Recruiting and Retaining Black Teachers to Work in Urban Schools

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Abstract
The purpose of this article is to examine teacher preparation from the perspective of novice Black teachers. While all teachers, regardless of race, can be trained to be effective teachers of Black students, Black teachers can be more adept at motivating and engaging students of color. Six Black teachers were interviewed to determine their experiences during teacher preparation and induction. Findings revealed the teachers believed their programs were high quality and prepared them well to teach in urban spaces, but some expressed concern about the swift immersion into the classroom.

Keywords
Black teachers, teacher preparation, mathematics, urban schools

Introduction
In the current political climate, the teaching profession, which was once considered a “stable, high-status profession for the African American middle-class” (Ladson-Billings, 2005, p. 2), has become tenuous and is experiencing decline. Job-related factors that contribute to attrition among all teachers include high-stakes testing, retrenchment of tenure, and increased pressure to improve student outcomes (Moore, 2012). Factors that contributed to fewer Black¹ teachers in the profession have also been attributed to school desegregation (Madkins, 2011; Tillman, 2004), inadequate preparation for college (Irvine, 1988), standardized testing for teachers (Leonard & Martin, 2013; Madkins, 2011), and increased access and opportunity to pursue other professional careers (Madkins, 2011).

Tracing the history of Black teachers in the United States, Foster (1997) reported that Black teachers grew more than fourfold from about 15,000 in 1890 to 66,000 in 1910, which was 40% of all Black professionals (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Prior to the Brown vs. Board decision in 1954, approximately 50% of all Black professionals in the United States, some who were graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), were teachers (Madkins, 2011). However, after the Brown v. Board ruling, nearly 40,000 Black teachers lost their jobs in 17 southern states from 1954 to 1972 (Fine, 2004; Irvine, 2002; Madkins, 2011; Tillman, 2004). From that time, the percentage of Black teachers continued to decline to the point where they represented 7% of the teacher workforce in 1986 (Madkins, 2011). There is great disparity between the percentage of Black teachers in the workforce and the percentage of Black students enrolled in U.S. schools (Fine, 2004; Irvine, 2002; Madkins, 2011; Tillman, 2004). Thus, it is critical that teacher education programs become proactive in recruiting and preparing Black teachers to teach in urban settings.

While all teachers, regardless of race, can be trained to be effective teachers of Black students (Leonard, 2008), some theorists believe “minority teachers are particularly adept at motivating and engaging minority students because they often bring knowledge of student background to the classroom that enhances students’ educational experience” (i.e., culturally responsive pedagogy [CRP]; Mitchell, 1998, p. 105). Villegas (as cited in Mitchell, 1998) argued that teachers of color familiar with students’ cultural backgrounds are more likely to build positive relationships between the home and school to enhance student learning. Black teachers are important in the teacher workforce because it is important for Black students to see them as successful role models (Cooper, 2002; Leonard & Evans, 2008; Madkins, 2011; Mitchell, 1998). Although behaviors cannot be generalized, Black teachers are more likely to be familiar with the cultural nuances and vernacular of Black students and have the skills and ability to motivate them to learn. Moreover, Black teachers, historically, have served as inspirational models for

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college attainment (Madkins, 2011; Mitchell, 1998). In terms of student outcomes, Black students attending predominantly Black schools in New Jersey had higher mathematics achievement when they were taught by Black teachers (Barr, Sadovnik, & Visconti, 2006). Black students are more likely to succeed when they have teachers who meet their academic, psychological, social, and emotional needs (Mitchell, 1998). In this era of accountability and teacher reform, it is imperative to recruit and retain Black teachers to prepare Black students (and all students) to be productive citizens and to lead productive lives. Teacher preparation programs are critical to the recruitment and development of diverse teacher candidates.

The purpose of this article is to examine teacher preparation from the perspective of the novice teacher (i.e., less than 3 years experience). We will discuss traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs and Black teachers’ experiences in these programs. These teachers’ voices are missing from the literature regarding teacher retention and attrition. Moore (2012) found that Black teachers were dissatisfied with their jobs after analyzing School and Staffing Survey (SASS) teacher data using school environment factors to predict school dissatisfaction. In this article, we examine the experiences of five teachers enrolled in alternative certification programs and one additional teacher who completed a traditional teacher preparation program. Teachers were interviewed to determine their experiences during teacher preparation and induction. These six Black teachers comprised a sample of convenience that entered the teaching field from different pathways. Black teachers’ counterstories about their experiences in teacher education programs and in urban schools are important if we are to understand the reasons why they chose to teach, stay in teaching or leaving the field. Prior to presenting and analyzing data collected from the participants, the conceptual framework and literature review on teacher quality and teacher certification programs are presented below.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that undergirds the principles in this article is critical race theory (CRT), and the constructs that support this theory are culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and social justice pedagogy (SJP). CRT allows for examination of deeper questions around equity and race, challenging the colorblind approach of a traditional liberal civil rights stance, and examining how citizenship and race interact (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The concept of CRP emerged from the multicultural education literature of the 1970s. Gay (2000) defined culturally responsive pedagogy as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them” (p. 29). CRP is based on the assumption that “responsiveness to cultural differences is fundamental to effective teaching and learning” (Gay, 2009, p. 190). It is validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory (Gay, 2000). CRP creates the opportunity for students to learn in a *third space* where ethnic ways of knowing are valued alongside dominant canons of knowledge (Gay, 2000; Lipka et al., 2005). CRP is an attempt to use the cultural capital that students bring from home and community as a springboard to learn. Cultural capital embodies the norms, ideologies, language, behavior, mores, and practices of a particular group and is transmitted to children as cultural knowledge (Howard, 2003; Sheets, 2005).

