Exploring the Perspectives
of Teacher Educators of Color:
What Do They Bring
to Teacher Education?[1]

A. Lin Goodwin
Teachers College, Columbia University

Much has been written about the paucity of teachers of color[2] in the profession (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Dilworth & Brown, 2001; Gordon, 2000). The majority of teachers in the U.S. are White, female, monolingual, and middle class (Goodwin, 1997; Rong & Preissle, 1997; Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992); only 13% of teachers identify as persons of color (Dilworth & Brown, 2001). The concern about the limited presence of teachers of color is typically related to the increasing numbers of children of color in U.S. schools (Hodgkinson, 2001) and continuing evidence that their levels of achievement fall far below that achieved by their White peers (Gay, 2000; Goodwin, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). There is general agreement that children of color—and indeed all children— benefit from interaction with teachers who represent the diversity that is increasingly characterizing the U.S. population and who bring a culturally diverse mindset into the classroom and the curriculum (Dilworth & Brown, 2001).

There is also agreement that, despite numerous efforts to recruit teachers of color, the proportion of teachers of color is not likely to achieve parity with that of students of color and that the profession cannot rely on teachers of color solely to support the development of children of color (Gay, 2000). Thus, there has been a great deal of attention paid in

A. Lin Goodwin is an associate professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City, New York. E-mail goodwin@ tc.columbia.edu

the past twenty years to preparing White teachers to work with children of color in culturally responsive ways.

Most teachers continue to receive their preparation from teacher education programs in schools and colleges of education. This begs the question—who are these teachers in preparation studying with? Who are they learning from? Demographic data reveal that the percentage of teacher educators of color is equally as dismal as the percentage of teachers of color. The teacher education professoriate is dominated by European American men and women, specifically, 88% are White and 81% of these are between 45 and 60 years old (Ladson-Billings, 2001). This means that most teacher educators are quite distant from their own P-12 classroom experience and teacher preparation (if they had these experiences to begin with), and are not likely to have first-hand knowledge of teaching children of color, especially in urban and central city schools. What we have then is a national phenomenon whereby a majority White, and monolingual, teaching force is being taught by a majority White, and "culturally encapsulated" (Melnick & Zeichner, 1997, p. 23) teacher education force, even while the nation's classrooms become more black and brown, immigrant and non-English speaking.

This study explored the perspectives of a group of teacher educators of color in an effort to capture their perceptions of teaching and teacher education. The driving purpose behind the study was to find out what teacher educators of color bring to their work and to the teaching profession—what are their experiences, goals, intentions, passions, challenges and hopes—and how do they see themselves in relation to their White peers? Seven teacher educators were interviewed with each interview running about an hour. Respondents were either invited to participate in the study or identified through a nomination process, using three criteria: each had to be (1) a person of color, with (2) prior experience as a teacher educator in a variety of capacities who expressed (3) willingness to participate in the study.

Each was asked three questions: (1) Describe your perspective as a teacher educator of color; (2) Describe at least two significant experiences which have shaped your perspective as a teacher educator of color; and (3) Describe the ways in which your perspective as a teacher educator of color influences your work. Data were sorted according to the research questions and then examined for major themes, using a constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Together, the group represented the four major visible racial/ethnic groups (Carter & Goodwin, 1994) in this country, specifically Latina (2: Columbian; Mexican American), African American (2), Asian American (2: Japanese; Chinese American), and Native American (1). The sample

was also all female although gender was not a criterion for selection. All the respondents have had prior teaching experience either in the elementary (5) or secondary (2) grades, and described serving as teacher educators in a variety of capacities including as cooperating or mentoring teachers (4), supervisors of preservice (4) and/or inservice teachers (3), and as college- or graduate-level instructors (3). One respondent had been the director of a teacher education program.

