Teacher Residency as a Path to Teacher Diversity: Negotiating Tensions in Role and Identity

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Abstract

This phenomenological qualitative study examined the experiences of graduate-level teacher candidates enrolled in teacher residency programs and serving as teacher aides or assistants (TAs). Some participants were graduate-level teacher candidates already employed as TAs in a large urban district and enrolled in an Urban Pipeline Residency Program, a state-funded diversity initiative designed to increase the number of teachers from underrepresented groups by supporting TAs to pursue teacher certification. Additional participants were enrolled in the Traditional Residency Program and completed residencies in other local districts. Survey and interview data from TA/teacher candidates, mentors, and instructors showed that TA/teacher candidates in both groups experienced conflicting roles and identities, balanced demands of different classroom settings, lacked access to knowledge and materials, and balanced demands on their time. Informed by role theory, identity work, and culturally responsive pedagogy, this study suggests that programs for TA/teacher candidates may benefit from negotiating these tensions through: (a) support for TA/teacher candidates to develop their identities as teachers to address *role conflict*, (b) strong communication protocols to address *role clarity*, and (c) increased access to tools and knowledge to address *role enactment*.

Keywords

teacher residency, teacher diversity, teacher assistants, teacher roles, teacher identity

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In American classrooms, children of color are disproportionately disciplined (Lindsay & Hart, 2017), referred to special education (Fish, 2019), and experience higher dropout rates (United States Department of Education, 2021). The opportunity gap, as it relates to race, has remained fairly stable since the 1980s (Hanushek et al., 2019). In addition, the nation has found it difficult to move culturally diverse students, including children of color, to the highest levels on national achievement tests (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014). These facts highlight the urgent need to identify factors to support the success of children of color in the classroom and close the opportunity gap (Muhammad, 2020).

One promising path is to increase the number of teachers of color. Diverse teachers can have positive social and academic impact for all students, particularly students of color (Easton-Brooks, 2019; Farinde-Wu et al., 2020). There are several benefits of diversifying the teaching force, including teachers of color serving as role models for all students and the potential of teachers of color to improve academic outcomes and school experiences for students of color (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). For example, Black male students who have at least one Black teacher in the elementary grades are significantly less likely to drop out before graduation from high school (Gershenson et al., 2017). When taught by teachers of the same race, children are less likely to experience exclusionary discipline (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Some argue that teachers can possess a *cultural synchronicity* with children of the same race that gives them an advantage in advancing academic outcomes for those children (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). However, currently 79% of public-school teachers in the United States are White (non-Hispanic) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020) while approximately 53% of the student population are children of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). In schools where the majority of students are Black, only about one third of the teachers are Black (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Given the relationship between teachers' races and children's academic success, it is incumbent upon the profession to identify avenues to increase the number of teachers of color in American classrooms. Diversifying the teaching force in America is, therefore, a critical and urgent goal.

Many factors have kept people of color out of teaching (Gershenson et al., 2021). These include financial barriers and concerns about academic coursework (Burbank et al., 2009). One promising approach to this challenge is the implementation of teacher residency programs specifically designed to increase the racial diversity of the urban teaching force. Teacher assistants (TAs) include a diverse group of individuals, already in the field, who have the potential to become excellent teachers with additional education (Burns et al., 2020). Recent data reveal that 49% of TAs in the United States were people of color compared with 20-27% of teachers (Data USA, n.d.; National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Teacher residency programs offer a potential avenue for supporting some of these TAs to enter the teaching profession and diversify the teaching force.

This study looks at participants in two teacher residency programs at one university. Some participants were enrolled in the Urban Pipeline Residency Program, a state-funded diversity initiative designed to increase the number of teachers from underrepresented groups in the local urban school district. Other candidates completed a Traditional Residency Program with residencies at other local districts. These other candidates were not funded by the state, but this program allowed individuals to retain their jobs as TAs while working toward certification. We studied participants in both programs.

