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Pathways to Teaching: African American Male Teens Explore Teaching as a Career

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The need for African American male teachers is clear; however their pathway to teaching is in disrepair. This article shares research findings and a description of a pre-collegiate course designed to encourage high school students of color, including African American males, to explore teaching. More specifically, drawing from survey and interview data, the researchers examine factors that influence 11th and 12th grade African American males' (N = 5) consideration of a teaching career and explore the impact of a pre-collegiate pathway to teaching program. The results of this mixed methods study expose the complexity of effective recruitment while also demonstrating how a successful program has the capacity to encourage young African American males to reframe their thinking and see themselves as potential future teachers.

Keywords: *African American male teachers, African American male teacher pipeline, pre-collegiate teacher pipeline*

The pathway, or pipeline to teaching, metaphorically refers to the stages along the way to becoming a teacher (Torres, Santos, Peck, & Cortes, 2004). The pathway starts long before a teacher accepts his or her first teaching assignment; it starts with early school experiences and continues throughout completing high school, graduating from college, and passing teacher licensure examinations. For African American males, the pathway to teaching is replete with cracks and potholes at every juncture. Others have referred to this as a leaky pipeline (Brown & Butty, 1999; Lewis, 2006; Mitchell, Scott, & Covrig, 2000). Brown and Butty (1999) explained the leaky pipeline in this way:

The relationship between African American students and African American male teachers is a symbiotic one—that is, the number of African American males who go into teaching is influenced by the number of African American males who attend college, which is in turn influenced by the number of African American high school graduates and so on. Unfortunately, the pipeline that moves African American students from public school to public school teaching is a leaky one. (p. 281)

The need for African American male teachers is clear and urgent. By representing only 1% of the national teaching force (Lewis, 2006) chances are that most students will *never* have an African American male teacher at any point in their 13 years in the public school system. Their presence in classrooms is critically needed not only for African American young men and women, but also for all students (Lewis, 2006). This article addresses a noted gap in the research literature by examining the factors that influence high school age African American males' consideration of teaching as a career option while also exploring the impact of a pre-collegiate pathway to teaching program. These authors begin with a brief overview of the public schools' failure to meet the needs of African American young men and how this blocks the pathway to teaching.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

African American Males and the Failure of the Public School System

Any discussion of recruiting African American males into teaching must first acknowledge how the public school system has tragically failed the very population we most need in our schools.

More than any other group, African American males find themselves at serious educational disadvantage in the public school system (Howard, 2008; Howard & Flenbaugh, 2011). According to Ladson-Billings (2011), the school experiences of many African American boys consists of a curriculum of control and discipline rather than much needed focused attention on academic achievement, student learning, and creating culturally responsive learning environments. African American males are commonly placed at risk of academic failure early in their school years and pushed out of school before graduation (Ford, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Toldson, 2011). Achievement and educational outcome data at the national, state, and individual school district level provide clear evidence of wide-spread, systemic failure across American public schools to effectively educate African American young men (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2009, 2010). As a group, African American males are grossly underrepresented in gifted education, advanced placement (AP) and honors classes (Ford, 2010; Whiting, 2009), overrepresented in special education classes (Blanchett, 2006; Ford, 2010), have high suspension rates and disciplinary actions taken against them (Ford, 2010), have high dropout rates (National Center of Education Statistics, 2010), and have among the lowest college graduation rates (National Center of Education Statistics, 2010). These disparities are the shame of our nation and clearly fall on race, class, and gender lines.

For decades researchers have documented evidence of numerous educational inequities that African American youth routinely face (Ladson-Billings, 2011) and the roles that race, class and gender play in these injustices (Ford, 2010). We must acknowledge the intersection of race, socioeconomic status and gender as key factors in determining how educators respond to African American males and how these students, in turn, experience school based on these variables (Howard & Flenbaugh, 2011). The persistent and profound educational inequities are particularly apparent for African American students who live in poverty. These students are placed at even greater risk of academic failure by attending grossly under resourced schools with the least qualified, most inexperienced teachers (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2011) who retain deficit views of students based on race, class, and gender (Blaisdell, 2005; Ford, 2010; Howard & Flenbaugh, 2011). The history and experiences of discrimination, segregation, and exclusion of many African American males in public schools helps provide context for understanding their potential resistance to enter the teaching field and, therefore, may create one more challenge for teacher recruitment. In order to disrupt the educational inequities faced by African American males, the need for well-prepared, culturally responsive teachers, regardless of race or gender, is great; however, the need for well-prepared, culturally responsive African American male teachers is desperate.

In summation, numerous potential African American male teachers are lost before college begins. To increase the presence of African American male teachers in public school classrooms one must first address the numerous educational inequities experienced by bright and talented potential future teachers—African American male youth. Perhaps by engaging African American male youth in a critical examination of these inequities, we can encourage their consideration of teaching and related fields as a way to meaningfully participate in striving for educational justice.

