Journey to Becoming a Teacher:

INTRODUCTION

According to the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (1996), there are currently more than 50 million students in K-12 schools in the United States, a number which is projected to increase to 55 million by 2008. Along with the influx of students has come an increase in the diversity of the student population (Futrell, 1999), where currently one in every three students is of an ethnic

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or racial background other than European American (Futrell, 1999; Rettig & Khodavandi, 1998; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). As Villegas and Lucas (2002) have noted, one in seven of these children lives in a home where English is not spoken, and one third of whom have been identified as being of limited English proficiency.

In contrast to the increased diversity of students, the population of teachers is becoming more homogenous; that is to say, with each passing year there are fewer teachers of color to represent the diverse group of students in today's schools (Cooper, 2003; Futrell, 1999; Su, 1996). In fact, just over ten percent of teachers come from racially or ethnically diverse groups (Eubanks, 1996).

The problem does not stop, however,

with numbers. Those college graduates entering the teaching force, regardless of race or ethnicity, are not sufficiently prepared to teach ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2002). Teacher education programs have attempted to resolve the problem by adding only one course in multicultural education, or worse, by simply adding a multicultural education component to a pre-existing course (Goodwin, 1997). This change in curriculum is a step in the right direction, but it is not adequate (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Some have argued that the shortage of teachers of color isn't necessarily bad, because there is an indication that many students of color are becoming professionals within the community, choosing to become doctors, lawyers, etc. (Banks, 1989).

The Experiences of Students of Color

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This is certainly a positive step in the overall picture, but this also means that the teaching profession is missing out on these bright and diligent individuals.

What is more, scholars in the field of teacher education (Darling Hammond, 1990; Dillard, 1994; Gay, 2000; Haberman, 1988; King, 1993) have argued that it is imperative that schools have a "culturally informed and a culturally diverse teaching population" (Su, 1996, p. 117), which can only be accomplished by employing teachers of color. Montecinos (1994) cautions, however, that research does not conclusively indicate whether the diversification of the teaching force, in and of itself, truly has the impact that is claimed. While there is no doubt that diversification is im-

portant, Montecinos (1994) maintains that this is only part of the solution. As she argues, regardless of the race or ethnicity of the teachers, it is crucial that teacher education programs prepare all teachers for the multicultural classroom. It is unfair to assume that just because one is of a diverse cultural background, one will know how to transfer this experience into meaningful pedagogical experiences in the classroom. It is, therefore, crucial that teacher education programs prepare *all* teachers to teach *all* students.

WHY ARE THERE SO FEW TEACHERS OF COLOR?

As discussed above, despite the obvi-

ous need for teachers of color, their number continues to decline. It is argued that students of color lack role models because there are few teachers of color; consequently, when making a decision about what to study in college, students do not consider teaching as a viable career (Rettig & Khodavandi, 1998). What is more, when students see what the teaching profession entails (i.e., lower salaries and poor working conditions, as well as current demands made on teachers), they consider other professions where the conditions are better.

Claycomb and Hawley (2000) note that the cost of going to college and becoming a teacher often outweighs the benefits of teaching. They continue to argue that students can choose other careers that are

more lucrative when they compare the salary of being a teacher to the salary of other jobs. There are also a considerable number of students who complete teacher education programs but then do not actually teach, at least in the first year upon graduation. Ginsberg et al. (1987) proposed several additional factors which play a role in the negative view that students have of the teaching profession, including the control that administration and government have over schools and teaching, and increased violence and crime on school property. Many of these concerns are not unique to students and teachers of color, but are at the forefront of the minds of many teachers and preservice teachers regardless of their race or ethnicity.