Phenomenological studies allow researchers to examine the lived experiences of participants. Some research has looked at the lived experiences of teacher assistants (Ward, 2011) and teachers who are also assistant principals (Beltramo, 2014). However, while research has examined *practices* to support teacher candidates who are also TAs (Burns et al., 2020; Clewell & Villegas, 1999), little is known

about the lived experiences of those individuals and the perceptions of the mentors and university faculty with whom they work. It is important to explore the lived experiences of these individuals because this type of study allows us to learn about the complex set of circumstances they bring to the university classroom and to better support them. Our experience suggested that TAs who are also teacher candidates (TA/TCs) possess a unique set of strengths and challenges. Therefore, we asked the following questions:

1. What are challenges faced by currently employed teacher assistants who are also teacher candidates?
2. What are ways to support the shifting roles of teacher assistants who are also teacher candidates?
3. What are ways to appropriately differentiate instruction for teacher assistants/teacher candidates?

Relevant Literature

One potential avenue to prepare teachers of color is the employment of teacher residency programs, which are "district-serving teacher education programs that pair a rigorous full-year classroom apprenticeship with masters-level education content" (National Center for Teacher Residencies, 2021). Residency programs are uniquely poised to recruit teachers of color who are serving as teacher assistants. However, at the same time, these programs may pose unique challenges for TA/TCs of color given that the teaching force is predominantly White.

Increasing the Diversity of the Teaching Force through Recruiting Teacher Assistants

Research has shown that teacher candidates benefit from clinical preparation in contexts similar to their future teaching contexts (Darling-Hammond 2014; Goldhaber et al., 2017). The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance documented that those teachers who participated in a clinical residency program were more likely to persist in the workplace than teachers who did not (Silva et al., 2015). This finding was especially salient in relation to harder-to-staff schools (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Thus, teacher residency programs are demonstrating promise in helping to prepare teachers for success in high-need urban schools (Darling-Hammond, 2014).

Some teacher residency programs are specifically designed to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of the teaching force (Burbank et al., 2009; Burns et al., 2020). Residency programs can recruit diverse individuals outside the schools and provide them with positions in schools or can recruit individuals currently working as TAs within schools and provide them with a customized program leading to teacher certification. A study of positive outlier districts in California found that schools outperforming similar districts serving children of color had strong partnerships with local teacher preparation programs to train existing instructional aides to become teachers (Burns et al., 2020). However, barriers may prevent current TAs of color interested in becoming teachers from achieving this goal, including financial (Clewell & Villegas, 1999), standardized teaching certification requirements, and a lack of support networks for teachers of color (Torres et al., 2004).

Potential Supports for Teacher Assistants of Color in Teacher Preparation Programs

Campus-based supports have been shown to support the success of TA/TCs of color, including orientation workshops (Dandy, 1998), time management assistance (Osterling & Buchanan, 2003), and a cohort model (Lau et al., 2007). Communication among university faculty about the progress of the TA/TCs is also foundational to success (Lau et al., 2007; Villegas & Clewell, 1998). A collective approach to learning, as opposed to an individualized approach, was found by Kohli (2019) to support teachers of color. In addition, engaging in culturally responsive practices and discussions of race and criticality assisted these learners (Kohli, 2019). Burbank et al.'s (2009) study of immigrant TAs becoming teachers found that they benefitted from supportive dialogue. In addition to these campus-based supports, a supportive school context is critical, including strong school leadership and collegiality among school faculty. Administrators serve as either a source for growth or a significant point of interference in the professional development of the TA/TCs of color in their buildings (Humphrey et al., 2008; Lau et al., 2007). Careful selection of mentors and clear communication with mentors and building administrators will provide a network of support for TA/TCs of color so that they are able to develop their teaching skills and manage their shifting roles (Humphrey et al., 2008).

