The Grow Your Own Collective

A Critical Race Movement to Transform Education

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Abstract

This article introduces a strategy to diversify the teaching workforce through de-centering teacher education as the primary stakeholder in the preparation of diverse teachers. The article expands the focus on teacher recruitment and retention by proposing a model that counters the educational context of White supremacy through Grow Your Own (GYO) programs. Using a critical race theory (CRT) orientation to educator development, this article introduces the national Grow Your Own Collective (GYOC) as an advocacy and support network for locally tailored collaborations to recruit, prepare, place, and retain culturally rooted teachers of color. In clarifying how GYOC applies CRT as an operational framework for preparing teachers to

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teach within historically underresourced school systems, the article defines GYO programs, shares nationwide models, and argues that collaborations between community-based organizations, districts, schools, and higher education partners are essential to disrupt institutionally racist practices. The article ultimately argues for a reconceptualization of teacher preparation processes to more fully recognize and address institutionalized racism at the K–12, collegiate, and community levels.

Introduction

Although seemingly every teacher-focused organization, school district, and department of education proclaims the value of a diverse teacher workforce, less conversation focuses on the role of teacher education in maintaining a predominantly White teacher workforce (Delpit, 2012). Indeed, the overwhelming Whiteness of higher education has a direct impact on the Whiteness of the teaching profession (Sleeter, 2001). Much research has documented the cumulative impact of racially hostile campus climates, including daily microaggressions, false color-blind or blatantly racist collegiate faculty, and White-centric curricula that students of color must navigate if they are to graduate from predominantly White institutions (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). The disproportionately smaller numbers of students of color who do graduate with bachelor's degrees and who attend teacher education programs face continued isolation, receiving instruction from a majority White professoriate around strategies to teach an increasingly diverse student population that often these very faculty are unskilled at teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Picower, 2009).

The alignment of White supremacy across the P–20 spectrum creates accumulated cognitive dissonance for students of color, ultimately leading to fewer teachers of color in U.S. classrooms (Kohli, 2014). Scholar-practitioners have pushed to reframe the problem of teacher shortages to confront the idea that recruiting and retaining teachers who hold the pedagogical and cultural expertise is required to deliver the best education to students in high-need areas (Gist, 2017; Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein, & Mayfield, 2012; Skinner, Garreton, & Schultz, 2011). This article extends the focus on recruitment and retention by proposing a model that recognizes the need to counter the educational context of White supremacy with Grow Your Own (GYO) programs. Thus this article clarifies the national Grow Your Own National Collective (GYOC), a collaborative of school, district, college, and, most essentially, community-based organizations committed to advocacy for and with antiracist, community-rooted teacher development models.[1]

To be clear, this article is not a step-by-step primer on best practices for teacher education programs to recruit, retain, or improve the lack of teacher diversity and preparation for teachers of diverse students. Instead, this article aims to decenter the role of teacher education as the primary responsibility for the preparation of diverse teachers; we argue here that community-based organizations, districts, schools, and higher education partners must collaborate as full partners to disrupt

institutionally racist practices. Therefore we expand beyond the traditional notion of teacher education by problematizing diversity within students and teachers, applying a critical race theory (CRT) orientation to educator development frameworks, and situating GYOC as a network for locally tailored collaborations to recruit, prepare, place, and retain culturally rooted teachers of color.

Context of Student and Teacher Diversity

As local, state, and federal educational reform efforts are debated at all levels, increasing requirements shaping who teaches, what they teach, and how we measure their effectiveness are being implemented across the country (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015). These reforms occur alongside a multitude of efforts to address systemic inequities that contribute to the seemingly ever-present opportunity gaps that shape public education in the United States. Despite the continual cycling through of change efforts, however, significant disparities in almost every measure of educational outcome for African American, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Latinx[2] students remain (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Rankin & Reason, 2005). These disparities, and the reforms attempting to address them, are exacerbated by both a growing teacher shortage and the lack of a diverse teaching workforce. This shortage is in danger of expanding rapidly as states increase the number of temporary or substandard permits they issue (California alone issued some 10,000 in 2015–2016), while enrollments in teacher preparatory programs continue to shrink (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hersh & Merrow, 2015). These shortages exacerbate entrenched inequalities in schools that educate low-income children.