A concern that addresses the particular issue of students of color lies in the fact that they do not receive the same education as their White counterparts; students of color find their educational experience to be deficient in several ways (Gordon, 1994). A study conducted by Su (1996) reports that parents of all students, regardless of racial/ethnic background, have high expectations for the success of their children in school. Unfortunately, as Rettig and Khodavandi (1998) argue, students of color are often tracked into lower-level courses while White students have a much greater chance of being tracked into higher-level classes. Students placed in the lower tracks are often not challenged academically and it is assumed that they will go directly from high school to work in low-level jobs. What is more, teachers of students in lower tracks often expect less of them and provide them with instruction of a lower quality. As a result of being placed in non-college-preparatory courses, these students are not informed of the requirements for college admission (Siddens, et al., 1997).

It is also no secret that urban schools are often more diverse in student population than schools in suburbs or rural communities; it is estimated that 75% of the students of color and 40% of the students who are English Language Learners attend school in an urban setting (Claycomb & Hawley, 2000). In light of these figures, urban schools have a great need for qualified teachers. Sadly, however, Eubanks (1996) has identified urban schools as having the greatest difficulty in finding qualified teachers. In fact, there is only a 50% chance for students in an urban school to be taught by a licensed teacher, especially in science and math (Eubanks, 1996). Instead, many of the people employed to "teach" in the urban setting are not even certified (Claycomb & Hawley, 2000).

Students of color are also often at a disadvantage when it comes to the curriculum that is selected and the manner in which it is delivered. The curriculum is often "euro-centric" (Su, 1996) and does not take into consideration the cultural and educational backgrounds of the students who are not of European descent or who are not familiar with the American style of student-centered teaching. Students of color often find the curriculum less inclusive (Wilson & Justiz, 1988). Rettig and Khodavandi (1998) contend that this is largely due to the lack of teachers of color who, if present, might have the knowledge of and sensitivity to the needs of students of color to ensure that a more appropriate curriculum be employed.

These negative educational experiences result in detrimental effects on students of color as a whole, but also play a role in their decision to avoid teaching as a career. One such result is that students who feel disconnected from the curriculum often drop out of school (Daughtry, 1989), reducing the number of possible candidates who even go to college. Another issue is that because of the inequality of education, students of color are at a much greater risk of not meeting the high college entrance standards required for admission into many colleges and universities (Rettig & Khodavandi, 1998). This also reduces the number of possible candidates to enter college and to choose teaching as a career. Part of the problem is that colleges place too much emphasis on the standardized tests that are part of the of the admission process (Wilson & Justiz, 1988). What is more, studies indicate that standardized tests used for the certification of teacher education candidates are largely culturally biased (Nicklos & Brown, 1989).

Financial support is also a concern for many students of color (Vanden Brook, 1993). The lack of money often prevents one from going to college, regardless of the major. Many participants in Vanden Brook's study expressed their concern of obtaining sufficient funding to complete their program and become teachers.

Even if students pass through all of the above hurdles and are admitted into a teacher education program, they often face yet other obstacles before becoming a teacher. Zapata (1988) and Linton (1991) have identified several of the concerns of college students of color. One such concern is that they fear being rejected by "mainstream" students, faculty, and administration. Also, university bureaucracy is often a foreign concept to many students of color as they have had little experience in dealing with such procedures. Su (1996) reports the experiences of several students of color who found that White students dominated the classes, monopolizing the discussion time. What is more, professors often failed to encourage the students of color to contribute to class or blatantly rejected their contributions.

Sheets and Chew (2002) also noted that teacher education courses are dominated by White students and that the curriculum also caters to the mainstream student. There is also the concern of racial tension on campuses across North America (Rettig & Khodavandi, 1998). These problems either discourage students of color from even entering college, or they contribute to their attrition rate.

The shortage of teachers is not limited to those of color. In fact there is a similar concern with recruiting teachers in general and then keeping them beyond the first couple of years. While there is a concern of attrition among all new teachers, the rate is nearly double among teachers of color (Nicklos & Brown, 1989).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This issue is of particular concern for various reasons. First, it is important that all students have opportunities to succeed academically. However, as Rettig & Khodavandi (1998) point out, students of color are grossly identified as at-risk and dropouts, resulting in their over-representation in low-paying, minimum-wage jobs. While it is difficult to claim a cause-and-effect relationship between the lack of teachers of color and the low success rate of students of color, there is an interesting relationship between them. Zapata (1988) suggests that teachers who are of similar linguistic or racial groups as the students may serve as role-models and "may be better prepared to meet the learning needs of an increasing proportion of the school population than teachers from other backgrounds" (p. 19).