Cultural relevance in the program is an essential support, especially for TA/TCs of color. Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) is characterized by an emphasis on high-level learning goals, cultural affirmation and fluency, and critical consciousness. These ideas have been further developed as culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies emphasizing rigorous academic standards, social and political consciousness, and criticality (New York State Education Department, 2018). Cultural responsiveness can support TA/TCs by affirming their unique strengths, encouraging rigorous academic preparation, and fostering a critical stance toward teaching and learning. Attention to culturally responsive practices also supports TA/TCs as professionals (Burbank et al., 2009; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Helping TA/TCs prepare to face racialized interactions with colleagues and administrators, such as being asked to serve as a racial expert, can improve job retention and success (Kohli, 2019). Similarly, training in culturally responsive pedagogies can improve job satisfaction for TA/TCs, who then feel better equipped to meet the needs of their students (Cherry-McDaniel, 2019). Despite this knowledge of some aspects of teacher residency programs that support TA/TCs of color, much remains unknown. In particular, it is important to identify factors that might support or impede the ability of TA/TCs to transition from the role of TA to TC and the importance of identity and race in this process.

Theoretical Framework

A role refers to a combination of expectations and norms manifested in behaviors within socially defined categories (Bishop et al., 2020). As new roles are taken up, issues of identity are also made manifest. While roles express ways of behaving, identities are not always visible. The taking up of a new role can be fostered or impeded by an individual's identity development. Racial identity is also an important consideration as TAs of color transition into a predominantly White teaching force.

Role Theory

Role theory helps describe the socialization process that occurs in schools where "individuals learn to

behave in accordance with the way things are or have always been done" (Harris & Aprile, 2015, p. 141). Role theory posits that behaviors are based on context and governed by norms and expectations (Bishop et al., 2020). Therefore, enacting a role requires adjustments within dynamic situations, both immediate and longer-term. Due to the intense and varying demands in a classroom, teachers and teaching assistants engage in role adjustments in varying ways, including *personal*, *situational,* and *cultural* (Beezer, 1974). A personal role adjustment refers to immediate modifications made in-the-moment, whereas a situational role adjustment refers to changes made within an on-going situation. Finally, a cultural role adjustment involves modifying established interaction patterns expected within a culture over the long term (Beezer, 1974). In this study, we look most closely at the situational and cultural role adjustments of the participants, aware that personal adjustments contribute to these other areas.

In addition, TAs sometimes experience *role stretch* (Warhurst et al., 2014), even in their primary role as a TA, and may be asked to complete varied tasks including: one-on-one support for students with disabilities, translating for particular students, administrative duties inside and outside the classroom, playground or bus duty, and covering for various teachers during their breaks (Harris & Aprile, 2015). Adding the role of teacher candidate to a TA's existing role can introduce *role conflict*. The TA/TC may face competing expectations from the school context and teacher preparation program. In role conflict, an individual has difficulty prioritizing which role to fulfill (Bishop et al., 2020). In contrast to the roles of a TA outlined above, teacher candidates are tasked with fulfilling expectations of their course faculty and being apprenticed into the role of a professional teacher (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The role of the teacher commonly involves setting learning goals, creating learning experiences, and assessing student performance (Bishop et al., 2020). As TA/TCs experience competing expectations associated with these dual roles, they may experience role conflict. In contrast, when roles are well-defined, interpersonal and professional relationships tend to be more effective (Kaye, 2010 as cited in Harris & Aprile, 2015). *Role clarity* supports TA/TCs to take up their new roles effectively and engage in *role enactment.* Programs can address these competing expectations and conflicting roles in a variety of ways to facilitate role clarity and role enactment for TA/TCs.

Identity Development

Closely related to the concept of role is that of identity. While roles describe the observable interaction patterns of individuals, identity also encompasses ways of thinking, acting, and being in a social context (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Teaching and learning, at their best, deal with issues of identity (Beauchamp, 2015). TA/TCs develop their ways of thinking, acting, and being in the context of interactions in their classrooms and during campus instruction. Learning "implies becoming a different person" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53) in relation to those contexts. As teachers develop in thinking and practice, they engage in construction of their identity and evolution of their membership in a community of practice. Identity development is a dialogic process (Bakhtin, 1981/2003). Bakhtin (1981/2003) noted that we come to see our own thinking in a new way by encountering alternative viewpoints and voices. He further contended that social intercourse "mediates a person's ideological becoming and offers opportunities that allow development" (Freedman & Ball, 2011, p. 6). Dialogue then impacts our being as we look at our own beliefs in light of another's. Therefore, dialogue facilitates the development of identity and impacts how we view the world (Freedman & Ball, 2011). Muhammad (2018) noted the critical role of identity for learners of color in her examination of Black literary societies of the 19th

century. Based on her examination of artifacts from these communities, she argued that who we are, who others say we are, and who we desire to be are all powerful factors in learning, particularly for students of color. She contended that a strong sense of identity can become a source of strength for these students. So, too, could this become a source of strength for TA/TCs of color as they transition their roles and identities and enter the teaching profession.

