accomplished for some, or events could be offered in multiple modalities so that no one is excluded. Similarly, programs can consider affinity groups for students who are parents and train faculty to practice equitable community building and ensure that certain groups (such as parents) are not isolated from developing relationships with their peers. Aly noted the benefit to social belonging for career support beyond the program, and this cannot be underestimated for persistence in the profession.

The findings show that for some students, establishing opportunities for safe and separate spaces will promote a sense of belonging both during the program and in the profession more broadly. The teacher candidates of color in the second focus group describe what can happen in these spaces through experiences with professional scaffolding and coaching. It is clear that Raya, Mina, Marcus, and Lee all benefited from a separate, sacred place to process their experiences in the program and in their internship sites. As the only participant of color who was not a Fellow, Morgan (from group one) did not

have this support, and her experience suffered. She felt isolated from admissions day throughout the entire program, noticing the social ease that others felt. She recommended affinity groups for everyone not able to participate in the structured Fellowship.

The biggest surprise in the analytic coding and theming process was finding that the Fellows did not name specific strategies, research, resources, or even mentorship that the external program offers; what they named was what I will call *the sacred space to be themselves*. This space allowed Fellows to ask questions, to process experiences such as Raya's stories about professional development (PD) in her school, or Lee's new awareness of his experiences with microaggressions. The Fellowship provides structure and scaffolding into the profession, allowing participants to "learn the rules" outside of the white institution. When asked whether or not they would recommend that Fellows have more of a leadership role back on campus, the resounding answer was "No." They need it for themselves, and they want it to be sacred and separate. This raises the question about how to recruit Fellows without targeting them or asking more of them. There is clear evidence that the university cannot, and should not, attempt to meet graduate student needs in an institutional vacuum. TEP programs must invest in community partnerships not only because of the good work that many CBOs are doing, but also for accountability in what should be the shared work of teacher education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018; Zeichner, 2021).

That said, I would like to explore this concept of community partnership a bit further here. What I have learned, and what really challenged my thinking as a researcher, is that the power of the community partner is their knowledge of our students and their needs, and their capacity to serve them *outside* of the institution. The CBO in this study has the staff and the community and cultural resources to deliver vital professional development content for its Fellows. The BIPOC staff experienced schools in a way that many white TEP leaders have not. Further, the CBO partners with teacher preparation programs and school districts across the state and are able to assess the

needs and realities that the Fellows will enter into upon graduation. A single TEP cannot do this.

This study shows that the students are best served by the deep relational work and trust that must be developed between the TEP and the CBO. This shared commitment to developing a professional sense of belonging will ensure that our teacher candidates are equipped to flourish and persist in K–12 schools for the long haul. As Guillen and Zeichner (2018) argue, this model and orientation towards partnership is the best way for TEP programs to be relevant—to disrupt negative experiences for both the CBO staff and the TEP students and to replace them with positive ones. This model has the opportunity to extend the concept of hospitality and sense of belonging even further, to include what "belonging" can look like for the teacher candidates, the TEP program staff, and the community members as well. Further study would only strengthen the layers in our understanding of what it means to truly belong.

Limitations and Conclusions

The findings in this study will not be particularly surprising for those who have consumed research on urban teacher education, diversity in education, representation in teacher education, and many more similar and broad topics (i.e., Banks, 1993; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). We know that assimilation has historically been expected for people of color in higher education (Brown, 2004; Callan, 2005) and that this impacts identity and self-concept for new teachers.

This study included the voices of 45 alumni (phase one survey and focus group one) and four current students (focus group 2) in an effort to gather thick description (Creswell, 2015) of student perceptions and sense of belonging in one TEP. The resulting study cannot draw generalized conclusions or claims and may have limitations due to the idiosyncrasies of the program studied and particular biases of the researcher. The themes and assertions provide a narrative picture of one TEP and contribute to the body of research on graduate students' sense of belonging in teacher education programs.