Given the need to increase the presence of African American male teachers, men in classrooms, it is important to understand the high school pipeline programs designed to recruit potential future teachers, including African American youth. Next, the authors briefly review the literature focused on high school teacher pipeline programs followed by a description of the Pathways2Teaching program, the focus of the current study.

High School Teacher Pipeline Programs

It is important to consider all viable pathways to teaching for African American males, however, given the high push-out/drop-out rate, it is critically important that we examine early recruitment efforts that seek to encourage students' consideration of teaching while they are in high school or even earlier. Numerous teacher encouragement programs have been developed to expose high school students to teaching as a profession (National Education Association, 2009). Some of these

programs have an explicit goal of attracting students of color (National Education Association, 2009) while others are more general in nature (e.g., Teacher Cadet, Future Teachers of America, etc.). The authors use the terms *students of color* and *teachers of color* throughout this article because, given the demographic shift in the United States, and certainly the demographic population in urban communities, it is a more accurate and contemporary description than the term *ethnic or racial minority*.

Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. (1993; 1996) published several reports investigating numerous pre-collegiate teacher recruitment programs. These reports identified over 250 programs located throughout the country serving a high percentage (64%) of students of color. Of the more than 50,000 students served in these programs each year, 30% are males. Unfortunately, however, the reports did not indicate how many of these young men were African American.

The 1996 national survey (Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., 1996) identified several common features that contributed to the general success of pre-collegiate teacher recruitment programs. These included:

- connections to colleges, feeder schools, and the local community;
- apprenticeship activities including tutoring younger students;
- high academic entrance requirements for admission to the program;
- resources for college matriculation; and,
- curriculum that teaches and models a conception of the teaching profession emphasizing leadership and school reform.

Many of these features were also included in the Torres and colleagues' (2004) review of pre-collegiate programs. Although these program features were thought to contribute to their overall success, no empirical data were published examining which program features may have been more attractive to students of color in general or more specifically for African American males. Among the several hundred programs reviewed in the literature (Clewell, Dark, Davis-George, Forcier, & Manes, 2000; Education Commission of the States, 2003 National Education Association, 2009; Recruiting New Teachers, 1996), perhaps the most well-known of these is the Teacher Cadet Program which has a focus on recruiting high-achieving students of color (Torres et al., 2004). Teacher Cadet partners with local universities and provides high school juniors and seniors with hands-on experiences in teaching. Despite their effort to attract students of color into the teacher pipeline, limited outcome data relying on self-reports of program alumni indicate that the overwhelming majority (88%) of alumni who reported working as classroom teachers were White (Torres et al., 2004).

Funding has been identified as one of the most serious needs of pre-collegiate teacher pipeline programs (National Education Association, 2009; Recruiting New Teachers, 1996). In fact, more than half of the 250 pre-collegiate programs identified in the 1996 Recruiting New Teachers survey have since shut down (National Education Association, 2009). According to the National Education Association (2009), financial resources are needed to accomplish several important goals:

- build program capacity,
- allocate resources for dedicated personnel, data collection and program evaluation, and, most importantly,
- provide financial assistance to students so they could enroll in and remain in college in order to obtain their teaching credentials.

Rigorous research and program evaluation, especially for programs aimed at recruiting students of color, has been identified as another area of dire need (National Education Association, 2009; Torres et al., 2004). Little data exist regarding what is working, for whom it is working, and what is not working at all. As noted by Torres and associates (2004) in their extensive literature review on recruiting teachers of color "... the review team for this document failed to identify any research or even external evaluation studies that explored the effectiveness of these programs in

steering high school students into undergraduate programs” (p. 44). This unfortunate lack of research and program evaluation is attributed to a lack of dedicated personnel to collect and analyze data (National Education Association, 2009).

Despite the number of high school pipeline programs that exist, the lack of African American males in teacher education programs continues to persist. The need for research examining high school pathways to teaching for African American males and other students of color is clear. Furthermore, we need to include the voices of high school aged African American male youth to understand their perceptions of and need for more African American male teachers. Although there was a thorough review of the literature, no research studies were identified specifically exploring their perceptions about becoming a teacher, why more African American male teachers are needed and what program components of high school pipeline programs are most influential in their consideration of becoming a teacher. For these reasons, this study fills a significant gap in the literature.

The Pathways2Teaching program, centered on the pre-collegiate, concurrent enrollment course titled, “Introduction to Urban Education,” is being offered at an urban high school in the Midwest that serves a predominantly African American and Latino/a student population, many of whom face serious economic challenges. This course was designed to encourage students of color to explore teaching and related fields. Critical elements of the course will be described followed by the research specifically focused on five African American young men enrolled in the course during the 2010-2011 academic year, the first year the course was offered.

