

Cultivating Critical Consciousness Within Communities of Practice for the Recruitment and Retention of Black and Latinx Male Teacher Candidates

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Abstract

This article describes and assesses an initiative that one university used to build communities of practice (Wenger, 2010) designed to deconstruct institutionalized barriers to the success of male teacher candidates of color. The data-including focus groups, open-ended surveys, and observations- reveal that the various efforts created a transformative paradigm shift in teacher candidates' "critical consciousness" (Freire, 1974) as they explored perspectives of their own abilities, opportunities, and possibilities as male future teachers of color. Additionally, the study fostered a culture shift regarding more sensitivity and awareness of the unique experiences and challenges of male teacher candidates on behalf of faculty and staff. Implications for

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Volume 34, Number 2, Fall 2025

designing system-wide cohesive efforts to support underrepresented groups in pre-service teaching are also discussed.

Key Words: male teacher candidates, Latinx male teacher candidates, Black male teacher candidates, community of practice, critical consciousness, summer bridge program, teacher diversity

“A man who hunts an elephant does not stop to throw stones at birds.” Dr. Greg, one of the speakers for the Male Teachers of Color Project (MTCP) Summer Bridge Program, stood in front of the 10 participants, awaiting their interpretations of the African proverb. The topic of the day was “using hip-hop as a teaching tool.” He then highlighted the meaning of the proverb by informing the attendees that the elephants represent goals, while birds symbolize distractions.

*“What are **your** goals?” he posed to the group. Some of the goals the 10 Black and Latinx male high school students shared included achieving a “4.2 GPA,” “owning a house,” “becoming a college athlete,” and “becoming an artist for Disney.” Some of the birds (i.e., distractions) they described included “friends, social media, family, money, and making everyone satisfied.” Over the next five days, the 10 participants continued to engage in dialogues regarding what it meant to be a man and more specifically, what it meant to be a man of color in America and in the teaching field. Some participants shared concerns about their ability to survive past their 21st birthdays. Others expressed concerns about finding a career that would allow them to successfully support their families in the future. The discussion continued as Dr. Greg immersed the teaching/learning experience in a critical pedagogical framework.*

Introduction

A central component of critical pedagogy and the development of critical consciousness is open dialogue regarding topics, issues, and ideas that challenge existing worldviews (Thompson-Bunn, 2014). This article describes and assesses an initiative that one university used to build communities of practice designed to deconstruct institutionalized barriers to the success of male teacher candidates of color. Before describing this effort, it is necessary to briefly review the circumstances that make the need for such initiatives so compelling.

The current teacher shortage has garnered the attention of teachers, researchers, legislators and policymakers across the world. Nationwide, there has been a 35% decline in the supply of in-service teachers since 2014 (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], 2018). More recent projections suggest that this

shortage could reach up to 300,000 for the country as a whole by the year 2025 (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Goodwin, 2023). As a result, teacher education programs across the country are implementing robust, evidence-driven efforts to recruit new students and to retain practicing teachers (Sutcher et al., 2019).

The task of seeking resolution to the teacher shortage is made more complex by the fact that the phenomena is asymmetrically distributed when race/ethnicity is used as a descriptor. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), as of the 2021 school year, 80% of public-school teachers were White Americans, 9% were Hispanic/Latinx Americans, 7% were African Americans, and 2% were Asian Americans. Such a non-normal distribution of teachers relative to students is not benign. Indeed, it generates an urgent need to diversify the teacher pipeline (AACTE, 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2018). By the year 2025, the United States will be a “majority, minority” country (Colby & Ortman, 2015). The presence of a teacher workforce that reflects the landscape of the country is integral to the success of not only students of color, but to all students.

Accordingly, it becomes important to explore current efforts to diversify the teacher pipeline and identify whether such initiatives have positively impacted the outcomes of K-12 students. It is equally critical to examine the unique experiences of Latinx and Black male teacher candidates.