While years of experience in the education field ranged from 27 to five and a half years, seven of the five were very experienced with more than fifteen years in the profession. At the time of the study, all seven respondents were working in colleges or graduate schools of education—five as professors, one as an instructor. The one respondent not actively teaching was engaged in teacher education research, but had most recently been a teacher educator and spoke of herself in that capacity[3]. All seven women defined teacher education as their primary responsibility or priority.

To gain a sense of the level of diversity of the setting within which each respondent worked, respondents were asked to identify other faculty of color colleagues as well as to provide the percentage of students of color at their institutions. One respondent spoke programmatically and indicated there were no other faculty of color in her program. The rest of the respondents talked in institutional terms with other teacher educators of color ranging in number from two to twelve (when instructors were included) or two to six (professorial rank only). All the respondents indicated that they were one of a small number of faculty, which is in keeping with a predominantly White and male teacher education professoriate (Fuller, 1992; Irvine, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

In terms of students, respondents either based their response on their particular program (e.g., secondary social studies, early childhood/elementary) or on the general *preservice* student teacher population at their institution. Individual program percentages reported were much higher and ranged from 20 to 28 percent preservice students of color (one exception was the bilingual certification program which was reported to have 75% students of color). In contrast, institutional percentages of preservice students of color were reported to be much lower, ranging from less than one percent to five percent of the student body. Thus, institutional figures were more reflective of national trends that show students of color entering teacher education at very low rates (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Dilworth & Brown, 2001; Fuller, 1992; Gordon, 2000).

Findings

Perspectives of Teacher Educators of Color

The discussion of findings that follows is organized according to the three interview questions. Question one—*Describe your perspective as a teacher educator of color*—asked respondents to offer their perspectives in terms of (a) what schools of education should emphasize in their preparation of teachers, (b) the skills and knowledge they feel teachers should possess, (c) the skills and knowledge they feel teacher educators should possess, (d) the kinds of field experiences to which they feel student teachers should be exposed, (e) how they feel their perspectives compare to the views of their European-American colleagues, and (f) how/if they feel their perspectives are acknowledged or supported by their colleagues and/or institution. In sorting through the responses to question 1, it appeared that respondents did not really differentiate between probes (a) and (b) and so the responses to these two components of the question were collapsed.

What should schools of education emphasize in their preparation of teachers, and what skills and knowledge should teachers possess? Respondents identified a wide range of skills and knowledge including a strong grounding in teaching methods, informed decision-making, conflict resolution skills, ability to integrate or connect subject matter, flexibility, problem solving, the capacity for continuous professional development and growth, ability to work collaboratively, knowledge of trends in the field or profession, communication skills, curiosity, knowledge of student development or how children "feel, respond and learn," and leadership skills. None of these skills or kinds of knowledge was mentioned by more than two respondents. Thus, it appeared that respondents did not necessarily agree on the essential skills and knowledge for teachers, even while those they did outline most teacher educators would not argue against.

However, there were two points of convergence where respondents demonstrated a high level of agreement. First, all the respondents agreed that it is important for schools of education to ensure that teachers acquire deep subject matter knowledge. Knowledge of content and the structure of the disciplines were uniformly considered important by all the respondents. Second, respondents all were in agreement that teachers should be aware of the cultural dimensions of practice and the implications of diversity for instruction. Everyone in the sample agreed that teachers should have knowledge of culturally diverse groups. This knowledge was defined as *specific* knowledge about the lives and ways of groups labeled as "different" in this country, *political-historical* knowledge, and *community* knowledge.

First, respondents spoke generally of "cultural knowledge," "sensitivity to 'others'... awareness of stereotypes," "knowledge of different people, different ethnic groups, knowledge of diversity," but punctuated these general principles with specific emphases such as "understanding children of color and the circumstances they are in," acquiring "knowledge of students' development, cultures, languages, and access to resources," and "having a real sense of the history of the culture, [being] well-versed in the literature that has emerged from that community."