Every program might not have access to a partnership as

rich as the Fellowship described in this study. However, all programs can examine their approach to hospitality, and how their policies, student experiences and programmatic supports would indeed promote equity in these learning "homes." Further, all TEP programs are situated in a community and can imagine the kinds of partnerships that might help them to replace the old models with a new vision of hospitality and belonging. For now, listen to the stories of Morgan, Aly, Daniel, Raya, Mina, Marcus, and Lee. Good teachers know that they learn more from their students than they teach. Here is what I learned from Lee:

> I joined because it was important for me to understand or at least try to understand. I don't speak much in the fellowship, I just try to soak it in, see what people are experiencing. Cause I have no idea what it's like to be in your shoes and even if you are from the same culturally backgrounded place, we're not the same human beings.

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Prior to transitioning to academia in 2004, Dr. Heiney-Smith taught language arts in rural Vermont and urban Seattle. She has held various administrative roles at the University of Washington and Seattle Pacific University (SPU) and has chaired the graduate teacher education program at SPU since 2018. Dr. Heiney-Smith's scholarly agenda addresses the gap in research on supporting pre-service K–12 mentor teachers, and her current research examines the university's responsibility in making mentors feel valued and supported in their important roles as clinical teacher educators.

Appendix A: Survey

Definitions for terms used in the questions were hyperlinked throughout the survey (shown below). For example, participants were asked to indicate experiences with (or observation of) microaggressions by faculty, staff or peers while in the program, to reflect upon their experiences or observations of curriculum and policies, and whether or not the faculty helped them to develop their own ethnic identity. Participation was anonymous and participants were asked to self-select from a list of underrepresented groups also defined through hyperlinks in the survey (see the survey below). *Editors' note: Hyperlinks are shown in brackets as URLs, for this publication, p.28, sections 1–3.*

Items aligned to the school's conceptual framework (revised for anonymity):

We strive to enhance opportunities for all, especially for those who have traditionally been underserved by and underrepresented in the institutions of our society. We commit to supporting students by fostering a hospitable climate and a diverse community that seeks the reconciling of all people

Survey (sent to graduates within three years of completion, see Table 1)

The [university] collects end-of-program and completer survey data in order to gather our graduates' perceptions regarding their preparation as new teachers to the profession. You may recall questions regarding your perceived preparation for skills like classroom management, designing assessments, and creating curriculum before you exited our program. While we ask our students to report perceived skills supporting P-12 students from diverse backgrounds, we do not have a full picture of our students' own experiences throughout the program. *Please take a moment to provide us with this valuable opportunity to listen. This survey is anonymous.*

Please note, the intent of this survey is not to target particular faculty or staff, but to get feedback on the teacher credentialing program. We ask that you not name names. If you would like to participate in a focus-group for deeper conversation, please provide your contact information at the end of the survey.

1) I identify as an individual from an ***under-represented*** [*https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf*] and/or under-served group.

   I do not identify as an individual from an under-represented and/or under-served group, but I would like to give feedback about my observations and/or experiences (skip to #4).

2) Please select any groups that apply:
   Dropdown:
   Racial/ethnic minority
   Sexual orientation minority
   Gender expression minority
   Religious minority (could be described as any faith practiced by less than 50% of the United States population, according to statistics ***here***: [*www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/*]
   Socio-economic status (your family of origin, as defined by the ***US Census Bureau*** [*https://www.census.gov/en.html*])
   English language learner
   Citizen of another country
   Physical disability
   Learning disorder
   Mental health or other disabilities

3) While a graduate student in the SOE, I experienced ***micro-aggressions*** [*https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/microaggression*] (select one or more-do not select if not applicable)
   Dropdown:
   By my professors
   By my peers
   By staff
   (open response comment box)
   Please consider describing one or more event that you experienced or observed (without naming names).

Concrete examples within the SOE will help us learn and improve.