The American Landscape of Teaching and the Need for Male Teachers of Color

Black, Latinx, Asian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial elementary student enrollment continues to grow rapidly and is projected to increase exponentially by the year 2028 (Snyder et al., 2019; NCES, 2021). Despite these demographic trends, the elementary teacher workforce remains predominantly white (80.2%) and female (89.3%) (Snyder et al., 2019). Current studies have found that the presence of teachers of color in the classroom positively impacts student outcomes. For example, Gershenson et al., (2018) examined student-level longitudinal administrative data on all public-school students in North Carolina from their entry into the third grade between the 2000-2001 and 2004-2005 school-years through their senior year in high school. Researchers found that exposure to at least one Black teacher (demographic student-teacher match) in grades 3 to 5 significantly reduced the dropout rate by 39% among persistently low-income Black male students. Similar patterns of indirect influence have been documented by other researchers (e.g., Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Grissom & Redding, 2015; Miller, 2018).

Current literature has established that the perceptions and expectations placed on students of color may be significantly different than for their White counterparts, especially when their teachers are White (e.g., Miller, 2018). According to a number of researchers, non-Black teachers tend to have lower expectations for educational attainment for their Black students and are less likely to place Black students in gifted programs despite comparable test scores (Gershenson et al., 2016; Grissom & Redding, 2015). Yet, with the current demographic profile of the teacher workforce, Black and Latinx children may never encounter a teacher that looks like them throughout their school career. Ladson-Billings (2006) differentiates the achievement gap from the opportunity gap experienced by children of color in America. She does so by exploring systematic “debt” (economic, sociopolitical, moral) as an area of need that must be addressed in schools. It may be argued that teachers of color represent symbolic capital by providing positive role-models and culturally relevant instruction that support academic achievement. Simultaneously, this unique variable minimizes the development of implicit bias in White children who also may have never encountered alternative narratives and experiences within the classroom (Billingsley et al., 2017; Egalite & Kisida, 2018). Egalite and Kisida (2018) found that students who share both gender and racial characteristics with their teachers were more likely to feel more cared for. Students had a higher probability of finding their schoolwork more interesting and of having more positive student-teacher communication (Howard et al., 2019). This is certainly not to say that group membership leads to assured or complete group affinity. In other words, not all Latinx students will connect with all Latinx teachers. However, recent studies have identified a correlation.

Such research substantiates an imperative to diversify the teacher workforce. What then can be done to recruit, retain and graduate Latinx, Black (and other) male teacher candidates by teacher education programs?

Supporting Black, Latinx, and Other Males in Teacher Preparation Programs

The goal of this project was to determine the optimal climate needed to recruit and retain male teacher candidates. It was also to determine their perceptions of the teaching field and how critical consciousness could be used to model the power of teaching as a tool to catalyze change. Yet, prior to this task, we needed to gain a greater understanding of the variables that impacted their journeys.

Male teacher candidates in general face unique challenges during both their pre-service and in-service journeys (Collier et al., 2016; Bristol & Mentor, 2018; Warren, 2020, Jackson, 2024). For example, male teachers are more likely to experience gendered expectations for performance in a field dominated by women. Males are disproportionately expected to serve as disciplinarians. Furthermore, accusations of “predatory” behavior on behalf of families and colleagues (especially in elementary and pre-K contexts) are more likely to be directed towards males (Geng & Midford, 2016). The burden of patriarchy is such that males are expected to conform to stereotypes of gendered performance in terms of masculinity (Ponte, 2012; Singh, 2019). Ponte’s (2012) qualitative analysis of interview data for Asian and White male teacher candidates in Hawaii confirms this pattern. “These male teachers’ rejection of hegemonic views affords them the possibility to embrace personal qualities valued in the teaching profession that cross boundaries of gender” (Ponte, 2012, p. 50).

For male teacher candidates of color, these challenges and unique needs are even further compounded. This suggests that, in the case of our study wherein the males were disproportionately Latinx and Black, it was of optimal importance to identify the full range of variables that may impact their outcomes in teacher education programs. While the experiences of these two ethnic groups vary, efforts were also made to identify similarities across groups.