Rather than adhering to a deficit theory, teachers should view students’ culture as an asset on which to build new knowledge. It is critical to understand the importance of other ways of knowing and other forms of mathematical activity (Greer, Mukhopadhyay, Powell, & Nelson-Barber, 2009). Culture is embedded in the natural world and influences every aspect of our lives. According to Nieto (2002),

> Culture is the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created and shared by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion and how these are transformed by those who share them. (p. 53)

We define SJP as holding specific social-justice-related perspectives and actions that provide all students with opportunities to learn core content in meaningful ways that seek to improve the economic and social conditions of marginalized individuals and groups and that work toward the reduction (if not the complete elimination) of deficit-oriented beliefs and dispositions (Leonard & Evans, 2012, p. 100). We use a mathematics example as the authors are both faculty in mathematics education. The Young People’s Project (YPP), an outgrowth of the Algebra Project, uses critical literacy to engage students in community-based and social-justice-oriented mathematics activities. Critical literacy means “to approach knowledge critically and skeptically, see relationships between ideas, look for underlying explanations for phenomena, and question whose interests are served and who benefits” (Gutstein, 2006, p. 5). The mission of YPP is to use mathematics literacy as a tool to develop young leaders and organizers who radically change the quality of education and quality of life in their communities so that all children have the opportunity to reach their full human potential (YPP, n.d.).

**Teacher Quality**

Teacher quality has become a major issue in education in the United States in the last decade with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002). According to the United States Department of Education, a highly qualified teacher is one who has a bachelor’s degree, full state
certification or licensure, and can demonstrate content knowledge in the subject area (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Evidence for the final criterion is provided by completion of a content area major or equivalent number of credits, and passing a standardized content examination. Poor teacher quality can have a direct and negative impact on the learning of Black students (Desimone & Long, 2010), especially in mathematics, which we know is a gatekeeper course for access to college education (Martin, Gholson, & Leonard, 2010). Students’ standardized mathematics scores are correlated to school variables more than standardized reading scores, which are associated with home variables (Barr et al., 2006). Thus, teachers’ content knowledge and pedagogical practices in mathematics have a tremendous impact on students, particularly Black students whose mathematical experiences have largely been shaped by a teaching style known as the “pedagogy of poverty” (Haberman, 1991), which promotes seatwork over critical thinking and problem solving.

While content knowledge is an important variable, prior research has found that students’ trust in teachers and the belief that teachers care about them (i.e., “ethic of care”) are strong variables for academic success, particularly among Black children (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2009). While teachers in traditional programs may need strong intentional support from their educational programs and professional development to foster the instilment of trust and care in their students, the quick immersion of alternative certification teachers into the classroom makes the development of an “ethic of care” more critical for these teachers. This is particularly true for teachers who have students who have been conditioned by prior experience to expect apathy from teachers who have not exhibited genuine concern and care (Haberman, 1991).

Student learning can and should be measured in a myriad of ways, including grades and creative products and productions (e.g., essays, reports, oratorical contests, acting in plays, mathematical modeling, science fair projects, music, and artistic ability). In addition to academics, education should focus on the development of the whole child, which not only includes intellectual but psychological, social, and emotional growth (Haynes & Comer, 1990). The affective domain is just as critical in motivating children to learn and should be considered in the teaching and learning process (Mitchell, 1998).

**Teacher Education Programs**

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), teacher education has undergone several decades of change. In 1980, “there was a shift in teacher education away from the training approaches” where “prospective teachers were taught to engage in classroom specific behaviors that had been shown to be effective through programs of research correlating classroom processes” with student achievement (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 8). Instead, teacher education began to focus on “teacher thinking, teacher knowledge, and teacher learning” (Cochran-Smith, 2004), particularly as it is related to content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK; Shulman, 1987).

The 1990s ushered in the *Standards* movement, and teacher educators shifted toward inclusion of standards-based practices in content-based methods courses. By the year 2000, the context shifted toward accountability along with the passage of NCLB in 2001, which led to a focus on student outcomes. About the same time as teacher preparation programs began to focus to outcomes-based assessment, another trend emerged that focused on the theme of teaching for social justice in teacher education programs (Enterline, Cochran-Smith, Ludlow, & Mitescu, 2008). Social justice orientations are also critical in helping teacher candidates develop dispositions to work with poor urban students and students of color whose backgrounds differ from the teachers and to build classroom environments that foster deep learning.