Second, respondents defined cultural knowledge as political knowledge and intimated a relationship between cultural understanding and positive social change for children in their use of terms such as "social responsibility," "social action," "advocacy" and "urgency" in their descriptions. Their responses emphasized the institutionalized nature of oppression and "the moral dimension of education." This translates into teachers "finding ways of addressing the issues of discrimination and its consequences," and "understanding policies that affect schooling as we know it at different historical junctures" and "how the structures of schooling promote inequality."

Finally, three of the group tied cultural understanding to the community, both in terms of creating community and relating to children through knowledge of the communities to which they belong. In the words of one respondent, teachers need to simultaneously "build community in the classroom...[and make a] commitment to working with the community long term." According to this teacher educator, "home-school relationships give [teachers] the opportunity to understand the nature or character of the problems [teachers] are faced with." Another respondent emphasized knowing "how to talk to parents," while a third underscored knowledge of "where children are or what each is about."

Respondents clearly did not define culture as merely a source of content, or as a quality simply to be celebrated, but expressed concern with the long history of differential and unequal schooling experiences as well as inadequate access to resources endured by children of color and poverty (cf. Carter & Goodwin, 1994). These teacher educators emphasized how important it is for teachers to "make things more culturally relevant when children are different (culturally) from themselves," but also pointed out that:

> Something explicit must be said/done about cultural difference so that teachers do not get reinforcement for the idea that 'everyone's the same after all'. They are (the same) and they aren't, and teachers need to understand this in a profound way.

What skills and knowledge should teacher educators possess? In most

cases, respondents began by stating that teacher educators should possess skills and qualities similar to those they consider necessary for teachers. However, in each case, respondents also added additional skills and knowledge they deemed specifically pertinent for teacher educators, namely teaching knowledge, knowledge of diverse contexts, and political knowledge. Knowledge of teaching was mentioned by six of the seven respondents: "strong knowledge base on teaching, curriculum development," "ability to demonstrate a range of teaching skills," "proficiency with teaching," etc. Respondents seemed to agree that "teaching experience would be nice" or that "teaching experience is important."

Respondents also specified that teacher educators should have experience in particular settings, such as "teaching experience in varied school settings (i.e., monocultural, multicultural, high SES, low SES)," or experiences with "inner city or something that is culturally different, something where there are potential inequities." One teacher educator expressed a strong sentiment that teacher educators "should have to teach in an urban school."

Last, respondents stressed that teacher educators should "have a broader understanding of the social/political context of our society and how schooling has been inequitable." The notion of having a political or moral stance was evident in the responses of five of the seven teacher educators. This means understanding that "teaching is a value-laden and moral activity" and that teacher educators need to be able to "talk about different subject matter (such as race, racism, values, etc.," and should be "politically and socially involved in issues related to diverse populations." The words of one member of the group were especially pointed:

> Teacher educators should possess a moral commitment to justice and equity. Once that underlines our work, then we can make our advisement, curriculum approaches and content, selection of resources, and evaluation strategies be student-centered and socially responsible.

What kinds of field experiences should student teachers be exposed to? Respondents were of several minds when it came to field experiences. However, they all agreed that students should be exposed to as wide a variety of settings as possible. Nonetheless, definitions of "variety" differed. One respondent was very explicit:

> Students should have at least one field experience in each of the following:
> (1) a school setting with at least 50% students of color
> (2) a school setting that is facing many challenges (i.e., economic, political, racial and/or organizational)
> (3) a school setting that is in the process of school improvement.

Others spoke more generally of "a variety of classrooms" or "variety is key." However, no matter how respondents defined "variety," they each indicated in some way that it is important for student teachers to gain experience with diverse populations. For example, one respondent advocated "several experiences in a variety of contexts with students of mixed ethnic and racial groups," while another stated,

> My own bias over the years has been to expose all students to public schools, preferably those that teach something useful about the real world of education. Today that means having at least some cultural diversity, including racial and ethnic diversity in urban areas.