For example, research on both Latinx and Black male teacher candidates reveals a theme of resistance to gendered expectations of masculinity (Bergey et al., 2020; Goings et al., 2019; Singh, 2019). These candidates often play an active role in dismantling preconceived expectations of their abilities, skills, and dispositions. For male candidates of color, this often occurs prior to program entry in the recruitment phase (i.e., in high school) (Byrd et al., 2011; Will, 2018), once they enter teacher preparation programs (Irizarry, 2011; Wallace & Gagen, 2020), and after they enter the workforce (Bristol & Goings, 2019; Warren, 2020). Goings and Bianco’s (2016) qualitative study of 22 Black male high school students found that stereotypes of academic performance sometimes guided teachers. Low expectations and racial microaggressions were also a subset of several factors that impacted male high school students’ perceptions of the teaching field. Such negative expectations served as barriers to recruitment. In reality, Black and Latinx males are likely to enter the teaching professions “for reasons surrounding social justice and community upliftment” (Goings & Bianco, 2016, p. 643). Byrd et al. (2011) found that Black male athletes often did not choose teaching as a career due to incorrect advising, negative perceptions of the teaching career,

and flawed assumptions of teacher education program pathways. Additional research has confirmed that effective recruitment of Latinx males is also contingent upon proper mentorship and support by other male teachers (Will, 2018; Irizarry, 2011).

While the recruitment of male teacher candidates of color requires special consideration, specific attention also needs to be paid to the supports they require for retention and the challenges they confront while in their teacher preparation programs. More specifically, teacher educators must be attuned to the intrinsic as well as the extrinsic variables that propel or inhibit Black and Latinx teacher candidates. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, Bergey et al. (2020) found that the cost and barriers to teaching for Latinx male teacher candidates included concerns about job demands, emotional costs, salary, and teacher preparation demands. However, the perception of the “costs” of teaching varied greatly for each individual.

Additional research confirms that creating a sense of community via positive interactions and encouragement from professors, peer support both inside and outside of the classroom, and serving as potential role models were significant factors contributing to the successful completion of Black and Latinx male teacher candidates (Gomez et al., 2008; Wallace & Gagen, 2020). Gomez and colleagues (2008) noted that the Latinx male teacher candidates in their study often felt misinterpreted by white females, both in their teacher education courses and in their field experiences. Yet for them, the power to use teaching to positively impact their communities was a key factor for pursuing teaching (Goings & Bianco, 2016, Bergey et al. 2020). While the opportunity to serve as a role model is a well-known benefit in research regarding the recruitment and retention of males of color into teaching, being a role model is also a label that researchers have urged to use cautiously. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, Bristol and Goings (2019) examined how 27 Black male teachers across 24 schools used boundary heightening in the workplace to cope with perceptions of either being “incompetent” or “over-qualified.” Due to these various unique, work-based tensions that male teachers of color face in schools, they urge teacher educators to address these issues in their programs and support their transitions into the workplace (Bristol & Goings, 2019). That was also the goal of this study.

A growing body of research encourages researchers and policymakers to further examine the multiple identities of Black and Latinx teacher candidates. The assumption that teacher candidates in an ethnic group automatically have shared affinities with the students of the same ethnic background with whom they interact in K-12 schools is both flawed and limited. Teacher educators must attend to the unique

voices and experiences of Black and Latinx male teacher candidates, while also providing the support they need as they navigate academic performance, balance work responsibilities, and address personal matters (Goings et al., 2018). Research has demonstrated that Latinx and Black male teacher candidates tend to draw upon their own agency, utilizing potential barriers as a way to transform the curriculum and implement culturally responsive teaching practices (Salinas & Castro, 2010). While much of the existing research explores variables that impact outcomes for teacher candidates of color, few highlight the macro-faculty/university and system-wide role, in addition to the teacher candidates' role, in this process. Our goal was to fill this void. This study highlights how the development of critical consciousness within communities of practice can be used to revise and reimagine success for Black and Latinx teacher candidates in pre-service contexts.

Clearly, we, as teacher educators, must analyze our programs for biases. We must create space for Black and Latinx teacher male candidates to challenge gendered norms and racial stereotypes. We must develop communities in which all stakeholders involved (faculty, staff, collaborating teachers and peers) can support these candidates' efforts so that we can ensure the successful completion of the programs in which these males decide to enter.

The Male Teachers of Color Project (MTCP)

MTCP was designed to address the described barriers to success (MTCP and all university names are pseudonyms). The data from this study were collected as part of a grant that was not only designed to develop critical consciousness in male teacher candidates, but also to create communities of practice among faculty and staff regarding the unique needs of male students. These efforts were developed to catalyze a systematic shift across multiple universities and multiple teacher preparation contexts.