**Traditional Education Programs**

Traditional teacher education programs are generally housed in schools or colleges of education. Many programs, but not all, are designed to grant teacher licensure after completion of a bachelor’s degree with a program of study in early childhood, elementary, or secondary education. Other programs only grant teacher licensure at the graduate level. Most of these traditional teacher preparation programs reflect demographics that reveal about 80% to 93% of teacher candidates, depending on the region of the country, identify as White middle-class females (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Cooper, 2002; Leonard & Evans, 2008; Mitchell, 1998). Other publications have noted the need for more diversity in the teaching force (Bireda & Chait, 2011; Irvine & Fenwick, 2009; National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004).

Furthermore, regardless of entry level, almost all traditional education programs require teacher candidates to pass *Praxis* examinations prior to admission to candidacy in a teacher education program. Some researchers contend that use of *Praxis* examinations as a basis of admission to teacher education is one reason for the decline of Black teacher candidates (Madkins, 2011). Darling-Hammond (2000) argued that *Praxis* tests do not predict teacher effectiveness and are not valid measures of teacher preparation. Yet, these assessments have become the norm in the current political climate. In response to low passing rates among Black teacher candidates, HBCUs have responded by offering test preparation programs to improve the passing rate of their teacher candidates. Nevertheless, traditional programs are rigorous and require completion of a major or minor in the content and anywhere from 200 to 800 student contact hours (e.g., practice and student teaching) at the undergraduate level, or 18 months to 2 years of intensive study at the graduate level with student teaching.
Alternative Certification Programs

Alternative certification programs have been promoted as a solution to teacher shortages in less affluent high-need urban schools highly populated by Black and Latina/o students (New York City Teaching Fellows [NYCTF], 2012a; Teach for America [TFA], 2011a). Alternative certification programs allow candidates to enter the teaching profession in urban schools by quickly entering the classroom and teaching with a temporary certificate while earning a master’s degree in education and initial certification. While these programs have been criticized as quick fixes to teacher shortages and placing teachers in classrooms without a great deal of prior training, these nontraditional routes to teacher certification have expanded tremendously over the past 30 years (Madkins, 2011). Furthermore, these programs tap a different pool of teacher candidates than traditional programs, which includes older career changers and minority teacher candidates (Fiestritzer as cited in Madkins, 2011). Programs like TFA and the NYCTF program have had minimal to some success in recruiting Black teachers to teach in urban schools (Evans, 2010). Other programs, such as Teach Tomorrow in Oakland (TTO), have been successful in recruiting diverse candidates into teaching. TTO claimed that a TTO teacher will be a “qualified, culturally diverse, educator who lives in and is dedicated to the Oakland community” (TTO, 2013).

The TFA and NYCTF programs quickly immerse teacher candidates into the teaching profession over the course of several months. While they receive full teacher salaries beginning in September, they are given summer stipends when they begin the program in June and receive subsidized tuition at their partnering universities throughout their time spent in the programs. TFA and NYCTF teachers also take graduate education courses taught by professors in their programs at partnering universities. In New York, for example, these alternative certification teachers receive a Transitional B license, which is a temporary and conditional teaching license issued by the New York State Education Department, which allows them to teach for 3 years before earning initial certification. TFA teacher candidates may also be licensed in other states through a similar process. Each of the two programs is described below.

TFA Program. TFA is a nonprofit organization that began in 1990 with the goal of sending high-achieving college graduates to high-need schools to teach underserved students in urban and rural communities. Wendy Kopp, TFA’s founder, a graduate of Princeton University, was interested in doing something substantial after graduation (Kopp, 2003). Kopp realized that many recent college graduates at highly ranked universities in the United States would consider teaching if given the opportunity. TFA developed into a teacher corps that allowed new graduates of prestigious universities, with an interest in teaching, to quickly begin teaching students in the communities with the highest need. Kopp considered TFA could be like the Peace Corps in the 1990s and that teachers would stay in education or go into other sectors but remain advocates for public education.

TFA’s mission “is to build the movement to eliminate educational inequity by enlisting our nation’s most promising future leaders in this effort” (TFA, 2011b), and TFA’s vision is that “one day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education” (TFA, 2011c). TFA recognizes the importance of SJP and makes every attempt to recruit teacher candidates who have dispositions amenable to SJP, and TFA claims to address it in their teacher-training program (W. Seamans, personal communication, April 5, 2010). The TFA program requires that recent college graduates commit to teaching for 2 years while taking coursework in teacher education, and they would serve in high-need schools throughout the United States in urban and rural communities. Approximately 68% of TFA teachers are White and 11% are Black (TFA, 2011a).