Introduction to Urban Education—Pathways2Teaching

In response to the urgent need to increase the representation of teachers of color in the teacher pipeline, including African American males, university faculty from an urban institution partnered with a large urban school district to create and pilot the course, “Introduction to Urban Education” during the 2010-2011 academic year. Thirty-three juniors and seniors were enrolled in the class, with 17 African American students (12 females and 5 males) and 16 Latino/a students (10 females and 6 males). The course was co-taught by university faculty and a high school teacher, both of whom are teachers of color. The course met twice a week for a 90-minute block period.

Ultimately, the purpose of the course was twofold. First, the course was designed to encourage high school students to consider teaching and related fields as viable and important career choices. Second, the course provides students with “college knowledge” (Smith, 2009): that is, students gain an appreciation of the importance of academic success while being provided with academic supports and college student mentors in order to gain an understanding of various aspects of college life and processes as well as how to navigate the college and scholarship search and application process. The design of the course was informed by the literature on high school teacher pipeline programs and created around six guiding principles including: to increase high school students’ awareness of the teaching profession as a viable career choice and an opportunity to engage in educational justice; to include enrollment opportunities for all interested 11th and 12th grade students at the school where the course was piloted; to use critical pedagogy and critical race theory to provide students access to emancipatory knowledge; to prepare students with college knowledge and access through a challenging course curriculum that earns students three college course credits; to mentor high school students of color with teachers and aspiring teachers of color (e.g., high school teacher, university faculty, graduate teacher candidate); to involve community and family through culturally responsive practices that included frequent communication, home visits, and bridging school and community through sponsored family sharing evenings.

METHOD

The study focused on the following research questions:

- What factors influence African American males to consider teaching?
- What roles do race, ethnicity, and school experiences play in African American males' exploration of teaching? and,
- What aspects of the course are most influential in students' exploration of teaching?

This mixed methods study employed a fully mixed concurrent equal status design (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009), which means the qualitative and quantitative approaches were mixed at the data collection, analysis, and interpretation stages. Data were collected from all students enrolled in the course ($N = 33$) through interviews and an online survey. However, this research focuses only on the African American males ($n = 5$) in the course and uses pseudonyms as names for the students. Table 1 presents basic demographic information for the five participants.

Table 1

Basic Demographic Information for the Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Grade Level	GPA	Identified as Gift	Taking AP Classes	First in Family to Graduate High School	Selected Research Topic
Michael	17	12	3.4	Yes	Yes	No	Peer pressure and urban youth
Delasean	17	12	3.8	Yes	Yes	No	African American male dropout rate and college attainment
Kent	18	12	1.7	No	No	Yes	Foster care: What teachers don't know and need to know
Karl	17	12	3.8	No	No	Yes	African American male dropout rate and college attainment
Trevor	16	11	2.0	No	No	Yes	Homelessness and urban youth

There are a few limitations in this study that should be mentioned, as these may affect the results. First, only five students from one class were included in the analysis. If there had been more African American male students from varied contexts and different schools, the results may have been different. Second, because there was not a pretest of the survey and interview, it is difficult to know if the results were from the students' interactions and experiences in the course.

Data Collection

Data were collected through an online survey and interviews. The online survey consisted of 58 short-answer and Likert-scale questions. Developed from literature regarding teachers of color and their reasons for entering the field (Gordon, 1994, 2000) the survey was designed by the authors to include five major components: (a) basic demographic information, (b) the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992), (c) history and experiences, (d) perceptions of teaching, and (e) expectations. All components, except the MEIM, explored family, self, school, and college

access. The survey was administered in class as part of an assignment preparing them to write a narrative essay about their history, experiences, and influences in examining teaching as a career. The survey took students between 10-15 minutes to complete online.

The individual student responses to the survey were printed and used as a guide to gather more detailed information during the interviews. For example, when a student's survey response indicated he had an African American male teacher and reported that the experience was "positive," during the interview the researcher probed and asked the student to expand on his response. The interviews took between 20-35 minutes and were conducted in the school library.

Data Analysis

The data from the survey were analyzed with descriptive statistics. The open-ended responses from the survey were quantified and then analyzed with descriptive statistics. Due to the low number of participants ($n = 5$), the MEIM was not included for this analysis. The interview data were transcribed and used deductively to increase the rigor of the results of the survey by triangulating the survey data (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Sutton, 2006).