Another respondent felt that field experiences should be those that demonstrate "a commitment to multiculturalism." Two other respondents emphasized involvement with the students' community outside of school; thus student teachers would be engaged in "community service, working with students in non-academic circumstances" which would allow them to "get a different take on the conditions, the difficulties with which families must deal." Thus, the range of responses offered notwithstanding, six of the seven respondents articulated the importance of diverse field placement settings.

How do your perspectives regarding all the above compare to the views of your European American colleagues? This question drew a unanimous response. Respondents uniformly expressed differences of perspective or priority when they compared themselves to their European American counterparts. Invariably, these differences stemmed from the way these teacher educators of color define priorities given the unique cultural lens through which each views the world. As one respondent said:

> I find that culturally I have been influenced by a vision of teaching that calls for paying attention to the whole person and I have found that to be or not to be the case with teachers from all groups. Maybe it is a philosophical perspective about the all-encompassing nature of teaching, as a moral act and not a technical profession.

Questions or issues of culture and race were identified as prominent departure points. Respondents felt their European American colleagues "pay lip service to it (diversity)," and their commitments to diversity are "on the surface," "it's PC to say something like that." According to respondents, for European American faculty, because "it's an issue of PC… they are going to go along to some extent," yet "when they pick a school or experience, it has nothing to do with race, poverty, they don't apply what they say they believe in." Respondents also stated that their position "as a member of an oppressed group in society" meant that they

were "generally more interested in 'difference' than my European American colleagues" and understood the importance of not "los[ing] sight of micro-social issues." Being able to look at society through different eyes also meant being "more willing to see the relevance of discriminatory practices than they (European American colleagues) are, to see the hierarchies that may follow." Overall, these teacher educators of color mistrusted "how hard they (European American colleagues) work to get at [diversity issues]," and perceived that "as long as it's (diversity issues) superficial and they don't have to do anything, it's okay."

Respondents also spoke at length about several shared experiences: they defined themselves as constantly "beating the drum" in support of issues of culture and diversity in the face of a perceived reluctance on the part of White colleagues to work in urban schools; they spoke of European American colleagues' "narrow focus" which cannot adequately prepare student teachers for the real world of teaching; and they expressed concern about teacher education curricula centered on "the Western canon approach." There was sometimes a touch of sadness in respondents' answers when they described what they perceive to be a lack of caring on the part of their European American colleagues: "One of the things I think is missing is compassion; if they [European American colleagues] don't have it, they can't teach it." Respondents saw this lack of caring as specific to communities of color.

One respondent commented that she has "had a hard time convincing my colleagues that inner city teachers deserve access to resources," while another noted that "the most important distinction" in her 25 years of experience between teacher educators of color and those who are European American "has been [the] distinction of commitment to making a change in the community. I see a passion (in European American teacher educators) for producing students who can read and write but I don't see commitment to community transformation."

Because this study is based on perception and self report, there might be the temptation to minimize the power of the feelings articulated by these seven teacher educators of color, to accuse them of being too "sensitive" or "radical" or of misinterpreting the context in which they each work. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that perceptions of reality are expressions of how reality is defined and experienced. What then becomes clear from these responses is that these respondents feel their differences keenly and do not see their practice and commitments as aligned with those of their White colleagues.

The lack of philosophical or professional congruence respondents seemed to feel with their White colleagues was not reflected in the level of support they perceived to be available. Their answers to the question,

Are your perspectives acknowledged and supported by your colleagues and/or institution? were not uniform. Four of the group either felt that their views were consistent with institutional philosophy and they were therefore "ideologically supported" or that they felt themselves to be personally respected. Two respondents expressed varying levels of support from some to none, while the remaining respondent expressed a complete absence of support to the extent that she believes her views have "cost me greatly." Thus, the majority of respondents believed themselves to be supported by their colleagues and/or institution, which is curious given the isolation and conflict they expressed in response to the previous question. One explanation may be that there may be support for their views in theory, but that there is a gap between theory and practice so that in their daily work they are engaged in forwarding an agenda that appears to have few takers.