According to the TFA 2010 annual report, there are more than 20,000 TFA alumni throughout the United States (TFA, 2011d). On completion of the commitment to the program, nearly two thirds of alumni stay in the field of education, which is about 13,000, with about half of those alumni remaining in the classroom, which is about 6,500 (TFA, 2011d). This means that about one third of TFA alumni stay in the classroom on completion of their commitment. For those who stay in the classroom, about 90% of them teach in underserved communities (TFA, 2011d). However, critics of TFA believe that after becoming certified, many TFA teachers leave the field (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005). Lassonde (2010) claimed that only 11% of TFA teachers reported planning to teach 10 years or more.

Teacher quality in TFA. The findings on TFA teacher quality have been mixed. Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) found certified teachers had significantly higher student achievement gains as compared with uncertified teachers, including uncertified TFA teachers. Laczkó-Kerr and Berliner (2002) found that students of equally inexperienced, but fully certified teachers performed better than the students of TFA teachers. It appears that certification is a key factor because students of uncertified TFA teachers performed at the same level as did students of other uncertified teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Laczkó-Kerr & Berliner, 2002).

Contrary to these findings, TFA teachers had significantly higher student achievement in mathematics when compared with certified teachers from Grades 4 to 8, and there was an advantage for TFA teachers, specifically in the middle school years (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, Michelli, et al., 2006; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2006). Xu, Hannaway, and Taylor’s (2008) study of secondary mathematics and science teachers found that uncertified TFA teachers were more effective, as measured by student achievement variables, than traditionally certified teachers, including more experienced traditionally certified teachers. Xu et al. (2008) noted...
TFA “recruits and selects graduates from some of the most selective colleges and universities across the country” (p. 2), and 62% of TFA teachers were educated at the most selective and very selective higher education institutions while only 22% of non-TFA teachers were educated at these institutions. Xu et al. (2008) further claimed that TFA teachers had higher standardized tests scores than did non-TFA teachers, pointing out that “disparities do exist between TFA and non-TFA teachers in terms of their academic preparation” (p. 17). Xu et al. (2008) concluded perhaps TFA teachers were able to offset their lack of experience through better academic preparation or motivation.

According to TFA (2009) documentation, the National Principal Survey found that more than 90% of the 1,248 principals surveyed reported they were satisfied with TFA teachers: TFA teachers made a positive impact in their schools; TFA teachers were as effective as other beginning teachers in overall performance and impact on student achievement; and TFA teachers had comparable teacher preparation. Nearly 90% of principals said they would hire TFA teachers again and that the impact of TFA teachers on student achievement was excellent or good. Of particular interest is that nearly 90% of principals found TFA teachers to be knowledgeable in their subject matter.

NYCTF Program. The NYCTF program is an alternative certification program developed in 2000 by the New Teacher Project and the New York City Department of Education (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff, & Wyckoff, 2007) with the goal of bringing professionals from other careers to fill the large teacher shortage in the public schools of New York. When the program began, there was a predicted shortage of 7,000 teachers, which raised fears that there could be up to 25,000 teacher vacancies in the first decade of the 21st century (Stein, 2002). The mission of NYCTF is “to recruit and prepare high-quality, dedicated individuals to become teachers who raise student achievement in the New York City classrooms that need them most” (NYCTF, 2012b). NYCTF teachers, often called Teaching Fellows, generally teach in high-need urban schools throughout the city (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2006).

The NYCTF program is the largest alternative certification program in New York (Kane et al., 2006), and it grew rapidly during its early years: “Fellows grew from about 1% of newly hired teachers in 2000 to 33% of all new teachers in 2005” (Boyd et al., 2007, p. 10). Teaching Fellows represent about one fourth of all New York mathematics teachers (NYCTF, 2012a). As of 2012, there were more than 8,000 Teaching Fellows, which represented about 11% of all teachers working in New York (NYCTF, 2012c). About 40% of the teachers in the NYCTF program are persons of color (NYCTF, 2012b), which makes NYCTF a model for one of the most diverse recruitment and retention programs in the nation.

Retention of Teaching Fellows has been comparable with the retention of traditionally prepared teachers (Kane et al., 2006). NYCTF reports that 92% of Teaching Fellows completed their 1st year of teaching, 75% completed at least 3 years of teaching, and more than half had taught for at least 5 years (NYCTF, 2012c). Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, Michelli, et al. (2006) reported about 46% of Teaching Fellows stayed in teaching after 4 years as compared with 55% to 63% of traditionally prepared teachers. Sipe and D’Angelo (2006) found about 70% of Teaching Fellows who were in their 2nd year of the program intended to stay in education.