4) While a graduate student in the SOE, I experienced a safe and respectful learning environment
(Likert scale-never, rarely, sometimes, somewhat often, often)

5) While a graduate student in the SOE, I saw myself reflected in the curriculum, including course materials and discourse
(Choosing "rarely" or "sometimes" would indicate select courses and faculty. Choosing "somewhat often" or "often" would indicate systemic issues.)
(Likert scale-never, rarely, sometimes, somewhat often, often)

6) While a graduate student in the SOE, I was made aware of policies and procedures designed for developing an equitable learning community
(Likert scale-never, rarely, sometimes, somewhat often, often)

7) While a graduate student in the SOE, I experienced or observed efforts by faculty to support our diverse students in forming a stronger ethnic identity
(Likert scale-never, rarely, sometimes, somewhat often, often)

8) Optional-provide narrative comments regarding any of your choices above.
(Open response comment box)

9) Please let us know if you are willing to participate in a focus group to discuss these topics further. You may either provide your email address here, or email the chair if you would prefer to keep your survey response anonymous.
(Open response comment box)

Survey Results

Demographic results (Questions 1 and 2)

Participants in the survey were invited to select from the following list of "underrepresented" groups. Parentheses indicate the numbers selected, however there was not statistically significant nor narrative data sufficient to draw any conclusions. Additionally, no self-identified individuals other than racial/ethnic minorities volunteered for the first focus group.

Racial/ethnic minority (7)

Sexual orientation minority (5)

Gender expression minority (4)

Religious minority (could be described as any faith practiced by less than 50% of the United States population, according to statistics (9)

English language learner (0)

Citizen of another country (0)

Physical disability (1)

Learning disability (5)

Mental health or other disabilities (3)

Question 3

While a graduate student in the SOE, I experienced micro-aggressions (select one or more-do not select if not applicable)

By my professors	15.38%	2
By my peers	23.08%	3
By staff	0.00%	0
Open comments	61.54%	8
Answered		13
Skipped		32

Question 4

While a graduate student in the SOE, I experienced a safe and respectful learning environment

Never	0.00%	0
Rarely	0.00%	0
Sometimes	6.67%	3

Somewhat often	11.11%	5
Often	82.22%	37
Answered		45
Skipped		0

Question 5
While a graduate student in the SOE, I saw myself reflected in the curriculum, including course materials and discourse (Choosing "rarely" or "sometimes" would indicate select courses and faculty. Choosing "somewhat often" or "often" would indicate systemic issues.)

Never	2.22%	1
Rarely	15.56%	7
Sometimes	22.22%	10
Somewhat often	22.22%	10
Often	37.7%	17
Answered		45
Skipped		0

Question 6
While a graduate student in the SOE, I was made aware of policies and procedures designed for developing an equitable learning community

Never	4.44%	2
Rarely	8.89%	4
Sometimes	13.33%	6
Somewhat often	26.6%	12
Often	46.67%	21
Answered		45
Skipped		0

Question 7
While a graduate student in the SOE, I experienced or observed efforts by faculty to support our diverse students in forming a stronger ethnic identity

Never	8.89%	4
Rarely	15.56%	7
Sometimes	20.00%	9

Heiney-Smith

Somewhat often	24.44%	11
Often	31.11%	14
Answered		45
Skipped		0

Question 8
Optional-provide narrative comments regarding any of your choices above.
(Open response comment box)

Answered	9
Skipped	36

Appendix B: Focus Group

Focus group participants agreed to being recorded on the researcher's voice memo application and to participation in the study via signed IRB. Focus group protocols were guided by Creswell's (2013) assertion that a carefully managed focus group avoids overly simplistic conclusions about what the participations "felt." Both the context of the study and the questions for discussion (below) were provided in print to each participant in both focus groups. The researcher established norms for equitable discussion and encouraged a conversational tone.

Focus Group #1
Agenda
Welcome, and thank you for coming!
Purpose of the focus group:
Recent reflection upon potential areas for improvement in the teacher education program revealed a need to collect more feedback from students about their experiences in our program. While we have a lot of data about how well we prepare our students to teach in diverse settings and/or to diverse students, we have very little data on how we ourselves support our students who identify as underrepresented or underserved in some way.

This group was convened in order to help us interpret and further the findings of the initial survey that was administered in the spring.

Summary of background and initial findings:
Your participation today is welcome regardless of how you identify with any group membership.