This paper presents the findings gathered through MTCP. Funded by The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, MTCP spanned six teacher preparation programs and their adjacent school districts across six Southwest University System (SUS) schools. This study explores data collected from the lead institution, Southwest National University (SNU), during the first year of program implementation.

MTCP examined the following research questions:

1. How did various program activities impact the development of communities of practice among faculty and staff for the effective recruitment and retention of male teacher candidates?

2. What variables influenced male pre-service teachers' perceptions of the teaching field?

Conceptual Framework

This study served several purposes. A primary goal was to determine how the macro community at one university (eventually replicated across six other institutions) could more effectively recruit and retain males of color. The researchers specifically wanted to assess how institutionalized shifts in our teacher preparation programs might diversify the teacher pipeline throughout the state. Whether solutions required faculty to deconstruct the curriculum, revise marketing materials, or receive more professional development, the goal of the research was to determine how each of these macro-College-wide institutional-based variables would potentially influence student outcomes. There was also a micro-level component to the initiative that sought to develop self-reflection, self-exploration, and critical consciousness to support teaching as a tool for social justice on behalf of male teacher candidates. Due to the fact that the research questions address macro-level issues that are inclusive of administrative, faculty, programmatic dynamics, as well as micro-level teacher candidate internal variables, we drew upon Wenger's (2010) *Communities of Practice* model in addition to Freire's (1974) critical consciousness framework. The coupling of these two lenses helped to provide a holistic understanding of not only the university context, but the ways that our male students positioned themselves as future teachers of color.

Communities of practice, a term coined by Lave and Wenger (1991), emphasizes the social construction of knowledge by groups or entities that are mutually engaged in a joint enterprise through a shared repertoire of understanding. In this study, project leaders sought to not only recruit and retain male teachers of color, but also to raise awareness on behalf of faculty and administrators regarding institution-wide variables that influence the success of male teacher candidates. Thus, there were two communities of practice explored, the faculty and the students. We examine two professional development events for Faculty. As well as the teacher candidate's participation in the Education Diversity Club as well as the Summer Bridge. While data presented does not delve into student faculty interaction it provides insight into variables that impacted the various communities of practice designed to support male teacher candidates. Wenger (2010, p.10) membership for participants within a community of practice as the following:

- *joint enterprise*—a collective understanding of what the community is about and its purpose;
- *mutual engagement*—interacting and establishing norms and expectations;
- *shared repertoire*—using the communal resources, such as language, artifacts, and tools to build and sustain a group or community.

Some faculty and students were full participants who actively attended MTCP events and activities designed to support candidates, while others were often what Wenger (2010) would refer to as *legitimate peripheral* participants. As described in the literature review, Latinx and Black male teachers, whether in-service or pre-service, often encounter resistance and challenges by not being viewed as “legitimate” members of teacher education programs and within the classroom (Bristol et al., 2018; Geng & Midford, 2016; Ponte, 2012).

Critical Consciousness within Communities of Practice

As an underrepresented population within the field of teaching, male teachers must be provided a space to critically analyze the variables that impact their success during both pre-service and in-service experiences, specifically, in contexts such as in this study that are urban, multicultural and multilingual. Teacher educators must deconstruct how the unique lived histories of Black and Latinx male students impact them as future teachers in the classroom. Towards this effort, the MTCP incorporated Freire’s (1974) notion of “conscientizacao,” which he defines as “the deepening of the attitude of awareness” (p.90). El-Amin et al. (2017) further define critical consciousness as “the ability to recognize and analyze systems of inequality and the commitment to take action against these systems” (p.20).

The goal of MTCP was not simply to increase and support the recruitment and/or retention of male teachers of color, but also to provide institutionalized supports across several university contexts. Critical consciousness within teacher education programs is a powerful tool that may be used on behalf of students and faculty to analyze beliefs and attitudes related to race, marginalization and cultural hegemony (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Within a community of practice, faculty and students work collectively to deepen awareness of the social realities that shape students’ lives and discover their own capacities to recreate them (Darder, 1995). According to Pollard (2017), institutionalized norms within teacher education programs such as

limited opportunities for student agency can dilute opportunities for the development of critical consciousness. Thus, the MTCP worked to engage the “collective village” (staff, faculty, *and* students) in this process. We argue that the ideal context for the cultivation of critical consciousness is within a community of practice.