Teacher quality in NYCTF. Teaching Fellows have, on average, higher content test scores than other teacher candidates (Boyd et al., 2007), as measured by content certification examinations. They also generally have high content knowledge (Kane et al., 2006), as measured by undergraduate grade point average and mathematics SAT scores. However, few differences were found between the mathematics achievement levels of students in Grades 3 through 8 taught by Teaching Fellows compared with traditionally prepared teachers (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, Michelli, et al., 2006; Kane et al., 2006). Kane et al. (2006) found students assigned to teaching fellows [sic] performed similarly to students assigned to certified teachers in math . . . This average difference belies somewhat larger gaps among novice teachers . . . and no difference between teaching fellows [sic] and certified teachers with multiple years of experience. (p. 41)

After several years of teaching experience, however, the students of Teaching Fellows outperformed the students of traditionally prepared teachers (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, Michelli, et al., 2006).

Method

CRT uses counternarratives as a method for qualitative analysis (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) to tell the stories of “people whose experiences are not often told, including people of color, women, gay, and the poor” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). Counterstories are important because they present the narratives of marginalized people, which often stand in contrast to dominant narratives. We use counterstories in this article as a method to capture the voices and concerns of novice Black teachers, some who left and others who remain in the teaching profession.

Setting

We chose to interview teachers who were trained in traditional or alternative certification programs in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Our assumption was that these teachers had a variety of experiences and would most likely work with predominantly Black and linguistically diverse children in large urban districts. Four of the teachers we
interviewed were trained in alternative certification programs in New York City and another in Washington, D.C. We also interviewed one teacher who completed a traditional preparation program in Philadelphia. These teachers consequently worked in predominantly Black school districts in New York, Washington, D.C., and Maryland, respectively.

Participants
We conducted interviews with six Black teachers who had taught 3 years or less. They ranged from 22 to 60 years of age when they began teaching. However, given that some of these teachers had more teaching experience than others, their ages ranged from 25 to 60 when they were interviewed. Five of the teachers were female and one was male. Pseudonyms are used for anonymity. Two of the teachers, Dana (25 years old) and Faith (25 years old), were licensed to teach through TFA—one in New York and one in Washington, D.C., respectively. Three of the teachers, Carol (24 years old), Alice (53 years old), and Benjamin (60 years old) obtained licensure through the NYCTF program. The sixth teacher, Elizabeth (31 years old) was licensed by completing a traditional graduate teacher education program. These teachers taught a variety of levels from first grade to middle school and regular to bilingual and special education students.

Interviews
We developed a protocol that was emailed to each of the teachers for completion. Then, we telephoned each teacher to follow up on the interview protocol with additional queries. Field notes were recorded during the telephone interview. Interview responses and field notes yielded two pages of responses per participant.

Analysis
We analyzed the interview data for themes and patterns using the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The analysis involved the two authors reading and rereading the transcribed text separately, sharing independent ideas, and then coming to consensus on the interpretative of data.

Findings
The themes that emerged, while a direct result of the protocol, were (a) perceptions of program quality, (b) perceptions of teacher preparedness, (c) teaching styles, and (d) teacher retention and attrition. Summary statements and direct quotes will be presented to examine these six Black teachers’ experiences in terms of induction, mentoring, and support. Although their teaching experiences ranged from 8 days to 3 years, the voices of teachers new to the field are needed to understand retention and attrition issues among Black teachers.

Perceptions of Program Quality
As teaching for social justice has become a watchword in many teacher education programs (Enterline et al., 2008), we specifically queried whether SJP was part of these six teachers’ training. Five of the six teachers reported that SJP was part of their training. The male teacher, Benjamin, who was trained in the NYCTF program, was the only teacher who did not think SJP was a major focus of his program: “I think people step around it, but don’t address it too much . . .” Alice, another NYCTF stated that SJP was only emphasized in one course. Carol was more specific stating, “There is disparity of resources in high-needs schools, specifically in special education; wealthier communities have more resources.” Among the TFA teachers, there was a mixed response. Faith, the D.C. teacher with TFA training, stated that SJP was not part of her TFA training but part of the graduate program through a Foundations of Education course. Dana, who was new to the TFA program reported that SJP was part of TFA training and graduate courses. Dana’s self-report is consistent with Seaman’s personnel communication that TFA addressed SJP in the teacher training program. However, Seaman’s comment was based on his experience in the Western United States. The information reported here reveals that emphasis on SJP may vary within TFA for different regions of the country.

In addition to SJP, the teachers were queried about the strengths of their teacher education program. Self-reports from the teachers reveal the following:

I had two different field placements focused on urban schools. (Elizabeth, traditional program)

Teach for America offer [sic] a lot of support both inside and outside of the classroom to its corps members. It is as if they hold you by the hand through the process. While the work is demanding, it is both necessary and important. (Dana, TFA)

Rigorous lesson planning with a collaborative team led by an experienced Teach for America teacher for five weeks; graduate school alternative certification and master’s program with other students new to teaching in the same school district; strong course reading materials; TFA support throughout the year. (Faith, TFA)

The program strength is centered on child psychology and human development and the different courses and different professors we have. The social justice aspect in one course really helped me. Currently, I’m taking human development and it has this [SJP] aspect to it and it is interesting. (Alice, NYCTF)