A faculty of predominantly White teachers is in the difficult situation of trying to identify with students who do not share the same experiences or background (Rettig & Khodavandi, 1998). This does not mean that for every racial or linguistic group there must be a teacher to represent them; rather, the idea is that schools have teachers who understand the issues that students of color face on a daily basis and whom students can identify as potential role models. There is also the concern that many White, middle-class teachers have unrealistic expectations of the acculturation of students of color (Nicklos & Brown, 1989).

Montecinos (1994) suggests that it is

possible that the White teacher's lack of experience with people of diverse backgrounds promotes an environment of "ignorance, stereotyping, and prejudices which translate into low expectations for the academic achievement of ethnic minority students" (p. 34).

It is important to keep in mind that students of color are not alone in reaping the benefits from the expertise of teachers of color; having a diverse group of teachers will enrich the experience of all students (Su, 1996), ensuring that schools keep a multicultural perspective (Daughtry, 1989; Rettig & Khodavandi, 1998; Sleeter & Grant, 1993). As Haberman (1989) argues, teachers of color send a message to students about their own self-worth as well as that of others. Teachers of color afford all students opportunities to interact with people from varying backgrounds (Su, 1996), or as Nicklos & Brown (1989) noted, the children of our society will not have had the opportunity to interact with adults who form a considerable portion of the population.

Despite the concerns surrounding the recruitment of teachers of color, it is important to note that the issue goes beyond the racial make-up of teachers. As Dillard (1994) argues, teacher education programs, administrators in school districts, and others must recognize and acknowledge the richness that a diverse population of teachers brings, in the way they "participate, see, and are in the world" (pg. 9). Dillard also argues that the issue of recruiting teachers of color must extend beyond the focus on numbers. Rather, it is important to consider what the teacher of color can bring to the profession that is unique, different, and valuable.

THE STUDY

Guiding Questions

In order to arrive at the heart of the problem concerning the lack of students of color in teacher education, the researchers investigated students of color who are already enrolled in teacher education programs. The central question to this study is: *What draws students of color to teaching?*

In order to answer this particular question, other guiding questions are also appropriate: *Do family members who are teachers have an impact on the student of color's decision to become a teacher? Is parental support an important part of the decision process for students color? Are there role models who have an influence on the student of color's decision to teach? Do previous experiences have an effect on choosing teaching as a career for students of color?*

These guiding questions form the basis for this study, from which several findings emerged and are described below.

Theoretical Framework

In light of the guiding questions to this study, it was appropriate that the theoretical framework be based on the model of phenomenological study (Patton, 2001). Through this particular lens, it was the participants' experiences that were the most important elements to examine. As Patton describes, there are two approaches to phenomenology. The first is for the researcher to become a participant observer and the second is to focus on the experience of others and how they interpret these experiences in their own personal worldview.

Since at the core of this research was the participants' description of their own experiences, how the researchers guided the participants to express their interpretations of the phenomena was the major concern which determined the reliability of this research. It was crucial that the researchers skillfully craft questions and conduct interviews in order to get at the true essence of the participants' experience. It is imperative that the phenomenologist employ a rigorous analysis of the experiences of the population studied (Patton, 2001). The aim of this particular study was to understand the essence of the experience of being a preservice teacher of color in order to glean how these experiences have lead students of color to the choice of becoming a teacher.

Researchers' Perceptivity

The first author, a white European-American male, was a professor of French and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in a small northeastern state college at the time the data were collected. He is now a professor of Foreign Language Education at a large Midwestern university. He completed a Bachelor's degree in French teaching and has taught in urban and rural schools. His doctorate degree is in Foreign Language Education where he taught preservice teachers in general teacher education courses. His primary interest is in multicultural education, with a focus on English Language Learners. Being a teacher educator for a number of years and a researcher in multicultural education, this study is of particular interest as he has witnessed firsthand the lack of the number of students of color in education.