Teachers of color continue to be disproportionately assigned to underresourced schools in low-income urban communities (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010; Epstein, 2006; Gordon, 1994). Additionally, students of color and students who live in poverty are 70% more likely than their White and affluent peers to have a teacher who is not certified in math, English, science, and social studies teaching them these four core subjects (Barton & Coley, 2009). They are also more likely to have a teacher who does not have a college major or minor in the subject area being taught (Darling-Hammond, 2010). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), of the 3.2 million public school teachers currently educating the nation's 49 million children, only 6% are Latinx, and 7% are African American. Of more than 13,500 public school superintendents, estimates suggest only 250 are Latinx and that 363 are African American.[3] Simply put, students of color, especially those who live in low-income communities, are more likely to be taught by less qualified, racially dissimilar teachers than White students.

Educator Preparation

The growing need for teachers is paralleled by a similar call to diversify the

teacher workforce, while a related concern is that the way educators are prepared does not reflect the realities and resource disparities of the range of racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse students in schools (Gist, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Perkins, 2016; Skinner, Garreton, & Schultz, 2011; Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012). One obvious systemic example is the technological gap between urban and rural schools and predominantly White college classrooms (Warschauer, Knobel, & Stone, 2004). Another is the English monolingualism of predominantly White college classrooms that serves as a stark contrast to the vast multilingualism in K–12 classrooms (Curtis, 2013).

In addition to university structures not directly aligned to P–12 classrooms, schools, or districts, how potential teachers choose teaching as a profession reflects a lack of systemic intentionality and often requires substantial personal or familial resources (Goings & Bianco, 2016; Leech, Haug, & Bianco, 2015). As a result of antiquated pathways from college to the K–12 classroom, the majority of teachers in the U.S. remain White women, further exacerbating the need for culturally responsive approaches that reflect the increasingly diverse student population (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Gordon, 1994; Perkins, 2016). Research has indicated that students of color benefit in multiple ways by experiencing school with a diverse teacher workforce. Students are less likely to be expelled or suspended, more likely to be recommended for gifted education, less likely to be misplaced in special education, and more likely to graduate from high school on time (Antecol, Eren, & Ozbeklik, 2015; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Shanker Institute, 2015).

Critical Race Theory in Praxis

GYOC applies CRT as a framework for preparing teachers for service within historically underresourced school systems, particularly because of the need for a systemic antiracism lens (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT scholars are committed to recognizing racism as an operating principle in the design of schools, colleges, and, by extension, teacher education programs (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2012). Indeed, Ladson-Billings (1999) framed the foundational U.S. curriculum as "designed to maintain a White supremacist master script" (p. 21). Thus, based on the work of two scholar-practitioners central to the formation of GYOC, we adapt four tenets:

1. Racism is everywhere and all the time.

2. The purpose of schools is to silence students and educators of color.

3. White interests attempt to colonize every effort that centers students or educators of color.
4. Nurturing, valuing, and centering the perspectives of students and educators of color are the ways to transform the first three tenets. (Ard & Knaus, 2013, pp. 5–6)

CRT thus provides guiding principles for GYOC to examine, support, and foster

GYO programs that intend to dismantle "the structures of oppression" (Ard & Knaus, 2013, p. 6).

To that end, preparing local teachers to serve in the very schools where they live and may have grown up becomes an exercise in transforming White supremacist educational practices (Skinner et al., 2011). The collective context of race-neutral pedagogies, racist policies, and intentionally unequal teacher education practices prompted the need to develop GYOC.