RESULTS

Becoming a Teacher

Students shared various challenges and opportunities in terms of their considerations of teaching as a profession. To begin, students reported perceiving the level of respect for teaching careers to be low in their community. When asked to rate professions/career/jobs in terms of how respected the position was in the community, varied responses were reported in the survey. The professions/career/jobs that were rated as being very respected by most of the students ($n = 4$) included professional athlete, the entertainment industry, and a doctor. The profession of teaching had a spread of ratings from somewhat respected ($n = 2$), somewhat disrespected ($n = 2$), and very disrespected ($n = 1$). When asked to elaborate on this, students stated:

Some teachers do a lot more than people really see . . . as much as teachers do for kids and for the world they should be one of the highest paying fields. It's hard to stay a teacher because of the way kids act . . . people don't realize how much of an impact they can have on lives. **(Michael)**

People in my community really want to see you doing other things in your life besides trying to teach. Sometimes it's about the money . . . 'cause I hear a lot of times that teachers don't make a lot of money and people want to make a lot of money to get out of the community where they live now. Respected fields? Sports athletes, doctors, medical fields, judge . . . the law. **(Kent)**

Furthermore, students reported that having teachers who shared their racial background had a positive ($n = 2$) or somewhat positive ($n = 1$) effect on the students' thinking about becoming a teacher. High school teachers ($n = 4$) were most reported as being influential in the students' decision to be a teacher (the fifth student reported not planning on being a teacher). Three of the students reported being encouraged to pursue teaching by a high school teacher of color not associated with the current program. Michael discussed how he has been encouraged to become a teacher by a White and African American high school teacher.

Ms. F (White teacher), Ms. B (Black teacher) . . . They think I would be a great teacher. They see how I am with other kids—just caring. **(Michael)**

When asked why they thought most students of color, especially African American male teens, do not consider going into teaching, one student stated:

They've probably had bad teachers—and then like they are probably influenced subconsciously not to become teachers because they've never seen any male teachers like them—so they're like "why should I go become a teacher? I've never seen anyone like me." . . . It depends on teachers you've had. When

I've had good teachers it makes me think that I could totally do this—I could see myself doing this. **(Delasean)**

Other students made reference to what they perceived as the hopes and dreams of African American male youth:

Most students of color dream to become the entertainment mogul or all star football basketball . . . **(Karl)**

The pay isn't good. They want to go somewhere they can make money, be a rapper, football player, basketball player—want to do stuff that doesn't involve kids talking back to you. **(Trevor)**

Another student felt that students of color are not encouraged to become teachers and he saw this as a way for White teachers to exercise their power and privilege.

Because most teachers are White and they don't encourage students of color to become teachers. **(Kent)**

When asked to elaborate on this, Kent said:

No one ever tells us about how great it is to be a teacher. It is always the negative side about it. The work is too hard and work never stops even when I leave school - I don't get paid enough for what I do. And you shouldn't do this. I believe they want to keep the teaching field White and their own color—I don't know if it's a power thing with that but I think they want to have the advantage of teaching other kids—like lower standards. Like White schools have higher standards than Blacks—and lower standard schools they still have White teachers, but they still don't show a higher level of teaching to students' needs. **(Kent)**

When another student was asked to elaborate on why we do not have many African American male teachers, he reflected on the low college enrollment rates.

Most Black males don't really, from what I've seen in my life, don't really go to college. **(Michael)**

He further elaborated on the intersection of gender and race in career choices for African American young men.

. . . and if you do go to college it's not really to be a teacher; it's to be something else. They go for engineering or mechanics. . . . It is a man thing. The same reason why we don't have any male nurses. Some males think some jobs are just for women. For Black males, if they are teachers it's mostly gym teachers because of athletics and sports—or maybe history because it deals with slavery. . . . As far as math and science? You don't find too many Black teachers. **(Michael)**

When asked what they believe can be done to help more students of color, especially African American males, become teachers, students replied:

Get them in some kind of big brother tutoring program so they can get a feel for what it is like. Get them in some kind of teaching experiences—they can see like, "Hey I really helped him," so they can see how it feels to be a teacher . . . classes like this too really make you see what it's like to be a teacher. **(Delasean)**

We should have more classes like this, "Intro to Urban Education." Even from the first beginning of the class it's been mostly about teaching and get to have some experience with kids. If you're not thinking about teaching right now, I bet you will later on. **(Kent)**

Let them know that it is a male **and** female job. Explain the low number of Black males in teaching. Do this Intro to Urban Ed class. I don't know if I want to be a teacher, but I definitely want to do counseling or something—or become a principal. **(Michael)**

When thinking about becoming a teacher, and considering income, only two students were discouraged from becoming a teacher, with three students reporting that pay would not be important in their decision.