The second author, a Japanese male, completed his Master's degree in Foreign Language Education at a large midwestern university. He completed a Bachelor's degree in Japan in English teaching. He also has a particular research interest in multicultural education with a focus on English language learners. Being a teacher of color, this author is able to relate to many of the experiences of the participants.

Setting and Participants

There were eight participants in this study, all of whom were undergraduate students of color in the teacher education programs of a large midwestern state-funded university and a smaller state-funded college in the northeast. Three of the participants identified themselves as Asian Americans, two as African Americans and three as Latin Americans. Three of the participants were studying to be teachers at the elementary level, two were in Physical Education programs, one was in Mathematics Education, one was in English Education and one was a dual major in Special Education and Spanish. Two of the participants were male and six were female.

The participants in this study were recruited and selected based on their ability to contribute their thoughts and feelings about their experiences as students of color in a teacher education program. Students were recruited through the assistance of instructors in general undergraduate education courses. They all volunteered of their own volition to join in this study. The researchers were not the participants' instructor, so there was no obligation for the students to participate. There were approximately twenty students from both schools who initially demonstrated an interest in the project; however, in the end only eight participated. The task of recruiting students of color was a challenge considering that the majority of the students in teacher education at these two institutions are White European-Americans.

Data Collection

As this is a phenomenological study, the researchers distributed a questionnaire to each of the participants which asked questions to elicit responses addressing the study's guiding questions. There were eight questions, all of which were open-ended, where participants were encouraged to write as much as they could.

Following the completion of the questionnaire, one
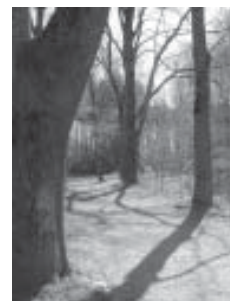
of the researchers interviewed the participants, some individually and some as a group (because they were too timid to participate in the interview alone), in what Patton (2001) terms an "informal conversational interview" (p. 281) which was tape recorded and then transcribed, coded, and analyzed. This interview was used as a follow-up to the questionnaire in order to seek clarification or additional information from the answers to the survey. What is more, collecting data using multiple methods increased the credibility of the results (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), affording the researchers, through triangulation (Patton, 2001), opportunities to understand more accurately how the participants interpreted their experiences.

ASSERTIONS

The data presented in this study are echoed by the voices of the students of color who have decided to pursue their career as an educator. These voices are genuine, representing the essence of the experiences of the participants. What emerged from this study are several assertions worth highlighting. Since the number of participants was small, the reader should keep in mind that these assertions may not be generalized to a larger population. Rather, these assertions describe the experience of these individuals, which may give researchers and teacher educators an idea of what experiences students of color have, but should not be interpreted to be identical for every student of color.

In accordance with this study's theoretical framework, the authors interpreted what the participants described about their experiences. What is more, the assertions described below contributed to current research and may suggest which direction future research on this topic should take. In the tradition of qualitative research, the following are assertions that the researchers have gleaned from the findings which emerged from this study.

Having educators in the family had an impact on the participant's choice to become a teacher.

Out of the four participants who have educators in the family, all of them indicated that this connection to teaching was influential in their choice to become a teacher. For example, one participant has an aunt who is a professor, one has parents who teach part-time at the college level and one has an uncle who is a professor and an aunt who is a special education teacher.

This data supports the notion that if students of color have an educator in the family they may have a stronger interest in becoming a teacher, or at least have a better understanding of what it means to be an educator. It is interesting to note that while some of the participants have family members who are teachers, they all chose to name teachers as those who influenced them the most in making the decision to become a teacher, not family members.

Parental support was a determining factor for students of color in deciding to become teachers.