Grow Your Own Collective

As university-based GYO programs have proliferated in response to the need to diversify the teacher workforce (Jenlink, 2012; Madda & Schultz, 2009; Skinner et al., 2011), the need for a clear definition of GYO programs, rooted in research, practice, and a critical race examination of systemic oppression, has increased. GYOC thus defines GYO programs as highly collaborative, community-rooted, intensive supports for recruiting, preparing, placing, and retaining diverse classroom teachers who dismantle institutional racism and work toward educational equity. Central to GYOC's argument is the notion that growing one's own must include placement and retention efforts for teachers of record, with an explicit focus on addressing structural barriers and providing culturally responsive development along the lifetime trajectories of educators.

Recognizing the national proliferation of programs that identify themselves as GYO (Professional Educators Standards Board, 2016), GYOC was formed in 2016 to identify, research, support, and incubate programs that fit within GYOC's defini-tion. GYOC contends that one critical strategy to diversify the teaching workforce is to develop programs that intentionally recruit, prepare, place, and retain diverse teachers. Programs that address the four development arenas are considered part of the GYO pipeline. In essence, GYOC utilizes a structural lens to ensure that all aspects of long-term, culturally responsive teacher of color development align around CRT practice.

Because GYO programs seek to staff high-needs schools with adults from the schools' neighborhoods, GYOC's operating assumption is that teacher candidates likely experience many of the racial injustices faced by the students they serve. Indeed, locally grown teaching programs presume that candidates have experienced oppression as K–12 students and must navigate racially exclusive higher education systems to then be placed (and retained) as teachers within racially disparate schools. Therefore creating GYO programs does not excuse White educators from examining their own implicit bias; indeed, successful GYO programs integrate White educators and educators of color in an effort to decenter the segregation of teacher education.

GYOC fosters programs that envision teachers as culturally responsive and community-rooted change agents with valuable insider knowledge. These teachers already have a cultural, linguistic, and geographic foundation as insiders within

specific school communities; they are community activists, concerned parents, and students from the local community with a wealth of life experiences (Rogers-Ard et al., 2012). These teachers intentionally bridge the school–home divide while providing culturally responsive education and advanced academic opportunities for students (Gay, 2018; Valdés, 1996). In short, GYOC aims to expand beyond both the one multicultural education course teacher education students take and the limited professional development teachers receive toward integrating CRT-informed cultural responsiveness throughout the educator life cycle.

Types of Grow Your Own Structures

GYO programs intend to diversify the teacher workforce, increase retention, and improve the quality of preparation efforts through some combination of university, community college, community organization, and/or district partnerships. By recruiting locally, these programs are situated at universities, community colleges, community-based organizations, and school districts to prepare and place adults familiar with the cultural context of their students.

GYO programs recruit teaching candidates from the local context, which includes recent college graduates and career changes. Central to effective recruitment is the notion of partnering with local community organizations that are familiar with target populations. Given the focus on recruiting adults already steeped in local knowledge, GYO programs prepare teachers with localized curricular and pedagogical approaches; this requires faculty, community experts with cultural knowledges, and school-based collaboration to blend insider knowledge with research-informed best practice. Many GYO programs are delivered off-site and in-community as ways of decentering the racially hostile campus climate that university-based programs reflect (Madda & Schultz, 2009).

Once GYO teachers are prepared, the focus shifts to placement of community educators within schools where cultural isolation (Rogers-Ard, 2015) is not a factor. Advocacy with site-based leaders and district talent departments is a critical component to ensure that educators of color are well supported at the site. When all of the three aforementioned approaches synergistically align with continual professional development and growth, GYO's theory of action results in expectations of increased teacher retention and locally informed, culturally responsive definitions of student success.

Several organizational models suggest myriad ways in which GYO programs can be conceptualized and implemented to sustainably prepare local educators. These include community-centric models, localized neighborhood partnerships between district and colleges, district-centered models, statewide and national networking models, and high school–based programs. GYOC operates out of the presumption that capacity to adapt to local, regional, and statewide pressures, strengths, and limitations is critical to ensuring longevity and sustainability.

