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Future Teachers of Color: A Documentary

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ABSTRACT

“Future Teachers of Color: A Documentary” explores the lack of diversity within education and provides a solution. The paper begins by explaining the background of the issue through statistics collected from the United States Department of Education and Michigan Education Data. Once the background has been established, the paper uses peer-reviewed articles to examine the specifics of the issue and its impact. Afterwards, the solution to the problem is introduced by utilizing other outside sources and transitioning into the story of Future Teachers of Color (FTC), a registered student organization at Western Michigan University.

A documentary was the best method to showcase the development and impact of Future Teachers of Color because it exhibits real connections and reactions to its foundation. The documentary was put together over a span of months and it was meant to be more traditional but due to the coronavirus and the safety protocols, the documentary's videos were created over google meet, voice recordings and submitted videos. Despite that, the documentary was able to capture authentic responses to the questions around how FTC was formed, its importance and impact and how it would be beneficial for other universities to adopt a similar supportive system for their students of color pursuing education degrees.

Supportive systems are essential to the success of all students. Primarily, in the education field it is known that there is a teacher shortage. On top of that shortage, there is a lack of diversity in the teacher workforce while at the same time, the classrooms and students are becoming more and more diverse. Students of color are having a difficult time entering the education field while in their preparation programs which is why an organization like Future Teachers of Color would be highly beneficial and an effective solution that will expand the number of teachers of color in the U.S education field.

Future Teachers of Color: A Documentary

Future Teachers of Color (FTC) is a currently functioning student registered organization at Western Michigan University that started in the Fall semester of 2019. FTC began as a conversation between friends to consider what could be done to expand the number of young people of color entering the teaching profession and to provide prospective teachers with the support and resources, they need to be successful. We recognized that there was a lack of students of color in the College of Education and Human Development and wanted to help solve that problem. This thesis will tell the story of how FTC was created and how it is continuing to function with the commentary below and the video documentary.

The Nature of the Problem: National

Over the years, there has been a shortage of teachers of color within the elementary and secondary school workforce (U.S Department of Education, 2016). Regardless of the fact that the nations classrooms are more racially diverse, Teachers of color, especially Black teachers, are leaving or never entering the pre-K-12 workforce. Recruitment of teachers of color has been deemed inadequate, according to a 2018 press release from the Learning Policy Institute. This is a consequence of poor teacher preparations and “teacher licensure exams that disproportionately exclude teacher candidates of color”.

According to the *2016 United States Department of Education State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce*, the public-school student population is projected to increase in diversity (U.S Department of Education, 2016). By the year 2024, there will be a decrease in White students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools while there will be an increase in students of color. The teacher workforce in the United States will continue to be racially non-reflective of the students in the classroom if the decrease of teachers of color

continues (U.S Department of Education, 2016). During the 1987–88 school year, 87% of public-school teachers were White compared to 82% in the 2011–12 school year (U.S Department of Education, 2016). In comparison to other racial groups during this time, there was an increase in the percentages of teachers identifying as Asian or Hispanic while there were ongoing decreases of teachers identifying as Black, American Indian or Alaskan Native (U.S Department of Education, 2016).

As stated by the U.S Department of Education, students who pursue/acquire bachelor's degrees are less diverse than high school graduates. For example, during 2011 and 2012, 38% of bachelor's degree students were students of color while 43% of high school graduates were students of color (U.S Department of Education). This is important to note because it shows that students of color are more likely to graduate from high school than college which means that the possibility of entering into teacher preparation programs becomes low. The data shows that in addition to the low number of students of color graduating from colleges, there is a low number of students of color in education programs. In 2012-2013, 25% of individuals enrolled in a teacher preparation program were individuals of color while there were 37% of individuals of color enrolled in those same institutions overall (U.S Department of Education, 2016). In terms of completion rates for students who major in education, the rates are lower for Black and Hispanic students compared to their White student counterparts (U.S Department of Education, 2016). According to the document, 73% of bachelor's degree students majoring in education finished in six years after beginning postsecondary education. 42% of the Black bachelor's degree students and 49% of Hispanic bachelor's degree students finished in six years (U.S Department of Education, 2016) Additionally, the retention rates for teachers are higher among White teachers than Black and Hispanic teachers (U.S Department of Education, 2016)