Participants in this study deemed that the support of those whom they love was vital in their decision-making process. While most of the participants had the support of their parents from the time they made the decision to become an educator, two Asian-American participants admitted that their parents were not supportive initially. Their parents were expecting them to choose a career in which they could earn more money than in teaching.

Ultimately, the parents of the Asian-American students agreed with and supported their child's decision. One participant commented that his "parents were a little disappointed at first, but then they realized that it's important for me to do what makes me happy instead of just making money." The data also indicated that parental support is one of the most essential factors in order for students of color to succeed in their teacher education program.

One participant commented, "The encouragement from my parents and past teachers helped me choose it [teaching] as a major and go for it." Another noted that she appreciated that her parents were always there whenever she needed encouragement. In general, college students are mature enough to make decisions regarding what they would like to do in their future; however, when they receive encouragement from their supporters such as parents, making career decisions is easier. For students of color, emotional support is vital in that this encouragement allows them to follow through with their decisions.

Teachers are important role models.

As was discussed in the first assertion, those participants who had family members who were teachers were strongly influenced by their role. Similarly, it was found that the significant role models of the participants were also their previous teachers. Every participant of this study was able to identify at least one teacher as a role model. Not only did these teachers have a great impact on the participants'

lives in general, but they also inspired them to follow in their footsteps.

For example, one participant wrote, "When I was in second grade, I transferred schools and my teacher really devoted so much time just to me. That really meant so much." Another student identified her physical education teacher from high school as being her biggest role model and yet another participant commented that it was his track coach. One other participant named her art teacher as being the most influential.

Teachers who show their love for teaching, passion for their subject, and thoughtfulness towards their students are those who will be respectfully admired. Teachers who portray these characteristics are more likely to influence their students and their students' future. One participant commented that a particular experience that impacted his decision to become a teacher was "being around teachers who cared … and seeing so many people try to help me or others in their spare time. Also their friendliness to me just in the halls."

Having a bond with teachers is important.

Having a bond with teachers is also very important in leading students of color to choose teaching as a profession. As the participants confirmed, getting to know their teachers was more valuable than only seeing them in their traditional role in the front of the classroom. By developing this type of bond with their teachers, students were able to establish a greater respect for teachers and their occupation.

Most of the participants indicated that they enjoyed helping their teachers by being responsible for something. They were highly appreciative of the dialogue that occurred between them and their teachers. As a result of this bond, these students of color admired their teachers, mentors, and role models.

Unfortunately, not all teachers are as effective as others, and some of the participants admitted that they had both positive and negative experiences. One participant noted,

I have had many good and bad experiences, good and bad teachers. I know the impact either one can have on a life. The reason I want to be who I want to be is because of my favorite teacher.

However, for some students of color, a bond may be more easily established when there is sameness instead of difference. As one participant stated in an attention-grabbing opinion: "I never had teachers of color. I think things would have been different if I had Spanish[-speaking] teachers." This

student's belief supports the argument discussed in the introduction claiming teachers of color, or at least teachers who represent ethnically and/or linguistically diverse students, could inspire students who might relate to them at that level. The students of color in this study have indicated that they need teachers with whom they can identify culturally, racially, ethnically, and perhaps linguistically.

Having previous teaching experiences may play a role in deciding to become a teacher.

On the whole, most of the participants had previous positive experiences helping someone learn. Some worked as a camp counselor, others as a leader in extra-curricular activities, and one participant had experience as a tutor while in high school. Another taught swimming at a summer camp. These experiences provided them with opportunities to understand what it means to be a teacher and were influential in initiating their belief that this was what they wanted to do with their lives.

This is, in fact, a very important step for these participants towards making their decision to become an educator. A few of the participants in this study admitted that they changed their major to education after having spent a few semesters in college. These participants were, in part, able to make this shift because they already knew the pleasure of helping someone learn. Providing these types of experiences early was important for these participants.

Fostering the intrinsic motivation to teach is vital in recruiting students of color.