I know teachers go through a lot. Teachers don't get paid enough to do that. Some teachers are really passionate about teaching and that's why they don't really care about the money. But some do it just for the money which is why some kids don't open up to them or feel comfortable. You can tell which teachers just do it for the money and which teachers come because they really want to change someone's life. I really don't care about the money. If I become a teacher I know what I am getting myself into. Money really doesn't matter to me. If you're going to be a teacher you should know what you're getting yourself into and know that you're going to love and care for the kids. (Michael)

It's not always about pay, but I do wish the pay was a little bit better—an extra 10K wouldn't hurt. (Delasean)

Overall, it appears that despite the teaching profession being perceived as having a relatively low status in their community, the African American male students were considering teaching because of encouragement they had received from high school teachers. They also felt that opportunities for African American males to explore and engage in aspects of teaching could powerfully influence career decisions regarding teaching. Furthermore, students displayed a nuanced awareness of various issues around educational attainment, race, class, and gender that stand as barriers for African American males to enter teaching.

School Experiences

Most of the students ($n = 4$) stated they have had positive experiences in school, however, none provided details. Instead, students wanted to elaborate on their negative experiences in school, especially with racism. Every student shared painful memories of experiencing racism in school and with particular teachers. One student reported having bad experiences because of inconsistent schooling due to his foster care status. Several students felt that having teachers who shared their racial background was positive for their schooling, but only three of the five students reported having had African American male teachers and not all of the experiences with those teachers were reported as positive.

All students reported experiencing racism throughout school with one or more White female teachers. They quickly remembered details of the events. In two of these instances students reported that the teachers were either fired or nearly sued as a result of their actions.

In 3rd grade I had a White band teacher. I was chewing gum in the class and she said to "get out—you are chewing like a cow you 'n' (word)" . . . I left the class crying and told my dad. She was fired! (Trevor)

My 5th grade teacher was just mean to me and I felt like she singled me out and did rude things to get my attention. If I was talking, she wouldn't say anything like "stop talking" she'd just slam books on my desk. It scared me—my little heart jumped. I was scared. This one time she just pushed me in front of this bus and I almost hit the bus. The bus driver stopped driving and stuff . . . I told my mom and she almost got sued so . . . I felt that she was being racist. (Delasean)

Delasean also shared his experience with another White female teacher whom he believed considered him a "pity case" and, as a result, gave him less work.

Then there was time in 6th grade where my teacher would give me less work because she thought I was some kind of pity case or something. She was always trying to talk to me like, "How is it like?" and "Where do you live?" She would try to give me less work than everybody else and if I didn't finish it she would just say like, "Well, it is ok" . . . she was like always in my business . . . wanted to know if I lived in the 'hood' and stuff like that—wondering if there was any gangs around. There are gangs everywhere around here; I mean, come on now. (Delasean)

Kent provided his definition of racism and gave examples of his experience with it in school:

Racism is being treated differently than another person or being treated not as a human being, but like a piece of trash and beneath them. I was in middle school, in class, it was mostly a White school. We were taking a test, and a lot of kids would talk. I said something—I wasn't cheating or anything—but the

teacher came and picked my test up and gave me a bad grade. He was a White teacher and wanted to be protective of his White students and wanted to make me look bad. **(Kent)**

Lack of consistency with foster placements contributed significantly to Kent's negative experience in schools.

I was moving to different schools a lot. I'd meet new friends and meet new teachers and as soon as I was developing a relationship I had to move again. In the foster system I was always moving from school to school. I've been in about 5 foster placements plus the crisis center. I'd leave, come back, leave, come back—or I didn't go to school at all. I missed 2 years of school. I'd be at a school for about 2 weeks. People didn't want me, or didn't have enough room, or thought me and the other kids weren't working out together. **(Kent)**

Three students reported having one to three teachers in both elementary and middle school who shared their ethnic or racial background. When asked what the experience was like, students stated:

It was like they felt where I was coming from. When I was having a bad day they knew what had happened. I kind of feel more comfortable—like they're gonna actually try and figure out what is going on. Not saying that White teachers don't care. They go through different stuff than we do . . . All my African American teachers were a big help to me because I got really close to them. **(Michael)**
[My first grade teacher, a teacher of color] was mean . . . she was really, really strict it was only in 1st grade. It was first time I got honor roll—I was really proud of myself. **(Delasean)**

Michael felt it was important to have teachers that shared students' ethnic or racial background:

Once you get in middle school and high school too, I think it is important to have a teacher with the same race and background as you because they understand where you are coming from on deeper level than other people could. You can have a little more respect for them and communicate with them better 'cause they know what you are going through. They can say, "I've been there. I came from the same place as you—and I made a future for myself just like you need to." Especially like males cause I really didn't know my father. I didn't meet him until I was 14. Having those male role models would be important like in middle school. Once you get older you kind of like resent them . . . like I don't need you. . . . **(Michael)**

In high school, all students reported having at least one to three teachers who shared their ethnic or racial background. The effect of having had so few teachers of color in schools negatively influenced this student's thinking about becoming a teacher:

I don't want to be a teacher if there's only going to be White teachers and I'll be the stand out guy . . . It kind of influences me to be a teacher if there are more teachers of color out there . . . especially if they are my co-workers. **(Trevor)**

When asked why we need more teachers of color, all students responded with similar responses related to an ability to establish a unique connection to students of color.