Methods

This study provided a unique opportunity to study the lived experiences of teacher candidates who were also teacher assistants. While research has looked at potential supports for TA/TCs (Lau et al., 2007; Osterling & Buchanan, 2003), little is known about the complex lived experiences of these individuals as they take up these supports and enact these dual roles. Therefore, this study highlights the lived experiences of TA/TCs enrolled in residency programs to determine what challenges they experienced, what supports were helpful or would have been helpful, and ways in which university faculty could differentiate to meet their needs.

Study Context: Urban Pipeline Residency Program and Traditional Residency Program

Participants in this study were enrolled in two different graduate programs leading to certification in general education for grades one through six. The university offering these programs is located in a mid-sized city of about 275,000 people in the northeastern United States. The Urban Pipeline Residency Program is for those employed as TAs by the local large urban public school, Appleton Public Schools (a pseudonym). It is a state-funded diversity initiative designed to increase the number of teachers from underrepresented groups. To qualify for the graduate Urban Pipeline Residency Program, candidates must be employed as a full-time TA in Appleton Public Schools. Pipeline TA/TCs can take two classes per semester at no cost. The second program, the Traditional Residency Program, offers graduate-level initial teaching certification with the option to complete the fieldwork as part of a residency with a different local school district. Traditional Residency candidates must also be employed as a full-time TA. TA/TCs engaged in residency at other schools in the region face similar challenges to the Urban Pipeline candidates, from financial constraints to the demands of working full time while attending school. TA/TCs in both programs were included in this study so that we could investigate how to serve the TA/TC population as a whole and because both groups contained people of color.

The programs for both groups include a six-credit English language arts methods course and a six-credit math course, both of which require 45 hours of field experience followed by one semester of full-time student teaching. The expectation is that these experiences will be completed in a general education classroom within grades one through six in order to meet certification requirements. The TA/TCs are able to complete their field hours in their own classroom, if the classroom meets these requirements, or go to another classroom in the building for the required number of hours if they are working in a different grade or special education.

During the year in which the study took place, fifteen candidates were enrolled in the Urban Pipeline Residency Program and five candidates were enrolled in the Traditional Residency Program. The Urban Pipeline candidates were all employed as TAs in Appleton Public Schools and the Traditional TA/TCs were employed in urban charter schools or nearby suburban districts. Those enrolled in the programs as TA/TCs identified themselves as African American women, Latina women,

Caucasian women, a woman from Sudan, and an African American male. Their mentors included individuals who identified as Caucasian, African American, and Latina.

Study Design, Data Collection, and Analysis

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was to investigate the lived experiences of the TA/TCs in both programs in order to refine this and similar programs to better meet their needs. Phenomenological studies describe "the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences" and "what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). Data were collected through written surveys and semi-structured interviews because these response modes allow participants to offer explanation for their answers. Surveys and consent were distributed by email to the 20 TA/TCs who were enrolled in both programs at the time of the study, five university faculty working with the TA/TCs, and 13 mentor teachers of TA/TCs. Questions, designed collaboratively by the research team and based on the research questions, were open-ended and included asking about challenges, existing supports, and what else could be done to support TA/TCs (see Appendix A). These questions were designed in an open-ended manner to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of the TA/TCS, university faculty, and mentors and allow for a range of responses. To increase the number of participants, the research team decided to offer semi-structured interviews instead of surveys as a response mode to potential participants. As a result, three more mentors and one additional TA/TC agreed to participate using video conferencing. These interviews were recorded and transcribed. As noted, these participants were chosen for interviews because they did not respond to the survey but were willing to share their thoughts through conversation. The survey and interview questions were the same, so we collapsed them for analysis.