In most cases, the participants chose teaching as a career for intrinsic reasons. One student commented, "It's something I have always wanted to do. Many teachers have left great impressions on me and I want to hopefully affect children in the same way." Another stated, "I always want to make a great impact on a lot of people and teaching is one of the ways to do this." Yet one more participant explained that she chose teaching because "I truly enjoy working with children and helping them learn."

It goes without saying that each participant had different reasons for deciding to become an educator; however, the common thread was wanting to help children learn and to inspire children as they were inspired. Recognizing this intrinsic motivation helped fuel their desire to teach.

Making the decision to teach prior to entering college was not as important as the experiences on which the decision was based.

Even though the answers varied from the participants, five commented that they made the decision to become a teacher after they were already a student in college. Two knew they wanted to teach when they were in high school and one responded that he knew teaching would be his career when he was in elementary school. Some of the participants who indicated that they made the decision after entering college stated that they had always considered becoming a teacher even though they put off making the final decision.

Clearly, it is not an easy process for college students to determine what they really want as a career, but as the data indicate, it is not too late for students to make the decision to become a teacher even after they enter college. As discussed above, perhaps one of the most crucial considerations in the process of choosing a career in teaching is having had at least one teacher who inspired them.

LIMITATIONS

The decline in the representation of people of color in the teaching profession is a topic that has increasingly piqued the interest of researchers over the last decade (see Claycomb & Hawley, 2000; Futrell, 1999; Gordon, 1994; Yasin & Albert, 1999). Due to the complexity of the problem, this study is not able to address each and every aspect of the issue. Most studies focus on the retention or recruitment of teachers of color. By looking at the lived experiences of the participants of this study, the researchers have been able to present a unique analysis of the problem.

While qualitative studies are limited in the generalizability across an entire population, this study does provide a glimpse of the essence of what it means to be a student of color in teacher education. This study is also limited in its perspective on the situation, as phenomenology (the essence of the lived experience of these participants) is the lens by which the topic is examined. At the same time it allows for a deeper inquiry into the lives of the selected participants.

This small sample size also prevents every ethnic or racial group from being represented. All of the participants grew up in the United States, thus excluding the perspective of students of color who grew up in other parts of the world. These participants, being already in college, limits the perspective of the study by excluding

those people of color who have not entered higher education.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Larger sample sizes should be collected in future research. This study examined the lived experiences of a select group of individuals at a particular moment; future research should consider a longitudinal study, following participants from their initial interest in teaching to either completion of their program or attrition.

As this was a phenomenological study, future research could also consider other qualitative theoretical frameworks such as narrative inquiry or case studies. Experimental or mixed-design studies examining the effect that a particular variable has on students of color are also needed. While the focus of this study was limited, it addresses issues which require further investigation. Since generally parents have a great influence on their children, to examine the role of the parents of students of color on their children's decision to become a teacher is an important question to address.

Another issue which requires further inquiry is the effect that the student of color's financial situation has on entering a teacher education program. Limited financial resources are available for students seeking higher education. Does this contribute to the decrease in students of color entering teacher education programs? Another issue which further research could consider is understanding the right timing for recruiting students of color into teacher education.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, it is important to consider what these findings mean for teacher educators today. The assertions which emerged from this study lead to several implications which are summarized below.

According to data collected by Claycomb & Hawley (2000), more than half of the students who enter teacher education programs made such decisions before starting their college career. They also reported that most efforts to recruit students in middle or secondary school were designed to target the recruitment of students of color.

It is interesting to compare this effort with the

data collected in this study, where more than half of the students decided to become a teacher after already entering college. This might be an indication that recruitment efforts are not as effective for students of color as one might hope. Others have argued that because many students do not think about college until they are nearly through high school, nor are they aware of the rigorous requirements for admission into college, it is imperative to inform students of color about their options as early as middle school (Nicklos & Brown, 1989).