Research Context

The data for this study was generated by a grant project, the aforementioned MTCP. The goal of the project was to improve the pipeline for male teachers of color throughout six Southwest University System (SUS) schools so that elementary age students of color would have increased numbers of males of color serving as teachers, mentors, and role models. The ultimate purpose of the project was to help close the persistent opportunity gap between White students and students of color in the United States. Teacher preparation programs on Southwest University System (SUS) campuses had expressed a need to increase the number of male, multiple subject (i.e., elementary education) teacher candidates of color, especially Latinx, African American, and Asian males who are underrepresented when compared to the diverse student population they will eventually serve.

Of the 921 multiple subject teacher candidates enrolled into teacher preparation programs in 2015-2016 at the six SUS universities participating in this project, only 34 (4%) were Latinx males, 4 (0.4%) were African American males, and 13 (1%) were Asian males. The communities they will eventually serve have student populations that are 42-79% Latina/o, 1-19% African American, and 0-50% Asian. The 2015-2016 school year was used as the baseline for the comparison of annual growth in enrollment numbers for academic years 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019.

While the ultimate goal of the project was to institutionalize efforts to recruit and retain male teachers, this particular study analyzed evaluation artifacts solely from MTCP interventions at Southwest National University (SNU) (the lead applicant). Interventions were first piloted and tested at SNU. They were then scaled up to the other five SUS campuses.

SNU is a Hispanic Serving Institution. The University as a whole is 45% Hispanic/ Latino, 21% White, 11% Asian, 4% and 7% Mixed race. However, enrollment within the SNU College of Education is over 60% White and female. Moreover, the faculty demographics do not reflect the student diversity. Table 1 includes the demographic breakdown of the faculty in the SNU College of Education in Fall 2020.

Table 1
Faculty Characteristics for the College of Education at Southwest National University

	<i>Tenured and Tenure Track</i>				<i>Lecturers</i>			
	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>		<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>
American Indian/Alaska Native	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
Asian	2	11%	8	19%	1	2%	6	5%
Black/African American	0	0%	2	5%	3	5%	5	4%
Hispanic/Latinx	4	21%	1	2%	10	15%	17	14%
Not Specified	0	0%	3	7%	4	6%	9	7%
Two or More Ethnicities/Race	1	5%	3	7%	2	3%	1	1%
White	12	63%	26	60%	45	69%	85	69%
Total	19	100%	43	100%	65	100%	124	100%

(2020 Faculty Data as provided by the SNU Institutional Research Dashboard)

Methodology

This project was completed with Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Several data sources were analyzed and triangulated for the purpose of this article. The first was the content analysis of a community luncheon held for a focus group of university faculty, staff, and stakeholders on addressing the needs and recruiting male teachers of color. During this luncheon, a total of seven participants responded to three open-ended discussion questions. These questions assessed their knowledge about (a) the challenges male minority students face, (b) suggestions regarding strategies that may address the identified challenges, and (c) recommendations regarding strategies that they can potentially contribute to the success of the MTCP. Focus group participants were specifically invited based upon their various roles across campus. Table 2 identifies the participants at the interview luncheon.

Table 2
Luncheon Focus Group Participants

Graduate Recruitment Coordinator	White Female
Chicana/o Studies, Chair	Latina Female
Africana Studies, Faculty	AfricanAmerican Female
NPA Institute/Theater, Director	White Male
Student Outreach and Recruitment, Assistant Director	White Female
School of Education, Grants Officer	White Male
Educational Psychology & Counseling, Faculty	White Female

The second data source involved pre- and post-surveys of ten male high school students who participated in a Summer Bridge Program (SBP) designed to recruit men of color into teaching, as well as detailed observation notes of the week-long program. This reflection focuses solely on the open-ended qualitative survey responses of program participants. To increase college-going awareness activities among high school age students, project leaders organized the MTCP Summer Bridge Program. Students were paid a stipend for their participation and would also receive a scholarship, should they decide to enroll in the following year. Ten students of color participated in this effort. Nine were high school age considering teaching as a profession and one was a junior entering the teaching program at SNU. Six participants identified as Latinx, three as Black, and one as Pacific Islander. Student participants were recruited through the various partnership high schools. The students received an interactive training led by the grant Principal Investigators (PIs), who were faculty members in SNU's Department of Elementary Education. Other components of the Summer Bridge Program included tours of campus resources and lectures from guest speakers. Students were also assigned to a Summer Academic Program for Elementary School Students (SAPESS) classroom. They served as "teaching assistants" by providing support to the classroom teacher for at least one hour for four days during the program.