The Nature of the Problem: Michigan

The racial diversity in Michigan mimics the nation's situation. In *The Racial Characteristics of Michigan Teacher Workforce* published in 2018 by the Michigan Department of Education, it illustrates that the Michigan teaching force predominantly consists of 92% White teachers, 6% Black or African American teachers and other minority groups at 1% or less (Michigan Department of Education, 2018). Over the years from 2012 to 2017 there was a decrease in teachers overall despite race, but the percentage is higher in Black or African Americans teachers at 18% (Michigan Department of Education, 2018). Similar to the national level, the student racial/ethnic demographics in Michigan are increasing while the teachers are doing the opposite. The percentage of racially diverse students increased from 31% to 33% between 2012-2017 (Michigan Department of Education, 2018).

The candidates enrolled in educator preparation programs in Michigan in 2016-2017 were 83% White (Michigan Department of Education, 2018). Black or African American were the next largest group and represented 7% of total enrollment (Michigan Department of Education, 2018). Hispanic or Latino, Asian American and other minority groups collectively represented 5% of the total enrollment (Michigan Department of Education, 2018). The data examined within the Michigan Department of Education document illustrates the statistical makeup of the educator workforce in Michigan and portrays the similarities that can be compared with the national data. This problem is a state problem as much as it is a national issue.

Why This Problem Exists

In 1986, Beverly Dupré's wrote an article, published in the *Journal of Negro Education*, titled "Problems Regarding the Survival of Future Black Teachers in Education" which described many of the same problems that today's education colleges are struggling with in terms of

diversity. Although this article is over thirty years old, it is still relevant and indicates interventions to make significant progress in efforts in colleges of education to expand the number of teachers of color in teacher education programs have not been successful or non-existent. Dupré highlights the “increasing concern nationally regarding the need for reform in teacher education programs” and how at the time, the school-reform movement was “increasingly expanding its focus to include prospective teachers, especially black teaching aspirants” (Dupre, 1986). The article examines how the education reform movement of the 1980s negatively affected Black teachers by the implementation of teacher certification and standardized tests which many prospective Black teachers failed (Dupre, 1986). Students were failing due to the test’s inherent biases and “their longstanding function to delimit the intelligence” of Black Americans (Petchauer, 2012). Due to the biases and low scores of these tests, many Black teachers decided against taking them which minimized their possibility of becoming teachers (Dupre, 1986).

During the nineties, students pursuing a degree in education were required to take the Praxis I test which was used to assess basic skills that were needed for entry into the education profession (Madkins, 2011). Unfortunately, between 1994 and 1997, only 74% of Black teacher candidates passed the test compared to 94% of their White candidate counterparts (Madkins, 2011). In 2002-2005, the number dropped for Black candidates to 54% compared to 84% for White candidates (Madkins, 2011) Those low rates could have caused many Black teacher candidates to not apply to teacher education programs. This is unfortunately still happening today. According to a 2019 report created by the National Council on Teacher Quality, the standardized teaching exams, like the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification (MTTC), screen out approximately 8,600 of 16,900 aspiring teachers of color (NCTQ, 2019). These exams are

meant to determine the teaching ability of their candidates while excluding specific demographics from achieving that goal.

Efforts to Solve the Problem

It is important that as a society we dismantle the misconception around teaching that portrays teaching as unsatisfying and instead provide students with sufficient information that highlights how alive and important the teaching career is today. This can happen when programs are created for students of color where they feel supported by their peers and faculty. These programs allow students of color to learn more about the teaching field outside of the classroom and with the integration of outside resources deriving from the community such as current/past teachers, principals, administrators, etc., students can develop a connection with the field that can impact their decision to start or continue pursuing a degree in education.