Significant Shaping Experiences

The second question asked respondents to *Describe at least two significant experiences which have shaped your perspective as a teacher educator of color*. Respondents were invited to choose any experiences from any period in their lives. Since each story was unique and space does not allow the recounting of all fourteen, analysis took the form of trying to identify themes that seemed to characterize the stories. Three themes emerged. The first theme seemed to be embedded in childhood experiences of "otherness." Four of the seven respondents recalled specific moments during their formative years when they felt the pain of being different. One respondent remembered being called racial names by children who spat on her and threw gravel at her. When she went to her teacher for solace and informed her that she had been called racial names, her teacher responded by saying, "That's okay, that's what you are." The other respondents talked more generally of feeling "conspicuous as a school child" or "experiencing isolation...being a student of color."

A second theme was the impact of teaching experiences when four respondents were made acutely aware of the deficit or negative views fellow teachers had of children of color. One teacher educator remembered how a White teacher commented on how "Ray-ray's hair smelled funny" because of the "hair grease he was using." The respondent (who, like "Ray-ray," is African American) said she thought to herself that if she hadn't been there to intervene and explain, the teacher would have assumed that something was wrong with Ray-ray or that he wasn't clean. She concluded her story by saying, "It dawned on me how little White folks know about other folks, how inattentive they are and how willing

they are to think there's something wrong with you." Another respondent recalled a poignant tale involving one of her students:

> I was twenty-five and taught in East Harlem. I was asked to place a student in a class for speech-impaired and slow learners. I gave him the required tests in his native language. He was not speech impaired, nor a slow learner. I explained that I could not sign the recommendation. I was asked to resign. I brought up [my] training and certification as a translator and interpreter and threatened to bring in lawyers in defense of the child. I also spoke to the parents, got him a scholarship at a local parochial school. His parents took him out of school. Then I resigned, but in my resignation I made sure the child's ability to benefit from schooling was not going to be harmed by this school. When this child got to fifth grade he went on to one of the selective middle schools and then to Bronx Science (a highly selective school in New York city). He graduated from Cornell and is now a biologist with a drug company. This is the child I carry in my mind when I think what a teacher needs to know and be able to do.

Yet another respondent spoke emotionally of an entire teaching career spent with children of color and a majority of White teaching colleagues and being confronted with "the blatant ignorance as well as the almost perverse pleasure that seemed to be taken in [the failures of] children in these areas that was so egregious, so offensive, so appalling."

The consequence of memories characterized by the two themes described above seemed to be that respondents felt compelled to become advocates for children of color. Members of the group spoke of feeling that "something has to be done, people can't do this to children," that their colleagues needed to be made aware of their own "insensitivity, stereotypes and ethnocentric ideas" and of "not wanting my students of color to experience that (isolation)." These memories strengthened respondents' resolve to fight for children.

The third theme could be termed "awakenings." Five respondents were "awakened" to the culturally grounded nature of teaching as a result of their own experiences as students or faculty in higher education. One respondent talked about finally working at an institution where the student body is diverse and she is "part of a faculty of color" which has made her feel "unusually supported." Quite the opposite is true for another respondent who was teaching predominantly White students at a predominantly White institution. She characterized her students as "isolated and parochial" and realized that "things haven't changed much since I went through (teacher preparation)." As a result, she has had "very disturbing thoughts about who's going into teaching." Still another respondent recalled being introduced to sociolinguistics and ethnography, which enabled her to think about her teaching in a whole new light.

She said she realized "I could have been much more powerful in the beginning (of her teaching career)" if she had then what she possesses now, the tools necessary to come to know different communities in deeper, more meaningful ways.

