

Growing Your Own: Minority Teachers

Delar K. Singh, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Education
Eastern Connecticut State University
Willimantic, CT 06226

David L. Stoloff, PhD
Professor and Chair
Department of Education
Eastern Connecticut State University
Willimantic, CT 06226

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In the USA, the number of school age children who represent minority backgrounds is rapidly growing. However, despite several efforts, the teaching force remains primarily White. The purpose of this paper is to describe a residential future teachers program in Connecticut which recruits minority rising juniors and seniors from high schools across the state. The program, known as the Summer Institute of Future Teachers (SIFT) has clearly delineated goals. These goals are to: (1) Reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation, (2) Increase student achievement, (3) Build positive meaningful relationships among students, and (4) Promote multi-racial, multi-cultural understanding. The SIFT is held for four weeks on the premises of a state university. During the program, candidates acquire fundamentals of teaching and learning and develop dispositions for diverse classrooms. The post program surveys of parents and SIFT candidates as well as anecdotal data indicate that the program is effective in preparing future teachers of minority backgrounds.

Growing Your Own: Minority Teachers

For the last 25 years, the number of minority students enrolled in public schools has been rising while the number of minority teachers has been falling. According to the National Education Association (NEA), minority students now make up approximately 40% of the elementary and secondary school-age population while the number of minority teachers constitutes less than 10% of the teaching force.

The low numbers of minority teachers has negative implications for minority children as well as majority children. It is believed that a teacher's background influences children's attitude toward schooling. And a quality education mandates that children be exposed to the variety of cultural perspectives that represent the nation at large. The critical shortage of minority role models is likely to worsen the urban plight and lead to a failure of all American students to learn the academic, personal, and social skills; they need in the multicultural workplace of the future (NEA, 2007).

There are several reasons for the small numbers of minorities in the teaching workforce. Some of these are: disproportionate screening out of minorities by licensure tests, low teacher salaries, exclusion, separation, and discrimination. Furthermore, the experience of minority communities with schooling in the United States explains the challenges of recruiting minorities to the teaching profession (Gordon, 2002).

Despite several strategies such as promise of financial aid, and forgivable loans for minority students who intend to teach, academic counseling and tutoring, and early teacher identification initiatives, minority teachers remain a shortage (Shure, 2001)

The **purpose** of this paper is to describe a residential program, Summer Institute for Future Teachers for future teachers of minority backgrounds. This program is indeed a small but definite step towards preparing a diverse group of teachers.

The Summer Institute for Future Teachers (SIFT)

The SIFT is a 4-week summer program for rising juniors and seniors of minority backgrounds who represent several school districts in the state of Connecticut. The program is funded by the State Department of Education and is conducted in collaboration between a state university and Capitol Region Education Council (CREC). The program has been in operation for last 10 years. The cost of the program is about \$4000 for each candidate.

Every spring the CREC sends applications and announcements to school districts in the state of Connecticut. The application package includes demographic information, three letters of recommendation, a medical form, and an essay by the applicant stating his/her reasons for wanting to be a teacher. The program is mostly free with a cost of \$200 to meet the administrative expenses. The students who qualify for free lunch get their fee waived. The Future Teachers Clubs and Young Educators Society mentor teacher join guidance counselors in recruiting the candidates to the program.

By the end of June, 25-30 candidates are recruited by the CREC to participate in the program. The program is run on the premises of a state university. The program lasts for four weeks. It is residential in nature. The SIFT candidates live in the residential hall of the university where the program is housed. Monday through Friday, the candidates, attend classes in the university and engage in other social and extracurricular activities. The classes are taught by university faculty and school teachers. On Friday afternoon, the candidates are picked by their families. They spend the weekend at home and return to campus on Sunday evenings. For attending this program, the candidates earn three college credits.