Prepared you for what will see in terms of curriculum and behaviors (classroom management). (Benjamin, NYCTF)

Curriculum planning and resources to connect to the Common Core State Standards; lesson planning. (Carol, NYCTF)
Analyses of these responses reveal Elizabeth, the traditional teacher, focused on field placement in urban schools, which was probably important to her as a Black teacher. Interestingly, a key word that was used by both of the TFA teachers was support. Dana and Faith talked about the types of support they received from the TFA network. However, Faith was explicit in terms of describing the rigorous training involved in learning to teach, specifically as it related to lesson planning. A common thread among NYCTF teachers was curriculum and courses. Alice resonated positively about her child development courses, which were most likely important to her as a middle school teacher. Benjamin was the only teacher to mention classroom management at this juncture. However, this was no doubt important to him as a middle school special education teacher of autistic children.

When asked what they would change about their teacher education program, the responses reveal changes in policies or procedures that these novice teachers believed would improve the quality of their teacher education program:

More diversity among graduate students. (Elizabeth, traditional program)

I would allow people to obtain graduate degrees in more than just teaching. I think there are other graduate programs that would equip corps members with the proper training and preparation to be a successful influence in urban communities. (Dana, TFA)

Not feeling like we are using summer school students as “guinea pig” subjects. (Faith, TFA)

It needs to be a little bit longer. Just having the summer and then going into the schools is difficult. Sometimes you’re lucky and have great colleagues, who will help, but I have classmates who go into schools without any help, and this is difficult on first-year teachers. We have a lot of knowledge, but we don’t know where to start. It took a year to figure a lot of this out. They need to give us more than 2-3 months before becoming teachers. (Alice, NYCTF)

I took an autism workshop but hadn’t done a lesson plan for an autism class. How do I structure a unit or a lesson plan to meet the body of students who cannot understand? That’s challenging! (Benjamin, NYCTF)

More workshops where we can have hands on materials and actually create something. (Carol, NYCTF)

Interestingly, these teachers’ comments are program specific. Elizabeth’s comment about lack of diversity in traditional teacher education programs concurs with the literature (Cooper, 2002; Irvine, 2002; Madkins, 2011; Tillman, 2002). Dana, while new to TFA, suggested the program broaden its availability of support for other types of graduate study. This comment, while unintentional, actually creates a barrier to retaining Black teachers in the field of education. Expanded opportunities for Blacks to attain other degrees led to the decline of education majors (Madkins, 2011). Faith’s comment reveals her personal values and mores about using students as subjects to learn about practice. Whether contrived or not, it is important for teachers to have field experiences. Learning can be dialectic in such settings in which students and teachers learn from each other. Notably, all of the NYCTF mentioned receiving more training in terms of field experience (Alice), lesson planning (Benjamin), or development of curriculum resources (Carol). These comments, too, concur with some critics of alternative teacher education programs that early immersion is detrimental to teachers and students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005).

Perceptions of Teacher Preparedness

The teachers in the NYCTF program indicated they felt well prepared by their programs. Alice also mentioned emphasis on social justice in her program. The others indicated planning and curriculum as program strengths. While Benjamin indicated he felt well prepared by his program to teach urban students, Alice and Carol indicated that it took them more time to feel comfortable. They both alluded to not being prepared for the lack of resources in the schools. In the case of TFA teachers, Dana believed, although she had not yet taught, that she would be well prepared by her program. Faith also indicated that she felt well prepared and identified classroom management courses and the TFA summer institute as assets that helped to prepare her for teaching in urban schools. Elizabeth reported that her field placements were of significant assistance in her preparation, particularly in working with urban students. Elizabeth also mentioned preparation in cultural relevance and SJP as part of her program to prepare her to work with urban children.

Teaching Styles

When the data were analyzed, themes related to teaching styles also emerged. Because mathematics achievement is more aligned with school variables (Barr et al., 2006), we asked teachers if they connected SJP to their teaching of mathematics. When it came to pedagogy, Alice indicated that she connected mathematics instruction to social justice by attempting to connect the content to her students’ experiences and lives. She emphasized economics and used everyday purchases as examples. An example of her mathematics connection to increase student motivation included collecting data on the music produced by famous hip-hop artists, which also made connections to CRP. Carol, who had 2 years of prior teaching experience and taught early childhood special education students, indicated that she did not connect mathematics to social justice as frequently as she did with English and social studies, particularly noting that connections to social justice were made during Black History month. Benjamin had only been teaching for 8 days,
and he reported not having the opportunity to make connections to social justice. Benjamin also stated he believed his autistic students were too low functioning to connect this well, but claimed he made connections to social justice with parents and other teachers. However, he did not provide any examples. Dana (TFA), who did not have the opportunity to teach in an actual classroom setting prior to the interview, indicated

I will try to. Teaching in an urban community, the issue of social justice is important. Its importance should be obvious to the students. If it is not naturally obvious, I think it is our jobs as educators to make it known.