In each case, the stories appear as sign posts on each respondent's journey toward a pedagogy that meets the needs of a diverse population of students whether P-12 or post-secondary. As persons who do not fit the cultural mainstream, their own experiences as children have given them firsthand knowledge of what it feels like to be defined as "other." As teachers, they were able to then look at schooling practices through culturally sensitized eyes and recognize inequitable practices and injustice. As adults they are now able to confront racism, discrimination and inequality because they are equipped with tools, knowledge and strategies that were not available to them as children; as adults and professionals they have found their critical voice. It seems safe to say that given their childhood experiences, these respondents are uniquely positioned to empathize with students of color because they have been where these students now are. They may also be better able to discern hidden potential in children of color simply because they themselves had much potential as learners, talents that may have escaped the eyes of mainstream educators. These stories are the foundation of culturally grounded and culturally responsive practice.

The Influence of Perspective

Finally, respondents were asked to *Describe the ways in which your perspective as a teacher educator of color influences your work*. In answering this question, respondents were guided to think in terms of teaching, advisement and supervision. They were also asked if they felt their practices differ when working with students of color as opposed to White students.

Teaching. Six of the seven respondents were able to articulate ways in which their teaching is influenced by their perspectives as persons of color. As one teacher educator said, "being a person of color influences everything that I do." Respondents shared that they "select readings differently from faculty not of color" and "try to include studies or articles about issues of difference—race, gender, linguistic difference" or "texts or articles that are written by authors of color and/or represent the perspectives of people of color." They also consider the settings where student teachers will work and "choose materials that will help [them] work in different environments and not feel scared." The idea of seeing with different or "racialized eyes" (Goodwin, 2001) was mentioned again; respondents expressed the belief that they "tend to see some blatant

inequities that other people just miss" and in their classes they "tend to focus more on trying to get students to see exceptions to the rule…to ask hard questions…raise controversial issues." The one respondent who did not specify ways in which her culture and race influence her teaching works in bilingual education and stated that everything she does is grounded in who she is racially and culturally and in the central role she feels culture plays in schooling.

Advisement. When it came to advisement, respondents were less likely to talk in terms of what they do as faculty of color and more likely to talk in terms of how students of color perceive them. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to collapse the responses to this question with their comments regarding how they work with students of color versus European American students. Five of the group felt that students of color seek them out and feel more comfortable speaking with them, particularly about non-school related concerns. In turn, respondents reported that they felt "unable to not work with them" even when these students were not their "official advisees." Four of the teacher educators reported making sure that they held students of color to high standards or the same standards as all other students, "because I feel and know that an excellent education is the key to survival for many people of color in this country." This also meant making sure "that students are getting the proper advisement" for program completion and being "very directive" with students of color who are "in trouble." Two of the respondents talked about relating to students of color through a common home language, while another talked about taking cultural factors into account. For this respondent, "cultural factors" was defined very broadly to include any student who might not fit into the main-stream (one example she offered was a student coming from a rural area to her very urban institution). Thus, she felt compelled to reach out to any student who was "feeling a sense of not belonging." Finally, two respondents discussed "not falling into stereotypes" and taking care not to make assumptions about students. Thus, all the respondents felt that they did indeed work differently with students of color, not in preferential ways, but in ways that rendered advisement more personal and culturally responsive.

Supervision. This aspect of the question netted the fewest responses because three of the seven were not supervising at the time. However, of the four that were supervising, one stated that she is assigned more students of color to supervise. Two others described challenging students' "normative views" and helping students to "focus on what the possibilities are rather than the problems" in student teaching classrooms. Finally, the teacher educator who works in bilingual education indicated again

that all her work is embedded in a cultural context and so it was hard for her to separate how she might behave otherwise.

Discussion

One goal of this study was to identify what teacher educators of color bring to their work and to the teaching profession and to explore how they see themselves in relation to their White peers. The data indicate that one strong theme that exemplified the responses of all members of the group—their experiences, goals, perceptions—was diversity. Respondents clearly placed *issues of diversity at the center of their teaching* practice as well as their thinking about all facets of teacher preparation including advisement, curriculum, supervision, and student teaching. For these teacher educators of color, it was patently evident that diversity is *integral* to teacher education, fueled apparently by their deep concern for "the demographic imperative" which demands "that the educational community must take action in order to alter the disparities deeply embedded in the American educational system" (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 4). This concern for equity was obvious in these teacher educators' definitions of diversity. For them it is more than surface knowledge of customs and holidays, more than a topic to be addressed in a course or workshop; it includes intimate, substantive and specific knowledge about "other," socio-political knowledge that forces institutionalized racism and structural, systemic inequality to the surface, and community knowledge that sees children as embedded in rich contexts and members of whole, strongly identified groups.