Lastly, we examined open-end survey results of the "Education Diversity Club" (EDC). Monthly meetings were held to support currently enrolled male teacher candidates via the EDC. Summer bridge program participants were also invited to attend these sessions as a way to continue to build community for them prior to enrollment. Three sessions were held at SNU with 19 students attending. Sessions were led by a nationally recognized consultant on male teacher recruitment and the grant Co-PI. Each session lasted approximately two hours. Topics covered included: (1) "Making it Through Student Teaching: Male Teacher Candidate Peer Mentoring," (2) "Teachers as Role Models/Positive Forces in the Community," (3) "Understanding Structural Racism/Viewing School District Improvements Through a Racial Equity Lens," (4) "Setting up a Classroom to Challenge Gender Bias," and (5) "Engaging Teachers and Administrators at Your School Site to Increase Impact of the Project."

Qualitative Data Analysis of Observations and Open-ended Survey Feedback

In accordance with the traditions of qualitative research, using the constant comparative method for within-case and cross-case

analysis, MTCP project leaders coded detailed observation notes and supplemental documents for patterns, insider (emic) perspectives, and discrepant data to write up in case reports (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Thomas & James, 2006). We used three layers of coding. First, all data sets were open-coded. As a team, we used axial coding to develop subcategories. Next, we cross-examined our key findings to determine overarching themes for each data set. Lastly, we triangulated codes by first grounding our findings in the community of practice and critical consciousness frameworks. Finally, we conducted member checks of key findings to increase validity and reliability. The key themes that emerged from the triangulation of these key data sources are highlighted in the section that follows.

Findings

Identifying a Community of Practice Through Faculty Focus Groups

Prior to collecting data from male teacher candidates, project leaders first determined whether the stakeholders within the university context believed male teacher candidates had unique needs and, if so, discussed how to address these needs. Wenger (1998) describes practice as “ways of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action” (p.190). Thus, the first community luncheon focus group allowed project leaders to begin to develop a shared repertoire around male students and their successes and challenges. When asked about the challenges in meeting the needs of male students of color at SNU, one faculty member identified multiple issues: “few role models or mentors available resulting in a fragile sense of belonging, a lack of knowledge about available resources and how to navigate college, few classes that related to their experiences, and a reluctance to seek help for fear of looking dumb or weak.” The idea that male students of color may not feel a *sense of belonging* and may struggle with their *cultural identity* was also echoed by other participants (Wallace & Gagen, 2020). Additional stakeholders commented that male students struggled with: “Building affinity, cultural competency, valuing cultural identity, and participating in extra-curricular opportunities” as well as “Feelings of belonging on campus, perceived support, cultural validation, and being a first-generation college student.”

In addition to cultural competence, mentorship was also a key factor that stakeholders believed was essential to the success of our male students (Will, 2018). What became apparent early on was that

this community of practice was also a critical space in which the project leaders could infuse socially just frameworks to support male teacher candidates of color. A few ideas that were generated from the focus group included connecting with local teachers, building partnerships with male administrators at local schools to identify potential candidates, participating in forums that educate counselors, teachers, families, and holding conferences on behalf of the initiative. Project leaders explored these ideas further through two PD sessions with faculty.

Developing a Community of Support Through Faculty Professional Development

Faculty from five different departments within SNU's College of Education attended two professional development sessions related to retaining and supporting male teachers of color. The goal of the professional development sessions was to help faculty identify the unique needs of male teacher candidates and to provide opportunities to reflect upon current programs and curricula in order to determine the type, number and magnitude of any potential gaps that may exist for male students. These PD opportunities allowed faculty to engage in cultivating a community of practice as they deconstructed program curricula and examined community practices that might positively or negatively impact male teacher candidates of color.