They can relate to students of color better. **(Trevor)**

It's a connection thing. We share the same background. **(Kent)**

However, only one student reported his experience working with an African American male teacher as being very positive, one reported his experience as positive and one student reporting a neutral experience, but clarified his response by stating "it was good, but I did not have him for long." One student described the role Black male teachers can play:

They could be sort of a role model—'cause some African American males don't have a father figure in their life—they can be that person in your life to basically tell you how to be a man and live your life. **(Kent)**

Another student described his only experience with an African American male teacher in this way:

They show you kind of like tough love. . . . They're really nice but they're blunt. They don't sugar coat anything. I think it is cool because if a teacher sugar coats, it's like maybe they try to make excuses for a student for failing. Black male teachers tell you you're failing, but they believe you can get it and encourage you and will do anything in their power. They give it to you straight when you're failing, but the love part is when they are willing to do anything to help you. **(Michael)**

Karl interpreted the role of an African American male teacher in this way:

Having an African American male teacher is really irritating. They've been through school I understand they don't want you to make the same mistakes they did . . . to a certain point it starts to sound like nagging toward you. **(Karl)**

Overall, students had positive perceptions of their schooling experiences, but shared troubling stories of both overt and subtle forms of racism they had experienced over time. Further, students expressed a clear need for more teachers of color, especially males, but also reported having mixed experiences with such teachers. These African American males who are considering teaching as a career provide powerful insights into the experiences of African American males in current schooling practices. Clearly, issues surrounding foster care, racism, and the way a predominantly White teaching force can stand in the way of Black males entering teaching.

Experience of the Introduction to Urban Education Class

Four of the five students reported that the Introduction to Urban Education class helped them seriously consider teaching as a profession. However, one student is not considering a teaching career. When asked if the course influenced their thinking about becoming a teacher, students stated:

[It was positive] mainly because I got to teach little kids and they were interested in learning. **(Trevor)**
Because I want to help kids, it makes me think about the change I could make if I become a teacher. I can influence other young males such as myself to go and become teachers—it's not always about the pay. **(Michael)**

I am interested in becoming a teacher because I feel like I can connect with students better and I understand all their experiences that they may go through. I want to help other foster children I've been through experiences and have problems similar to theirs I can give them the help they need. **(Kent)**

Working with the elementary students was one of the highlights of the course for many of the students. Comments made by the students included:

This was the best part—the smile on his face when he could read something by himself or could figure out a word—it was a step up for me . . . seeing the smile on his face and really on all the kids' faces. At the end of the day when you learn a couple of words, it makes you feel good about yourself. **(Karl)**
The best part of working with my student was the fact that he was always eager to learn and he enjoyed me teaching him. **(Trevor)**

Beyond the fieldwork experience with elementary aged students, the course required students to engage in an in-depth research project. All students selected research topics for very personal reasons. They reflected on their research projects and the opportunity to present this research to an authentic audience on a college campus as having a positive impact on their learning about urban schools.

I have a better understanding of urban issues I got the chance to present my topic and it made me feel good. **(Kent)**

Michael's research explores high school drop-out rates for African American and Latino students. He explained why this is an important topic for him to examine:

This topic is important to me because I am an African American student and some of my relatives have dropped out of high school. It's also important to me because I've seen how dropping out of high school has affected my older cousins and some other students that have dropped out as well. I want to know what is the main reason why students drop out of high school. **(Michael)**

Kent is interested in exploring what teachers know and need to know about students in the foster care system. He described his interest in this way:

I am interested in this topic because I am in foster care and I know all the experiences and I feel like there are things that teachers don't know that they do need to know and also I feel like I haven't always had the proper help I needed so teachers need to know more . . . **(Kent)**

Having a university professor co-teach the course was invaluable for the students and made them feel more connected to the college experience. When asked how having a university professor of color as a teacher impacted them, students stated:

First I learned how to write an essay the right way and I got to understand how to work with a college professor—I never really understood that before. **(Trevor)**

[This] helped me a lot 'cause it's like that college experience being around professors. Makes me think that there are professors in college that you can talk to and care about teaching. It's good because you have a lot of resources. Take a class like this—and it's a great opportunity! **(Delasean)**

I think that they know the college life and they're more—well they're not like high school teachers—sometimes the college professor wants you to have your work on time without them telling you. They expect you to do your work—they expect more of their students—and it's helped . . . professors are like "up there." **(Kent)**

The Introduction to Urban Education course has had a positive effect on both the African American male students' considerations of teaching as a career as well as their preparedness for college. Following these students over time will be the clearest indicator of the success of the course. Such research is planned and in progress.