Elizabeth, who taught first-grade students in a large urban school district in Maryland, reported using SJP only in literacy but did not incorporate CRP even though her methods courses addressed cultural relevance and funds of knowledge. On further probing, she reported she was simply too overwhelmed with curriculum implementation and classroom management to make consistent links to CRP and SJP. When queried, Faith stated that she did not use CRP or SJP to teach core curriculum even though she taught PreK-5 English Language Learners. However, on further probing she explained that she did use elements of culture to help her students understand English vocabulary. Perhaps the demands placed on these two teachers in Maryland and Washington, D.C., inhibited them from going the extra step to ensure their lessons were more relevant to the lives of their students. New teachers have many tasks to attend to (e.g., taking attendance, collecting lunch money, communicating with parents, classroom management, and lesson planning), and, as a result, CRP and SJP may simply be overlooked.

When it came to implementing lesson plans, all three NYCTF teachers indicated that they do not follow a script in their teaching, which meant they had some freedom in their instruction. It should be noted that New York State has adopted the Common Core State Standards, which allows teachers to develop their own lesson plans as long as the Standards are met. Unlike the NYCTF teachers, Elizabeth and Faith indicated they were more inclined to teach with a script because the districts strictly aligned lesson planning to Standards and were preoccupied with making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) as required by NCLB (2001).

**Teacher Retention and Attrition**

While three of the teachers had taught less than 1 year, teacher retention and attrition emerged as a theme among this group of novice Black teachers. Two of the NYCTF teachers with less than 1 year of experience were older nontraditional teacher candidates. Recall that Alice was 53 and Benjamin was 60. Alternative certification programs often attract older teacher candidates who are most likely to be career changers (Madkins, 2011). While it is difficult to speculate what the attrition rate would be among teachers with less than 1 year of experience, Alice (NYCTF) stated,

I plan to stay in teaching and get certified in autism. This is the biggest population I’m working with. I plan to teach for at least the next 10 years and stay in special education. Maybe I’ll be in an administration position eventually. I work with the PTA, and I think it’s important to create a school community. Everyone working together is like the village raising the child. We need the sense of community, and we don’t have this. There is not a community investment. The only way to do that is to create activities that create the school community. Students succeed when there’s a strong school community.

Alice’s remarks reveal a strong sense of commitment to teaching, students, parents, and the community. Her care, concern, and values align with those of older teachers found in Mitchell’s (1998) study. Mitchell considered teaching as more than the mere transfer of academic knowledge, but considered variables in the affective domain such as culturally relevant pedagogy. Teaching was meaningful and engaging work with ramifications that went beyond the schoolhouse door. Like the teachers in Mitchell’s study, Alice spent money out of her own pocket on her students. Teaching was not a profession but a calling. This evidence suggests that Alice would most likely remain in education despite current challenges.

This was not the case, however, for Faith and Elizabeth. Recall Faith was a TFA teacher prepared in Washington, D.C., and Elizabeth received licensure after completing a graduate teacher education program. They were 24 and 26, respectively, when they left the teaching profession. Both of these young Black women were talented and gifted. They graduated at the top of their high school classes and attended prestigious undergraduate institutions in the Midwest. They had very high ideals and goals when they entered the teaching profession and were committed to their students. Faith reported that she often stayed up until 10 or 11 p.m. preparing her lessons and only had 4 or 5 hours of sleep during the week. Elizabeth often went to work at 6:30 a.m. and stayed until 4 p.m. during her first 2 years to prepare her lessons and make sure she attended to her first-grade students’ academic and developmental needs. When asked why they left the field, they responded,
I did not feel like I had the support I needed from the school district to succeed without stressing. I had met my two-year commitment, and I was ready to move on. (Faith, TFA)

Elizabeth and Faith left the teaching profession after only a few years, adding to the high rate of attrition and the teacher shortage. According to Ingersoll (2002), about one third of new teachers leave the field in the first 3 years. At the time of this interview, Elizabeth was pursuing a doctorate degree in education and planned to enter the professoriate. Thus, although she left the classroom, she did not leave the field of education and perhaps could make a difference in teacher preparation. Faith, however, left the field of education altogether. She recently began her own business and was working in New York in the fashion and cosmetic industry. While the sample is too limited to draw any conclusions from the data on teacher attrition, it is clear that school environment factors such as overemphasis on student outcomes and lack of support caused these two young Black teachers dissatisfaction and ultimately caused them to leave their schools.