Based on qualitative and quantitative survey results (the PD was successful in creating a sense of awareness of many of the challenges male teacher candidates face that had been identified in the literature (e.g., Wallace & Gagen, 2020). One participant mentioned that they "never thought about 'modifying' my teaching practices according to gender in this specific context." Communities of practice require time. While this was only one of several activities the faculty engaged in as part of the project, the PD component occurred very early on in the project. Interestingly, the responses reflected a slow shift in thought processes as related to male students and their experiences. According to the participants' experience with male teachers, only 35.7% of the faculty have between one and two male students per semester. Since more male teachers can be found within the Secondary Education program, recruitment efforts should be focused more actively in Elementary Education. Other findings from the PD survey results were that participants enjoyed "hearing about the institutional resources" and other recruitment strategies that can be tapped to support this effort. To support the recruitment process, participants wanted more information about "resources to incentivize participation among male

students,” more “buy-in from faculty not in attendance so that our ‘culture’ grows towards supporting this project,” and “details about grant objectives.” Faculty engagement early in the project served as a baseline for exploring institutional variables that impacted male teacher success in our various programs. Several of the faculty would eventually serve as mentors or facilitators in the Summer Bridge programs as well as the Education Diversity Club (as outlined below), that were designed as supports for recruiting and retaining the men of color in our teacher preparation programs.

Perceptions of Teaching from Male High School Students: Summer Bridge Program

Conversations with male high school juniors and seniors who were a part of a summer bridge program ranged from what it means to be a man of color, to what it means to be a teacher, to their future life goals. Each of these key conversations was led by a male Latinx or Black teacher. The summer bridge program was designed to integrate culturally relevant pedagogy and highlight how social justice can be used as a teaching tool that can be used to transform the community (Pollard, 2017). A critical part of the development of critical consciousness is identity, agency, and intersubjectivity. Male prospective teachers need to grapple with these three key variables; Summer Bridge provided a safe space to unpack each variable. *Identity* encompassed pre-conceived notions of masculinity (Ponte, 2012), *agency* required discussion around self-imposed limitations of race and class (Singh, 2019), while *intersubjectivity* included the expectations of the teaching field (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Critical consciousness is not just reflective awareness, but intersubjective and thus should be “a collective public experience rather than solely individual and private” (McDonough, 2015, p. 280).

Over the course of the week-long summer bridge program, the ten young men engaged in challenging conversations. For example, in response to the question, “When was a time you experienced something unjust?” one student responded, “A known bully was given a slap on the wrist when there were multiple complaints from other students... we are all minorities at the school...we’re not destined to do great things... so why do they keep putting us down?.” In this example, the student not only reflected on the variable of race, but he also described stereotypes he dealt with as a minoritized person.

While many of the studies on critical consciousness reflect upon its development with non-diverse groups, other researchers have

suggested that students of color or low-income students are more likely to have experienced issues of diversity and inequity and as a result show a stronger commitment to social justice (Pollard, 2017). Another student shared that, “after an altercation with the drama club faculty sponsor, I was physically threatened and told [by the faculty sponsor] that I would not be the president even if voted in by the [student] members.” The program explicitly challenged these students to explore how teaching can impact or alter societal notions of what a teacher does. They unraveled common myths about male teachers in the first session of the summer bridge program such as those described in Table 3.

Within the MTCP Summer Bridge community of practice, men of color who were active teachers emphasized not only pedagogy, but also character education. One activity included exploring role models who had an impact on their lives. A central part of the development of critical consciousness within a community of practice includes agency, or the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices (Bristol & Goings, 2019). Participant responses revealed a heightened sense of agency. For example, one participant mentioned that his goal was “to know the problems with male students and to learn the proper steps to become a teacher... statistics show a record low for male teachers and I want to be a part of the group that helps raise it.”

In reflecting on the connection between home and school, one participant described a teacher as “the strongest support system I had when my mom got diagnosed with cancer. I felt really comfortable and safe in this teacher’s class to the point that I mistook her and called her my mom.” This student realized the power that a teacher has to bridge home and school. On the other hand, one of the bilingual Latinx students argued, “School and home is very different for me... my parents only speak Spanish and don’t feel comfortable speaking up at school.” Several factors may have influenced this student’s trajectory into the teaching field; his own experience with isolation due to language and

Table 3
Common Myths of Male Teachers and Student Responses

<i>Myth</i>	<i>High School Student Response</i>
Men who teach young children can’t make it in other professions.	“I personally did not want to follow Filipino traditions and become a nurse. I found a passion for teaching.”
Men are not wanted or needed to work with young children.	“Children want male presence in their lives whether they are teachers or family members.”

cultural background may have influenced his desire to close such a gap with future students.