It is also vital that schools avoid marginalizing students of color due to the detrimental effect on the students' academic success. As argued above, students of color are at greater risk of being placed into lower tracks and dropping out of school than their White counterparts. Such unequal treatment gives students of color a poor image of schools and teachers, which creates an obstacle for recruiting them as possible teachers.

Schools must take a proactive role in ensuring that students of color have a positive educational experience. As the participants in this study noted, teachers who had the greatest influence on them are those who cared. This caring is what Gay (2000) calls "one of the major pillars of culturally responsive pedagogy for ethnically diverse students" (p. 45). The teacher's attitude toward students impacts their academic achievement and the overall educational experience.

Teachers, administrators, and teacher educators could attract more students of color into the profession of teaching. As our study noted, students of color are often intrinsically motivated to teach. Teachers should attempt to identify students who have this motivation as early as possible to encourage them to think about teaching as a possible career. By approaching them earlier, students will be better prepared for college admission. Students of color who demonstrate an interest in teaching need to be encouraged to seek out opportunities to teach. Many participants in this study had these opportunities.

Other opportunities to provide students with similar experiences are described by Claycomb and Hawley (2000). The Teacher Cadet Project, a program which originated in South Carolina but has been replicated across the country, is one measure to attract students to teaching while still in high school. A magnet high school in Rochester, New York, known as the Teaching and Learning Institute, was designed to attract students to teaching at the pre-collegiate level. Such experiences

give students a plan for their career at an earlier age, enabling them to establish the necessary goals in order to achieve this plan. The key is making such programs accessible to all students.

Once students of color are admitted to a teacher education program, another important consideration is retaining them. Dillard (1994) reminds us that students want to be known as more than just a number. In particular, students of color want the encouragement of teacher educators to embrace their ethnic, racial, and cultural identity and allow them to become teachers without assimilating to the predominantly White culture. She also argues that teacher education programs must clearly emphasize the important role of teachers of color in schools.

It is also important that teacher education programs redesign their curriculum to be more inclusive; it should reflect the diversity of the students who enter the program (Su, 1996). Teacher education programs should model showing respect for students of color, welcoming their contributions, and encouraging them to become engaged in the classroom. As Nieto (2003) points out that "ignorance about race and ethnicity prevail among many teachers ... because their experience with diversity of all kinds may be limited" (p. 41). But she also argues that just because one chooses to ignore the identity of students does not mean that their identity simply disappears; rather, faculty must recognize and embrace the rich diversity of the students.

This study has shown the gravity of the issue surrounding the need for and lack of teachers of color. Teacher education programs, while making valiant efforts to recruit more students of color, are still teaching a rather homogenous population of students. It is important to keep in mind that all students should be taught by teachers from varying backgrounds of race and ethnicity. This implies, then, that White teachers can effectively teach students of color and teachers of color can effectively teach White students.

Teacher education programs must ensure that they are preparing their preservice teachers to effectively teach all students by teaching them to be aware of cultural and social differences among students (Gay, 2002; Yasin & Albert, 1999). Gay (2002) takes the argument a step further by stating that more important than the design of the curriculum is the climate created in the classroom, which should be "conducive to the learning for ethnically diverse students" (p. 109). Preservice teachers must learn in their teacher education program to harbor an affirming attitude toward stu-

dents with diverse cultural backgrounds (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

To conclude, the current literature emphasizes that teachers of color are an important component to the educational experience of American society in the twenty-first century. The findings of this study point to the following ideas for possibly recruiting more students of color into the teacher education program: (a) tap into students' intrinsic motivation to teach, (b) model effective teaching for students at an early age, (c) ensure that students of color are aware of and are prepared to meet the rigorous admission requirements of teacher education programs, (d) help students of color establish bonds with teachers, (e) ensure that students of color have a positive learning experience, and (f) provide students of color with teaching experiences before deciding on a major at college.

These suggestions are by no means exhaustive, but they are the findings that emerged from the participants of this study. These findings, along with pre-existing and future research on this topic will help to ensure that teachers of color will contribute to the education of our students.

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