A total of 13 TA/TCs consented to participate in the study, 11 from the Urban Pipeline Residency Program and two from the Traditional Residency Program working in other schools. Eleven mentors participated, eight of whom worked with Urban Pipeline candidates and three of whom worked with Traditional TA/TCs in an urban charter school. Mentors' experience teaching ranged from five to 32 years and their experience with mentoring ranged from one to ten years. Table 1 breaks down the participant information by program.

The three university faculty member participants included a math methods instructor who worked with candidates in both programs and two ELA methods instructors, one of whom worked with Urban Pipeline TA/TCs and one of whom worked with Traditional Residency TA/TCs. Since the three university faculty participants also served as co-authors, they were able to offer insights from working closely with the TA/TCs over time (Spradley, 1980). These three faculty participants included one African American woman with 22 years of university teaching experience, one Caucasian woman with 13 years of university teaching experience, and one Caucasian woman with 2 years of university teaching experience. All faculty participants brought experience working with graduate level teacher candidates during fieldwork, ranging from two to six years, to the study. Each had extensive experience working with nontraditional graduate students and benefitted from knowledge gained by teaching the participants in the program. At that same time, they sought to maintain awareness of their subjectivities through discussion with the rest of the research team (Peshkin, 1988). As with the other data, the co-authors' survey answers were analyzed by the entire research team.

Table 1
Study Participants

Type of Participant	Type of Residency Program	Number of Participants	Years of Experience Teaching	Years of Experience Mentoring or Supervising
TA/TCs	Urban Pipeline Residency Program	11	n/a	n/a
	Traditional Residency Program	2	n/a	n/a
Mentors	Urban Pipeline Residency Program	8	5 - 32	1 - 10
	Traditional Residency Program	3	7 - 11	1 - 2
University Faculty	Urban Pipeline Residency Program - ELA	1	22	6
	Traditional Residency Program - ELA	1	13	5
	Both Programs - Math	1	2	2

Data from 27 total surveys and interviews from the three participant groups were analyzed within and across groups. This included the responses collected from surveys on a Google Form and six typed pages of interview data. Responses to questions on written surveys ranged from a phrase to several sentences each. Interview answers were longer and generally ranged from three to five sentences. First, researchers worked individually to identify significant statements from survey and interview data within participant groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These were noted in separate documents, and researchers individually grouped and coded statements using inductive analysis to generate tentative categories (Johnson, 2018). For example, initial categories included *access to materials* and *access to technology*. Researchers also identified illustrative quotes. These categories and quotes were shared among the research team in writing prior to a research meeting.

Next, the research team met to discuss these categories in order to collapse them into solidified themes and remove data that did not fit within each theme. Researchers then looked for commonalities across participant groups. Themes across participant groups were informed by role theory (Bishop et al., 2020; Harris & Aprile, 2015), identity development (Bahktin,1981/2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Muhammad, 2018), and equity work (Muhammad, 2018) and adjusted based upon this conversation. These final themes were: 1) tension between roles, 2) tension between classrooms, 3) technology tensions, and 4) tensions with time. Additional quotes were identified to illustrate each theme. Finally, we engaged in member checking with participants through email by summarizing key findings and asking for input before finalizing findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this way, themes were confirmed by participants.

Findings

Survey and interview data from TA/TCs, mentors, and university faculty showed that TA/TCs experienced conflicting roles, balanced demands of different classroom settings, lacked access to knowledge and materials, and balanced demands on their time. Informed by role theory (Bishop et al., 2020; Harris & Aprile, 2015), identity development (Bahktin,1981/2003), and equity work

(Muhammad, 2018), this study suggests that programs for TA/TCs of color may benefit from negotiating these tensions through: (a) support for TA/TCs to develop their identities as teachers to address *role conflict*, (b) strong communication protocols to address *role clarity*, and (c) increased access to tools and knowledge to address *role enactment*. We begin by exploring these themes through the eyes of the TA/TCs, mentors, and university faculty to illuminate challenges and supports. We will then suggest avenues of differentiation informed by these challenges and supports.