Some early GYO programs intentionally centered specific community residents within specific geographic communities. For example, the Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture (INPEACE) is based in rural Kapolei on the island of Oahu. INPEACE nurtures "community members and empower[s] them with specific knowledge and skills so they can realize a more productive, fulfilling life. In turn, the community in which they live becomes the community in which they serve" (Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture [INPEACE], n.d.). These guiding principles center and reflect local Native Hawaiian community contexts, and INPEACE offers an array of indigenous-centric parent and child development efforts, economic and workforce development, student supports, and cultural knowledge programs (INPEACE, n.d.).

INPEACE operates a teacher development program (K lia and Ka Lama Education Academy) that partners with local schools, the state department of education, a local community college, and a 4-year university program to align preparation and support efforts. The predominantly Native Hawaiian candidates are recruited from the geographically isolated Waianae coast; they enter at multiple stages through completion of a college degree and teacher certification. Many begin as parents who enroll their children in INPEACE's preschool academy, and some transition to working in its early childhood education programs. Most candidates spend years in INPEACE programming, eventually joining a cohort navigating through community college to a 4-year teacher preparation program, with professional development and Native Hawaiian educator mentors throughout the process.

Similarly framed within geographic contexts, localized neighborhood partnerships between schools, districts, and colleges are another adaptation of GYO programs. GYO Illinois was initially a statewide model (which has since been adopted yet again in consideration of changes in state funding models) that focuses on community-centered cohorts of community members becoming local teachers.[4] GYO Illinois

> grew from the work of Chicago community organizations in low-income neighborhoods who identified high teacher turnover and a cultural disconnect between the students and teachers as key barriers to sustained school improvement and student achievement. GYO was created to train and retain certified teachers of color committed to staying in high needs schools in the communities where they live.

Thus, while GYO Illinois serves as a statewide network, individual GYO programs tailor pathways toward their local residents, with each program establishing a web of community, district, and higher education partners. Candidates are parents, community members, and paraprofessionals in low-income communities who are then supported throughout the journey to complete a teaching certificate. Once a teacher is placed by a local district, GYO Illinois provides him or her with additional in-classroom mentoring over the first 3 years and has placed more than 120 teachers. Extending the neighborhood focus of GYO Illinois to reflect citywide boundaries, district-based programs approach recruitment, preparation, placement, and reten-

tion from within the framework of an organizational entity. Teach Tomorrow in Oakland (TTO) was a 9-year-long program that placed more than 160 teachers of color (Rogers-Ard, 2018). TTO collaborated with university certificate programs and offered its own admissions, professional development, and support programs; candidates were in the pipeline until they earned their bachelor's degrees, and once fully admitted, they were placed as teachers of record while earning their credential. TTO has since split into two GYO programs, one of which is the Grow Our Own Teacher Pathway, a program designed to increase the number of special education teachers of color by recruiting local adults and allowing teachers to earn their credential while being teachers of record (Oakland Unified School District, n.d.). The second, based entirely on TTO best practices, is the newly formed Classified 2 Teaching program within the Oakland Unified School District, which utilizes former TTO teachers as mentors and pedagogical coaches to support transitioning classified staff into classroom teachers.

California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) offers a university-based adaptation, applying similar parameters as GYO Illinois and TTO but extending beyond neighborhoods and cities to the geographic reach of the university. CSUDH partners with local community colleges and districts to offer a range of pathway options for preservice teachers and includes an alignment of state and federal grant sources to provide support along the pipeline. These pathways (framed as alternative pathways) include online programs, STEM, urban-focused programs, and other adaptations to match the needs of a wide range of preservice teachers (California State University Dominguez Hills, n.d.). Most students begin in one of the community college programs and transfer with a cohort into CSUDH, where they continue certification course work while retaining jobs as district-hired para-professionals.