This year the program started on July 8th. It concluded on August 3rd. A total of 26 candidates participated in the program. These candidates represented 19 different school districts of Connecticut. Approximately 58% of the candidates were African American, 20% Latinos, 8% Asian/Pacific Islanders and 14% were White. Majority of the candidates, that is 85% were females and a small minority, approximately 15% were males. The program had clearly delineated goals. These goals were:

1. To reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation
2. To increase student achievement
3. To build positive meaningful relationships among students.
4. To promote multi-racial, multi-cultural understanding

The program followed a very structured format. The day started at 9 AM with classroom instruction. The candidates learned about theoretical perspectives, multiple intelligences, Connecticut Common Core of Learning and Teaching, lesson plans, behavior managements and other relevant topics that are important in teaching and

learning. The candidates developed lesson plans and delivered group lessons. The candidates also completed a clinical experience. They worked as teacher assistants in a neighborhood elementary summer school. In the school, the candidates made classroom observations of teaching and provided one-to-one instruction to elementary pupils. They spent half a day for one full week in the school. The candidates practiced skills in creating classrooms that are welcoming for racial, cultural, economic, and, linguistic diversity.

Everyday, after lunch, teacher candidates had guest speakers in their classrooms. The guest speakers who were expert university faculty, shared their ideas with the SIFT candidates and engaged them in discussions. On the days, the SIFT candidates did not have guest speakers; they participated in non-academic activities such as fitness walking, land aerobics, swimming, and aqua aerobics.

In the evenings, for about two hours, the candidates attended a technology class. Here they learned to integrate technology into instruction. They worked on a project, “CulturQuest”. They participated in threaded discussions on WebCT, a course management program, and took PRAXIS practice tests. We also administered a PRAXIS pre-test and posttest. The mean score for the SIFT candidates in the pretest of PRAXIS was 36.5 and in the posttest, it was 52.7. Analyses of data indicate that the gain score of 16.2 in PRAXIS posttest is significant.

On the last day of the SIFT program, a talent show was presented by the candidates. The candidates and their instructors had spent significant time preparing for the talent show. The talent show lasted for about two hours and had items such as playing of piano, playing of violin, monologue, and dances.

Effectiveness of the SIFT

We administered a Likert type questionnaire to gather the candidates' perceptions of the SIFT. The data indicate that the vast majority of the candidates are extremely satisfied with the program. They found the program an opportunity to learn, develop meaningful relationships and an affirmation that their dreams to become a teacher are attainable and that teaching is what they really want to pursue. Here are some the comments of the SIFT candidates to the question, **“What special talents and skills were enhanced by this program?”**

“Public speaking, writing skills, and reading skills”

“My social skills, communication skills, working well with others”

“Social skills, time management”

“I was able to practice my teaching skills and work with students individually and groups”

“My working skills”

“I now procrastinate a lot less”

“My ability to speak in front of groups.

“I learned how to get to know people better; it also opened me up to new things”

We also captured parents' perceptions about the effectiveness of the SIFT. We gave them a questionnaire. The majority of the parents expressed satisfaction with the SIFT. Here are some of the comments made by the parents:

“Excellent program, encourages diversity, challenges students”

“I think it was an excellent opportunity made available to our youth to encourage and help them decide on future”

“It is a good program-it showed my daughter about college life and what is expected of her”

“It was an excellent program for teens who want to be teachers.”

“I believe more of this type of programs is needed. I think the staff went all out to help the student to succeed”

Administration of the SIFT

As far as the administration of the program is concerned, the program is run by a director, co-director, four instructors, and two residential assistants. This year, the staff represented individuals of African American, Latino, Native American and Indian American background. The SIFT candidates dine in the dining hall of residential hall and follow a number of policies and safety standards. In the event of health emergencies, the SIFT staff take them to university health center and nearby hospital depending upon the health needs. The candidates are transported to neighborhood school via university vans.

The anecdotal data indicate that a majority of our SIFT candidates go on to college and pursue teaching as a career. In the spring of 2008, we intend to conduct a follow up survey of the SIFT candidates who have graduated from the SIFT over the past few years. We should be able to share this data in our next paper.

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