Discussion

While the sample of teachers interviewed in this study was very small and cannot be generalized, the vignettes and findings delineated above shed important insight into these six Black teachers’ experiences as teacher candidates and as teachers in urban schools. First, they all believed their programs were of high quality and prepared them well to teach in urban spaces. However, the traditionally trained teacher was keenly aware of the lack of diversity in her program. If teacher education programs are going to make a difference in preparing teachers for urban schools, they must be serious about the recruitment and retention of teachers of color in their teacher preparation programs. This involves more than putting pictures of diverse teacher candidates on brochures but rather truly examining admission criteria and assessing programs to ensure candidates from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds are made welcome, treated fairly, and receive the supports they need to succeed. This also involves recruiting and retaining teacher educators of color who can serve as mentors and advocates for teacher candidates of color (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

Second, some NYCTF teachers had expressed concern that the swift immersion into the classroom may not be ideal for them or their students. Being thrust into a classroom without sufficient field experience and opportunities to develop best practices can be disastrous. It forces new teachers to sink or swim, and in many cases the teachers sink, leaving the profession far too soon and thus doing more damage to urban students who should receive the best teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000; McNeil, 2012).

Third, teacher educators must model how to engage in pedagogical practices that research has shown to be effective with children of color (e.g., CRP and SJP; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Leonard, 2008; Tate, 2008). Four of the six teachers in this sample who were actual classroom teachers did not fully use CRP and SJP to their advantage. One in particular noted that she only made connections during Black History month. While use of CRP or SJP is not a panacea, research has shown that these pedagogies can motivate children of color to learn (Lipka et al., 2005; Madkins, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2004). Future studies should investigate to what extent novice teachers have the flexibility to incorporate CRP and SJP into the curriculum given the current impetus on student outcomes. It is important that all teachers learn to teach for cultural relevance and social justice to motivate and empower all students (affective domain) and attend to content knowledge to impact student outcomes (cognitive domain) to prepare more students for college and inspire some of them to pursue teaching as a career.

Finally, the collective experiences of these novice Black teachers can be communicated to teacher candidates in initial licensure programs and potential administrators in principal licensure programs. Moreover, teacher educators and deans of schools and colleges of education should be aware of the barriers that inhibit the enrollment of Black teachers in traditional teacher education programs. While admission requirements such as passing Praxis I & II may be difficult to waive, support such as tutorials like those offered at HBCUs (Madkins, 2011) or financial support in the form of waivers to take the exams can be provided. Principals and superintendents should be made aware of variables that contribute to teacher satisfaction. For example, teacher autonomy and control over the curriculum are highly correlated with teacher satisfaction (Moore, 2012). Administrators should use such information to create school environments that encourage teacher retention.

Policy Implications

Recently, teacher education programs have taken criticism in regard to training high-quality teachers for urban classrooms (McNeil, 2012). Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, stated that “teacher preparation is broken and that the best educators need to be teaching the highest-need children” (McNeil, 2012, n.p.). The teacher pipeline has become a “revolving door” where one in five teachers quit annually (Ingersoll, 2002; Moore, 2012). Teacher stress coupled with pressure to improve student outcomes on high-stakes tests have been linked to teacher dissatisfaction (Moore, 2012). Recent changes in education policy in regard to meeting AYP have resulted in 33 states receiving waivers to opt out of NCLB (Resmovits, 2012). It remains to be seen what impact this will have on student performance and teacher retention.

Two of the six teachers interviewed in this study quit within the first 3 years. Interestingly, both teachers felt compelled to teach scripted lessons and listed teacher stress when queried about their decisions to quit. One identified lack of resources
and the other excessive testing, as additional reasons for leaving the classroom. Once teachers are prepared and licensed, schools and colleges of education have little to do with the school environment where teachers work. Schools and districts must also be accountable for teacher retention. Arne Duncan surmised that there are no schools or districts that “work ‘systematically’ to identify the best teachers and principals, then place them with the children with the highest needs” (McNeil, 2012, n.p.). Going a step further, we know of no school or district that provides the newest teachers with the best resources and latitude to creatively work with students without mandates. School environments must be conducive to teaching and learning and trust that teachers, who have completed more rigorous requirements than ever in the history of education, can do the job. Rather than deskilling teachers, we must find ways to restore respect for the position.

Recruiting and training Black teachers to work with Black students in urban and small urban school districts should be a national priority. High school dropout rates remain disproportionately high among African American students and college attainment among underrepresented students of color is below the national norm (Leonard & Evans, 2012; Mitchell, 1998; Viadero, 2005). It is important to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce so that all students can experience the passion and plurality that teachers of different backgrounds bring to the classroom. Past history reveals that Black teachers made a significant difference when it came to educating Black children, even in the face of limited resources (Irvine, 2002; Madkins, 2011; Mitchell, 1998; Siddle Walker, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2004).

Alternative certification programs continue to increase in size. These programs appear to be more attractive to older career changers and prospective Black teachers. Rather than criticizing these programs, perhaps schools and colleges of education should work with leaders of alternative programs to ensure that more diverse teachers are recruited, supported, and trained to teach effectively in urban schools. Clearly, changing the direction of the current course in teacher education is needed if teacher preparation, as we know it, intends to remain relevant. Adhering to the concerns voiced by the teachers in this study may increase teacher satisfaction and reverse the exodus of Black teachers from the field.

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1. Black and African American are used interchangeably in this article.

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