Tension Between Roles

TA/TCs shared extensively about the tension they experienced between their role as a TA and as a teacher candidate. When fulfilling both roles, at times their roles and responsibilities were in conflict. For example, a TA might accompany the class to a special area class, while the teacher attended a planning meeting with grade-level colleagues. One TA/TC reported this as her biggest challenge. She rarely attended team meetings because she was tasked with accompanying children to their special area classes, so she missed out on discussion of the implementation of the reading and writing curricula. To make up for this, she would "watch the videos and use the teacher's manual" to prepare her instruction. However, she would have preferred to "go with her to the team planning, so I could see the process a little bit of how they plan." TA/TCs needed to adjust their views and expectations of themselves as they moved into the role of a teacher candidate. One said that "as an aide, I was always just helping," whereas as a TA/TC "I had to look at all the needs of my classroom when I was making my lesson plans." Mentors echoed this sentiment. One explained that her TA/TC needed support growing in "confidence in developing from a support role to a leading role in the classroom."

Mentors played an important part in supporting TA/TCs to take on new roles as teacher candidates. This took many forms, including communicating expectations for students to respect TA/TCs and sharing practical advice. One TA/TC expressed gratitude that the mentor teacher treated her with respect and as an "equal" teacher. She explained: "My mentor teacher supported me by allowing me be equally important in her class and demands equal respect from the students." One mentor described how she was mindful of her TA/TC's needs as a teacher candidate by respecting her time. She said, "You don't have to be in the room 24/7 helping me all the time, like if you need to do something that pertains to your lesson . . . take that time." This sort of respect validates the TA/TCs' emerging identities as teachers.

More support might be needed by mentor teachers to learn concrete ways to help TA/TCs develop their identities as teachers. One TA/TC noted, "The mentor teacher could have offered more support by offering me to come and sit in during some of her testing with the students or grade level meetings to get an experience of what is being discussed and how it's being implemented." Attending grade level meetings and similar experiences affirm the TA/TC's emerging identity as a teacher who is part of a community of practice.

Tension Between Classroom Settings

Many TA/TCs served in special education or kindergarten classrooms for their TA positions and were required to spend time in a classroom that served general education students in grades one through six to complete their field experiences. One challenge associated with this was the potential disruption to the continuity of the learning experience. One TA/TC in this situation said that she felt "more connected to my mentor class than my assigned class." Another reported difficulty switching her interaction styles

between older and younger students. She explained, "observing one classroom different from my regular classroom was very challenging because I am used to speak(ing) one way to older kids and teaching and observing the little ones is a whole different world." Another TA/TC noted the difficulty in forming strong relationships with students, saying that she could not "really develop strong relationships" with children if she were moving between two classrooms.

Even when their paid positions were in the same classroom as their field placements, TA/TCs were sometimes pulled from their classrooms to fulfill other duties. One TA/TC explained that on "some days I will have to act as the sub." Finding substitute teachers is a major challenge for schools, and TAs are perfectly positioned to be called upon at the last minute because they are already in the building. University faculty noticed that the principals were more likely to require TA/TCs to fulfill their TA duties over their requirements as a TA/TC. In one case, a TA/TC experienced several challenges when beginning her English language arts and math methods fieldwork. She was employed as a TA at an elementary school where she had a multitude of responsibilities: supporting the classroom teacher and students to whom she was assigned, preparing materials for multiple teachers of different grade levels, and monitoring the lunchroom. Her schedule did not allow her to fulfill the requirements for one of her methods courses, and she was unsuccessful in getting her administrators to agree to a schedule change to accommodate the expectations of the course. It was not until the TA/TC threatened resignation that the administrator and university faculty member were able to discuss her unique role as a TA/TC and come to an agreement. She said, "I almost had to even quit the job to make sure I got my requirements done for school." This TA had a backup job she could rely upon for income. However, this was not the case for many of the other TAs who would not have been able to entertain the idea of quitting due to financial constraints.

Mentor teachers, too, wrote about the difficulties faced by TA/TCs when their responsibilities as a TA superseded their requirements as a teacher candidate. One mentor noted that when her TA/TC was pulled from her classroom to fulfill other duties, it took away from the TA/TC's ability to complete field placement requirements.