While none of the respondents called themselves *culturally responsive or relevant pedagogues*, implicit in their narratives were the characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy:

Culturally relevant teachers foster classroom social relations...that extend beyond the classroom. (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 113)

Effective teachers of minority students...acknowledge the state of oppression in which their students exist but insist that the students overcome these negative situations and present them with academically challenging tasks on a regular basis. (First & Crichlow, 1989, cited in Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 112)

...culturally responsive teachers...contextualize teaching by giving attention to the immediate needs and cultural experiences of their students. (Irvine, 1992, p. 83)

In reconceptualizing the curriculum, teacher educators must critically analyze the content to ensure that it reflects the diverse perspectives of

> the country's multicultural population. The multiple voices of students and communities must be incorporated. (Gollnick, 1992, p. 70)

> Culturally responsive teaching makes academic success a non-negotiable mandate for all students and an accessible goal. (Gay, 2000, p. 34)

Their deep understanding of diversity seemed to be grounded in their own histories as people of color and to be informed by their own confrontation with racism, inequity and oppression. The power of authentic or firsthand experiences as "other" in this country seemed to undergird respondents' conception of *teaching as work that is inherently moral and political*. As witnesses to the devastating consequences of racism, low expectations and deficit assumptions of children of color, respondents placed much emphasis on ensuring that diverse learners have access not just to educational opportunity, but to true caring from those who would teach them.

In centering their practice and their philosophies on diversity, respondents positioned themselves as *strongly committed to public, urban schools* and to the children who occupy these schools. They seemed primarily interested in working in those settings too often viewed as problematic by mainstream teacher educators and most often not seen as viable employment options by European American novice teachers. What seemed to define these teacher educators of color was their sense of advocacy for students and children of color exemplified by their willingness to go against the normative grain. They appeared to hold themselves to a standard of commitment that they feel is lacking in the academy. Underlying respondents' answers was *a sense of isolation and separation from their European American colleagues*. Said one respondent of her European American colleagues,

> I see regard, respect, and a humanistic kind of understanding, but I don't see a commitment to the populations (of color) we work with, a passion that I feel.

Another respondent talked about her White colleagues not feeling the same sense of urgency as she:

> We really need help in our schools. I feel public education is in grave danger. I don't think my White counterparts are as concerned. If something is wrong (in public schools), people can just up and leave, they have the means. They don't have to worry that their children won't have friends to play with.

For her it seemed to come down to an issue of invisible White privilege (McIntosh, 1989) where European American counterparts weren't often aware of—indeed did not need to be aware of—the direness of the

situation for children of color in public schools. The stakes are high for these children because they often have no option but to depend on public, urban schools to give them the passport they need to participate fully in all levels of American society and "develop the skills and dispositions of deliberative citizenship" (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 22).

Conclusion

Why might the views, intentions, knowledge, and experiences of teacher educators of color be important, particularly in terms of teacher education curricula and the preparation of a predominantly White teaching force for an increasingly diverse student population? Why should the teacher education profession worry about the limited number of teacher educators of color?

First, this study indicates that teacher educators of color have a great deal to offer in terms of *thinking and acting* in culturally responsive ways, and bring habits of mind that embrace a social justice agenda. This is not to say that all teacher educators of color are naturally culturally responsive or social justice oriented, or that European American faculty are not. Yet, an examination of the state of teacher education indicates that there has been little change in teacher education practices despite dramatic social changes (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Melnick & Zeichner, 1997) and that programs have failed to be "a force for freeing students of their parochialism" (Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992, p. 44; also: Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Instead, "the culture of teacher education has shown itself to be highly resistant to new ways of conceiving knowledge…and issues of race, class, culture, gender, and ecology will continue to be marginalized while the teacher education curriculum is located in Eurocentric and androcentric knowledges and practices" (McWilliam cited in Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 5).