At the beginning of the program, participants had generally similar beliefs about what being a teacher meant to them. Comments included, “connecting with the students to teach them some of the skills they will need in their life” or “being an initial spark for students’ passions as well as the person to nurture those passions.” When discussing connections between home/community/family and school, one participant noted that schools largely reflect the communities they are in and that can be a disadvantage when you come from a low-income community. He stated, “the connection that I have seen is that, sadly, low-income communities have low-income schools and high-income communities have high-income schools; all schools in my eyes should have the same resources and opportunities.”

Identifying Needs from Future Male Teachers of Color: Education Diversity Club

While the Summer Bridge Program consisted of high school juniors and seniors who were considering becoming teachers, the Education Diversity Club included current male teacher candidates who had served as mentors in the Summer Bridge Program and were close to completing student teaching. As part of the MTCP program, these male teacher candidates met monthly to participate in the “Education Diversity Club” (EDC). Key themes that arose from the male teacher candidates’ participation included mentorship, dealing with challenges, and needing financial support. Part of the community of practice was simply having the opportunity to be with other male students. One student commented, “I liked how we were all able to come together and share the same concerns about being a male in the field of education.” Another described a need for peer-to-peer mentorship as an additional form of support; “We as future male teachers need to be role models and mentors to future male teachers.” Being able to feel safe within a community of practice is key to shifting from a peripheral participant to a full participant (Wenger, 1998). As full participants, their awareness of their own agency and being proactive also inspired them to choose their own leadership opportunities. Interests included:

- “Becoming a leader in my education community.”
- “Mentoring future credential students.”
- “Leading a session on potentially becoming a mentor teacher”
- “Having students observe my classroom.”

Thus, they were not simply passive recipients of information as participants in EDC, but proactive catalysts and agents of change (Freire, 1974; Ponte, 2012).

Discussion and Implications

Our study describes how one university facilitated the recruitment and retention of Black and Latinx males into our teacher education programs. Similar to existing research, the findings reveal that utilizing teaching as a tool of social justice designed to transform communities is a key motivator when exploring teaching as a possible career. Furthermore, our participants used teaching or the prospect of teaching to resist hegemonic perceptions of masculinity. Our programmatic faculty and staff were not aware of the unique needs of Black and Latinx male teachers but were willing to consider curricular adjustments that would allow this group to more effectively integrate their voices.

There is a growing body of research that calls for the repositioning of narratives around Black and Latinx males, moving from a deficit paradigm to an assets paradigm (e.g., Howard et al., 2019; Irizarry, 2011; Warren, 2020). Our findings suggest that, although faced by many external challenges, Latinx and Black male teacher candidates are abundantly equipped to excel in their teacher education programs and beyond. However, this is not their sole responsibility. As the data reveal, developing communities of practice to recruit, retain, and support Black and Latinx male teacher candidates is a multi-layered and multi-faceted process. In terms of faculty, it requires a commitment from departments to deconstruct and examine the gaps in their current curriculum. It also requires faculty to examine their own teaching practices and reflect upon their own histories within an institution.

Completing this process under a critical lens in which the elements of race, gender or class are considered, also includes determining how societal constructs might influence one's success in a teacher education program. In some cases, the male students themselves had not considered how being a male in education might impact student teaching, coursework, and eventually, job placement. However, once they became aware of some of these issues within their community of practice, they not only sought opportunities to help their peers, but they also began to see future possibilities for mentorship. For the high school-aged summer bridge participants, examination of using teaching as a tool for social justice propelled them to reflect upon their

own experiences with injustice, in addition to reflecting upon how teaching could be used as a catalyst for change not only for males, but also specifically for males of color.

Teacher education programs designed to foster communities of practice must have a multi-tiered system of engagement where there is support for all members as they move from peripheral members to fully engaged members. There must be space for the organic nature of self-development to also be translated into co-curricular, collaborative, and critical spaces that ensure the growth and success of pupils in K-12 school and beyond.

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