DISCUSSION

There is a dearth of research regarding high school teacher pipeline programs for students of color (National Education Association, 2009) and even less focusing specifically on African American male youth. This study is a first step to better understanding the beliefs, experiences, and thought processes of African American males in a pipeline to becoming a teacher. Given the scarcity of, and need for, African American male teachers (Brown & Butty, 1999; Lewis, 2006; Mitchell, Scott, & Covrig, 2000), it is important to explore the thoughts and beliefs of African American male students on the pathway to teaching.

These five African American young men provided insight on several important issues related to the pathway to teaching. Similar to Gordon's research (2000), students reported that other professions, such as a professional athlete or medical doctor were considered more respected and had greater earning power than teachers in their community, however, students also spoke very highly of the profession reflecting on the ways teachers can have an impact on students' lives. This encouraging perception may have been influenced by their positive experience during the course and their field practice work with elementary students.

When students were asked about their experiences with African American male teachers, they described what Lynn (2006) termed "otherfathering" and what Irvine and Fraser (1998) referred to as "warm demanders." That is, students described these teachers' as having high expectations with a no-nonsense, no excuse attitude coupled with a sense of compassion and willingness to go above

and beyond to ensure students' success. This was best reflected by Michael's description of tough love, "They give it to you straight when you're failing, but the love part is when they are willing to do anything to help you." Students also commented on a feeling of connectedness to the African American male teachers they have had. Frequent statements regarding African American male teachers who have "been there" and have a better understanding of them because of shared experiences reflected students' perceptions of their African American male teachers' abilities to relate to them, understand them, and act as cultural brokers. This was also provided as a reason for needing more African American male teachers and for others, this was a reason for them to seriously consider becoming a teacher. Students reflected on their need for African American men in the classroom not only as role models but also for some, in the absence of having a father figure in their life, they wanted and needed someone to show them how to be men. Their sentiments echoed Whiting's (2008) assertion that ". . . it is only a Black man who can *fully* model the attitudes and behaviors of successful Black manhood," (p. 230).

Additionally, students offered numerous explanations for why there are so few African American male teachers and made suggestions for recruitment. They perceived the shortage was related to low college enrollment rates for African American teens and a lack of exposure to African American male teachers. In fact, one student (Trevor) emphatically stated that he did not want to be the "stand out guy" referring to being the only African American male teacher in a school. Another student cited that the perception in the African American male community was that teaching, like nursing, is women's work. While the gender stereotypes may be a contributing factor for the current underrepresentation of male teachers in general regardless of race (Rice & Goessling, 2005), it is unknown if this is particularly salient in the African American male community (Lynn, 2006). One student questioned the unjust arrangement of power and privilege in public schools as a reason for the underrepresentation of teachers of color. On a positive note, students offered suggestions for increasing the representation of African American male teachers. These focused on providing opportunities to work with younger children and offering courses such as the Introduction to Urban Education, while reminding future students of the urgent need for more African American male teachers.

Similar to other research findings (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Gordon, 2000; Lewis, 2006), the attraction to helping young people and becoming agents of change seemed more important than pay for several participants. Teachers' pay was not viewed as a deterrent to enter the field despite hearing negative comments about pay and workload from their teachers. This finding, coupled with the students' positive reflections on their field experience, suggests that providing opportunities for African American youth to work in the community with younger children may be an important step in recruiting more African American male teachers. Furthermore, by providing elementary age African American boys with African American high school age "teachers" we expose younger students to a positive view of a role they may fill one day.

All students reported experiencing racism in school. This finding, while very disturbing, was not surprising and supports past research on the experiences of African American young men in schools (Blaisdell, 2005; Ford, 2010). Although students did not specifically state that these experiences would either deter or encourage them to become teachers, it certainly had an effect on them. The experiences they shared highlighted how African American males are forced to navigate systems in which highly impactful negative experiences converge with deficit views based on race, class, gender (Blaisdell, 2005; Ford, 2010) and lowered academic expectations (Ford, 2010; Vegas, Murnane, & Willett, 2001; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Interestingly, however, the self-selected topics chosen by these students for their research projects were directly related to the racial, social, and educational injustices experienced by African American male youth (see Table 1). Taken together, this suggests that having African American youth explore their own experiences with racism and providing a theoretical lens from which to interrogate these sociopolitical and educational injustices may encourage students to consider teaching as a way to agitate the inequitable status quo and act for social justice in their lives, their communities, and for other African American male youth.