Second, the ways in which these teacher educators of color define multiculturalism and cultural diversity stands in stark contrast to the manner in which teacher education programs define and practice multicultural curriculum. The majority of teacher education programs continue to isolate multicultural teacher education in single courses (Cochran-Smith, 2004: Larkin, 1995; Melnick & Zeichner, 1997) and adopt an "easy rhetoric of cultural pluralism" that fails to recognize that "cultural differences are inextricably tied to racial segregation, economic depression, and political powerlessness" (Larkin, 1995, p. 2, 3). As a consequence, "multicultural education is very often reduced to folksongs and folktales, food fairs, holiday celebrations, and information about famous people" (Sleeter, 1995, p. 23) by White teachers who "greatly

minimize the extent and impact of racial…discrimination, viewing it as isolated incidents that hurt a person's feelings" (Sleeter, 1995, p.19-20). As Sleeter (1995) points out, "most White teachers simply do not know very much about non-White groups" (p. 22), and "most teacher educators have not had the transformative learning experiences necessary to interrupt the conservative assumptions underlying teacher education programs" (Cochran-Smith 2004, p. 13).

Thus, White teachers and teacher educators are missing "cultural frames of reference" (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 4) that give them the insight or inside knowledge to authentically enact culturally responsive practices. In comparison, by firmly centering their practice in diversity and social justice, the teacher educators of color in this study underscore that multicultural education cannot be an add-on in teacher education. Rather, their responses indicate that they believe that multicultural education must be woven throughout teacher education as "a comprehensive approach to the teaching role which informs and guides all aspects of classroom practice" (Larkin, 1995, p. 11).

This study reveals that respondents' identification with children of color—and lived experiences as people of color—provides them a unique and genuine perspective on the teacher education enterprise. This perspective guides the work that they do with students of color (as well as other students) so that questions of culture and cultural issues become moral imperatives rather than interesting asides. They also see such learners not as "other people's children" (Delpit, 1995) but as reflections of themselves and intimately understand the profound impact inequity and a lack of care can have, not just on academic achievement, but on a person's spirit, identity and sense of efficacy. One teacher educator in this study put it well:

> You either decide to honor someone's ability to express her love, knowledge, grief and joy or you don't. When one tampers with another's ability to communicate those four emotions, the consequences are psychological, cognitive, emotional, intellectual. When we allow assessments in ways that do not take that into account, I feel that our assessment of children is immoral, illegal, irrelevant, and invalid.

Teacher educators of color possess an empathic understanding of the lives of children of color, which results in a strong desire to engage in social action and redress inequities. Thus, while they subscribe to the skills and knowledge typically considered important for teacher education programs to impart and implicitly agree with the standards set by the profession, they come at this professional knowledge base from a different vantage point. Their perspective places teacher preparation

within a socio-historical context that acknowledges that children of color and poverty have been (and continue to be) unequally served and underscores the urgency of ensuring ready and open access to learning for all. They are a valuable resource that can be, indeed must be, tapped if teacher education is truly to become "part of larger movements for social change and [can] demonstrate to others that social justice itself is a valid outcome and an essential purpose of multicultural teacher preparation" (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 9).

Notes

[1] My deep thanks go to the seven teacher educators who participated in this study and spoke with such candor and passion about their experiences.

[2] I acknowledge that the term "of color" is contested and political. I use it in this piece to describe those people who identify themselves as Black or African American, Asian/Asian American or Pacific Islander, Latina/o or Hispanic, and American Indian or Native American.

[3] Currently, all seven respondents continue as teacher educators of preservice teachers (6) and inservice teachers (1).

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