Consent Forms
Participant Demographics:
Years since graduation from program _____
Age: _____
Gender M/F or other, please note: _____
Race/ethnicity _____

*If you would like to note membership in an underrepresented or underserved group as described above, please do so below on the reverse

Norms for Discussion
Questions:
Your participation today is welcome regardless of how you identify with any group membership. Our goal is to hear the lived experiences and observations regarding the topics we will discuss today.

For any of these questions, you may speak from your lived or observed experiences, however it will be helpful for interpretation if you feel comfortable describing your role. This is entirely optional.

1. How would you describe your overall experience in applying to the program when considering marketing materials and language, the application process, images on the website and brochures, etc.?
2. What was your experience of the curriculum and materials used in the program? Did you see yourself represented? If yes, how? If no, how?
3. Describe your experiences with course discourse and discussion norms during your time in the SOE graduate program. Did you see yourself represented in discourse norms? How would you describe your opportunities to participate in discussion? What did you observe when considering your peers?
4. Describe your experience of the learning environment. What kinds of policies, programs or initiatives were or were not in place to support students?
5. While you were a student, did you experience or witness one or more microaggressions? Please explain.
6. What were the greatest overall strengths of your program experience?
7. What were the greatest overall opportunities of your program? What general feedback would you like to communicate for program improvement?

Focus Group #2
Agenda
Welcome, and thank you for coming!
Purpose of the focus group:

Recent reflection upon potential areas for improvement in the teacher education program revealed a need to collect more feedback from students about their experiences in our program. While we have a lot of data about how well we prepare our students to teach in diverse settings and/or to diverse students, we have very little data on how we ourselves support our students who identify as underrepresented or underserved in some way.

This group was convened after a previous focus group revealed questions and concerns regarding program supports for students of color.

Summary of background and initial findings
Consent Forms
Norms for Discussion
Questions:

What general comments do you have about the XX Fellowship and XXU's collaboration with XX?

How has the PD been for you? How has it enhanced your experiences in internship?

In what ways could be better incorporate what you are learning and experiencing into the program without adding more to your plate?

Data from previous surveys and focus groups suggests that we certainly have work to do in developing a safe and inclusive learning environment. Some comments suggested that microaggressions were most common from peer-peer and that the majority white demographic is one of the main reasons. If you feel comfortable, please share your thoughts on this (personal experiences or observations).

We are about to admit a new group of students and want to do a better job recruiting Fellows. In your experience, how can we do that better? How can we encourage more candidates to apply?

Appendix C

From Theme One, Morgan's full text (see p. 15):

[For a person of color] entering into spaces where you have discussion can be difficult because of the layers and levels of power in the room... it's very much anxiety inducing for me to enter into that space because I am constantly hyper aware of is he gonna talk first, is she going to talk next? I don't want to talk over someone else. I don't want to take up space so that somebody else doesn't have space. So it was hard. It was challenging. I remember that being like one of the hardest things that first day like for that, for like the [admissions] interview process, when we were having to do that interview group. I remember I had to go into those interviews and give myself a pump-up speech. Like in my head what you have to say is valuable, just go in there...it's like the people cooking up the admissions process are all dominant culture, you know, kind of extrovert people person, thinking, oh, we just want to see how these people perform in this setting and kind of what ideas they have and it, it feels much lower stakes [to them]. Right? Yeah.

From Theme Two, full text referenced on p. 15:
Morgan:

> I think there were 13 of us [in my cohort] maybe and we took a lot of the same classes throughout the two years in our program and there was definitely that inner circle, these six girls who all hung out together and were best friends and on group texts, and never once did I hang out with them.

Daniel:

> I missed the orientation cause I didn't have childcare and I had my children that night and couldn't make it. And if perhaps somebody there had [advised my registration] none of [my problems with missing a course] would have happened.

Theme Four, full text from Raya, p. 17:

> In schools, I see a lot of annoyed eye rolls. Like whenever we're doing PDs about equity and justice. There's somebody in my building who will say things like, do

we hire white people anymore? The Fellowship, [helps interpret these situations] to see it wasn't intended this way, but it was the impact that it had on you when somebody said something. They are very transparent about the imperfect world we're working in. I personally oftentimes feel like not the greatest because I'm not an expert in my field yet. So it's safe space to be heard, or like play off as a sounding board.