Dupré discusses the steps that had been taken to help combat the issue and provided recommendations for improvement. Dupre states that it is essential to “provide support programs for education majors to assure matriculation of black students” (Dupre, 1986). In addition to this, institutions need to “increase recruitment, financial aid, and counseling to assure program completion for Black students” (Dupre, 1986). Although the Dupre article is focused on the experiences of Black students, the same ideas benefit other students of color pursuing education degrees. Support from peers, faculty, staff, and the culture of the institution play a pivotal role in the success of these students and when they do not feel supported, it is more likely that they will leave the major and never get to the profession.

One program that was created to fight this problem is Collaboration and Reflection to Enhance Atlanta Teacher Effectiveness (CREATE) Teacher Residency Program. This program was established in 2011 through the partnership between Atlanta Neighborhood Charter School

and Georgia State University's College of Education and Human Development. In this program, they train new teachers in a three-year comprehensive support system. Their goal is to seek out and develop talented, diverse, and committed prospective teachers to work in underserved communities. From 2015 to 2019, this program has been able to develop 74 new teachers and 75% are teachers of color.

Another result driven effort to combat this issue is the Call Me MISTER® (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) program at Clemson University in South Carolina. This program strives to increase the pool of available teachers from a broader more diverse background. Tuition assistance, academic support, social and cultural mentoring, and assistance with job placement are provided to students using a cohort model. Few universities and teacher education programs offer similar projects. Although, there are different variations of student support programs in some schools of education, they are not always formalized, funded, systemic, recognized or sustained by the institution. Which leads some students to create their own programs to assist students of color, by students of color, regardless of major. These programs are not impossible to create and develop. This documentary will be exploring the story behind the Future Teachers of Color (FTC) registered student organization and will portray how such programs come to be.

A Local Response to the Problem: Future Teachers of Color

FTC started out with conversations between students who were part of the WMU College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) Future Educator Program (FEP). FEP started as a scholarship to increase the numbers of teachers of color, specifically Black Males as per the private donor, Dr. William Pickard, of the Pickard Family Fund. Understanding that a scholarship is helpful but not the singular factor for student support, a collaborative was formed

between WMU CEHD, The Kalamazoo Promise, and the Kalamazoo Public Schools to contribute in different ways to the success of the FEP Scholars. FEP services and support, created by Marcy L. Peake, CEHD Director of Diversity and Community Outreach Initiatives and FEP Coordinator, began in the 2016-17 academic year with the first cohort of scholars. Through this program, my peers and I were able to develop a community with one another and found out that we all felt the same about our experiences in the CEHD and field of education. The students involved ranged from early childhood education to secondary education majors but still were able to establish similarities in our programs.

Initially among the group of friends, there was not much organization besides periodic bouncing of ideas about forming a Registered Student Organization (RSO). The co-founders of FTC are William Wright, Hailey Timmerman, Jarae McCoy, DeShaun Cornelius, Marcus Moore, Terry Patton, and me.

Established during the summer of 2019, FTC planning started with most of the founders meeting to create the constitution and overall outline of what we wanted to accomplish for the upcoming academic school year. We agreed upon ideas for activities that we found helpful and thought potentially helpful to other students of color. These activities included mentorship from teachers and administrators of color, mock-interviews with experienced education interviewers, and volunteer opportunities within the Pre-K-12 schools in the area. Most importantly, we knew we needed to create and foster a supportive community where other students of color would experience representation among peers and veteran educators and have a support system. In the 2019-2020 school year, Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS) sponsored FTC by providing teachers and administrators as guest speakers at our twice-monthly meetings and paid for formal catered meals for these meetings. KPS, FTC, and the Kalamazoo Promise also contributed funding and

in-kind support for the first WMU CEHD Inspiring Future Teachers of Color Conference in February 2020.

My documentary highlights members of FTC and their involvement with the organization. Students and other FTC supporters express what having a group like FTC means to them, the benefits of groups like FTC to teacher preparation programs, and inspiration for students at other universities to replicate our success to retain and expand students of color who will progress to the field of education. I decided that a documentary would be more authentic and relatable. The idea is to show viewers the overall impact and necessity of a program like Future Teachers of Color in education colleges.

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