In addition to these neighborhood, community, district, and university adaptations, other approaches include statewide and national networking approaches to support GYO programs. The aforementioned GYO Illinois served as a statewide network to support programs. The National Latino Education Research and Policy Project (NLERAP) similarly reflects an opportunity to link "experienced education researchers with an emphasis on Latino/a education" (National Latino Education Research and Policy Project, 2018). NLERAP promotes parental and community participation in school governance, develops leadership and political awareness among youths, promotes systemic change, and improves academic achievement. While NLERAP does not specifically focus on GYO programs, their values directly align, suggesting an approach that could extend ethnic-specific programs across the United States. Such state and national adaptations can dramatically expand the reach of programs that may operate within relative isolation.

A final adaptation, either school, district, or college-based high school programs, continues to expand across districts and states. Often referred to as high school teaching academies, these pipelines foster early interest in teaching as a profes-

sion. Some programs start as early as middle school, and participating students often mentor younger students, gain college readiness skills, early college credit, strengthen academic and public speaking skills, and examine educational inequalities. One such program, identified in part due to its commitment to CRT as guiding framework, is a concurrent enrollment program designed for 11th- and 12th-grade students.[5] Since 2010, Pathways2Teaching has served hundreds of students in several Denver metro school districts, and like in many high school teaching academies, some graduates do go on to enroll in teacher education programs or related fields. These adaptations are presented not as a cumulative list but as representative structural examples that suggest the wide range of opportunities to frame and engage in GYO programming. Moreover, they suggest the importance of creativity in adapting to specific cultural nuance, geographic influences, and organizational partnerships to encourage continual vigilance toward recognizing the structures of racism that collude to maintain barriers for adults of color becoming long-term teachers of color.

Creating a GYO Movement

GYOC's synergy is based on a common understanding of what is needed to develop and sustain a successful GYO program across numerous contexts. GYOC thus advocates for the expansion of GYO programming that aims to create localized pathways, rooted in specific, identified cultural and community contexts to address the democratic imperative to diversify the teaching workforce. Critical to GYOC is the notion of modeling the very antiracist orientation that CRT provides, and as such, founding members comprise a combination of scholars, educators, community-based practitioners, and others with shared experience leading programs that have, as larger structural visions, the recruitment, preparation, placement, and retention of diverse, socially just teachers of color.

Next steps in the GYOC effort to foster a national movement that shares the burden and expertise of developing long-term educators include identifying, replicating, and advocating for GYO-supportive programming and policies. GYOC identifies GYO programs as those that engage in all four of the areas of the teacher development process: recruitment, preparation, placement, and retention of teachers. Programs that prepare local teachers through high school– and college-based programs are defined as part of the GYO pipeline and thus may exemplify best practice in some of the four needed development arenas.

GYOC has identified very few programs that encompass each of the four areas; therefore GYOC encourages highlighting creative approaches, critical partnerships, identifying barriers and navigational successes, and documenting best practices operationalized at the local level. Indeed, many GYO-aligned programs operate in ways that concretely identify barriers that adults of color face along the pathway toward a career as a teacher so that these barriers can be circumnavigated or, potentially, changed. Thus GYOC further includes a focus on identifying local,

regional, and statewide policy advocacy efforts, including alignments of legislation that supports strengthening each of the four development arenas.

Ultimately, GYOC aims to transform the very way teacher preparation is conceptualized and sees as foundational to that effort a cross-collaborative network that connects programs and thought leaders, strengthens current and potential new models, and helps develop a national vision for implementation and scale-up. Central to next steps in transforming teacher education into a shared-responsibility model is sharing best practices across school districts, community-based programs, state educational business units, and universities across the country to sustain current and incubate new programs.

Notes

[1] See https://www.gyocollective.org/

[2] Recognizing a lack of shared acceptance for racialized terminology, the term *Latinx* is used to refer inclusively to the wide gender spectrum as well as the range of students who identify as Mexican American, Chicano/a, Latino/a, and Hispanic.

[3] See also http://www.alasedu.org/ and http://www.nabse.org/

[4] See http://www.growyourownteachers.org/programs

[5] See http://www.pathways2teaching.com/

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