Most students felt that the Introduction to Urban Education class positively influenced their exploration of teaching and also believed the course better prepared them for college, which hopefully will have a positive impact on their pathway to teaching. Working with young children was a critical component of the course. Students reflected on the positive feelings they had by becoming a role model and gained a sense of satisfaction in helping students acquire literacy skills. Again, the opportunity to work with younger students appears to be a critical component in attracting African American young men to consider teaching.

Students felt better prepared for college as a result of taking this course and regularly interacting with a Latina college professor. They viewed their relationship with a professor in terms of someone who provided a glimpse of what college life might be like because she held high expectations and provided academic and personal support. It is important to note that most of these students will be the first in their immediate family to attend college. As such, they had limited experience with college knowledge (Smith, 2009) or the expectations of a college course. Although, based on the literature (Clewett et al., 2000; National Education Association, 2009) other high school teacher pipeline programs offer college credit and campus visits as part of the course experience, no other program appeared to have the weekly presence of a university professor. This aspect of the course is worthy of consideration and replication given students' reaction to the experience. Furthermore, given this program's focus on increasing the representation of teachers of color, providing students with access to university faculty of color may provide additional motivation and incentive for students to consider teaching and perhaps looking further to consider becoming a teacher educator. Interestingly, although none of the students were able to clearly identify degree types (e.g., AA, BA, MA, PhD) or distinguish the differences between requirements to obtain those degrees at the onset of the course, once students had that knowledge, they were curious about the degrees held by teachers and administrators at their school. In one instance, one of the young men in this study reportedly asked his principal if he intended to pursue his doctorate. This same young man now has this as his long-range goal.

Lastly, unlike other pre-collegiate teacher pathway programs (e.g., Teacher Cadet) that only admit students who have a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or better (National Education Association, 2009), we were inclusive in our approach and did not impose exclusionary criteria (e.g., GPA, number of disciplinary actions, attendance record) that would limit access to enrollment. This strategy proved extremely effective. The GPAs for the five young men in the study ranged between 1.7 and 3.8, with two students having a GPA below 3.0 (see Table 1). Interestingly, the student with the lowest GPA was one of the brightest and most engaged students in the class. Kent's GPA was more of a reflection of his multiple transitions through foster care than his intelligence or commitment to school. In fact, Kent openly discussed his foster care status and used his personal experiences to develop his research project exploring teachers' knowledge of the foster system. Because of his participation in the class and the information gleaned from his research project, Kent is seriously considering becoming a teacher. Therefore, it was extremely fortunate that Kent was not excluded from the class based on his GPA.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

To improve the pathway to teaching for African American male youth, the following recommendations are provided as areas of future research and suggestions for classroom practice.

- A large-scale study should be conducted with middle and high school age African American male youth to understand their perceptions of teaching as a career choice, factors that inhibit or encourage their exploration of teaching as a career option, and their recommendations for attracting African American male youth into the teaching force.
- More empirical studies should be conducted on the effectiveness of high school teacher pathway programs to determine which program components are deemed most influential in encouraging African American males to pursue teaching. These data, coupled with

longitudinal studies following students' educational and career trajectories, can provide much needed information on teacher pathway program effectiveness.

Given the success of the current program, several recommendations are made for replication and classroom practice. These include:

- Developing partnerships between school districts and teacher preparation programs to offer pre-collegiate Introduction to Urban Education type courses.
- Providing African American male youth with the opportunity to explore teaching through tutoring and mentoring younger students.
- Increasing conversations across the K-12 experiences of African American male youth regarding the possibilities and opportunities a teaching career provides.
- Utilizing the expertise and perspectives of African American male youth to strive for educational justice across grade levels and communities with a particular focus on improving the pipeline into teaching for African American males.
- Mentoring African American male youth by successful teachers of color, particularly African American male teachers.

We strongly encourage African American male teachers to advocate for the creation of these learning opportunities and lead their design and implementation. Data from this study can help inform curriculum development by attending to those aspects of the course that African American male students found most influential.

CONCLUSION

The pathway to teaching is in crisis for African American men (Lewis, 2006; Mitchell, Scott, & Covrig, 2000). As such, we desperately need to find ways to encourage their participation in exploring the teaching field. The findings from the current study speak to the need to create new and relevant teacher pipeline models that address the unique and complex perspectives and experiences of young African American men. In this age of increasing accountability (No Child Left Behind, 2001), efforts need to be placed in areas that will assist African American young men to work to their full potential; one avenue to accomplish this is to increase the number of well-prepared African American male teachers to ensure that African American students can have teachers who can act as cultural brokers and role models as well as provide academic supports in culturally responsive environments. This study demonstrates how a successful program has the capacity to encourage young African American males to reframe their thinking and see themselves as potential future teachers.

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