Technology Tension: Access and Inclusion

Technology was a major concern during the time these data were gathered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instruction in elementary schools at that time occurred in hybrid and online settings for at least part of the school year. However, these data highlight larger issues of access and inclusion that were brought to light by online instruction and persist even as children returned to school buildings. While technology was a common concern across TA/TCs, mentors, and university faculty, TA/TCs were the most vocal about this area. One challenge was the financial burden of maintaining adequate hardware and connectivity. A TA/TC explained that her computer acquired a virus during the semester: "It cost me $108.00 to get it repaired. It's hard using my laptop for work and school." Another spent money to improve her internet connection: "I had to purchase a new modem/router to improve my connection." Another TA/TC explained that she experienced "slow internet, poor connectivity." TA/TCs suggested that they could be issued a laptop and a hot spot device by the university that would be a reliable source of internet access for the duration of the program.

One important common challenge among the TA/TCs was the issue of access and inclusion. TA/TCs experienced difficulty when they were not given access to teacher privileges in the learning management system of the school in which they worked (e.g., Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams).

One TA/TC noted the challenge of "not being able to set up the platform where I could be the facilitator of the remote teaching classroom. I still had to wait around for someone to allow me in the meetings." University faculty noted that TAs were not included in district training regarding the required technology platforms in the district. To address this issue, one faculty member took on the responsibility to arrange training for the TA/TCs in the technology platforms required by the district.

TA/TCs also cited a lack of familiarity with technology tools required as a university student. One TA/TC suggested that detailed explanations should be provided with each new technology tool. As she put it, she would have benefitted from "explanations on how to use them instead of 'Here, watch the videos.'" Access to connectivity, teacher privileges in learning management systems, and training are critical prerequisites for learners entering the world of teaching. Lack of access exacerbates feelings of being invisible, silenced, and isolated, which are commonly experienced by people of color in predominantly White settings (Haddix, 2010 as cited in Kohli, 2019).

Tensions on Time

The demand of time required to fulfill the roles of teacher candidate and teaching assistant was a major concern expressed by TA/TCs. This caused a good deal of stress. One noted, "It was stressful trying to find enough time to complete all assignments." Another agreed, "It was challenging in the fact of trying to meet your job obligations and meet the university requirements of the course load." A third TA/TC echoed this sentiment, saying, "when I have a huge assignment, I have to budget my time." An additional issue related to time was finding the time within the school day to complete the required teaching activities. Within a busy school day, each TA/TC had to negotiate the time to complete assignments with the mentor teacher while balancing their existing job duties. One TA/TC explained, "My challenges were finding the right time to practice my teaching assignments as a teacher candidate."

Mentors echoed this challenge and reported that they relied upon the TA/TC to let them know what needed to happen when. In general, they preferred this communication to come from the TA/TC rather than the university supervisor. One mentor said it is "easier for me to have her (the TA/TC) reminding me." Another agreed that emails from the supervisor would likely "just get lost." This placed the additional responsibility of communicating time needed to complete upcoming tasks on the TA/TC. Mentors also reported that they liked to have the expectations laid out for them in advance of the field placement experience. Mentors benefitted when university faculty provided a calendar for the semester ahead of time, as well as clearly articulated expectations. In cases when these were not provided, mentors missed them. One stated, "I think I would have liked more of maybe a layout of what they're really expected to do." Mentor teachers explained that, while flexibility was important, too much flexibility could be as problematic as too little flexibility.

In this same vein, university faculty expressed great empathy for the time management struggles of the TA/TCs. One noted that she sometimes felt conflicted about holding TA/TCs to high standards, so important as part of culturally sustaining and responsive instruction, because "It's hard to say 'no' to someone who is trying to make ends meet financially while going through the program." Another faculty member indicated that she created a written schedule for the TA/TCs and contacted the mentor teachers weekly to make sure they were on track. This was a much more hands-on approach than the faculty member typically used with other teacher candidates in traditional field placements.

Addressing Tensions Through Differentiation

Our third research question addressed ways that university faculty could differentiate instruction for this population. Au (2009) contends that culturally responsive instruction is defined, in part, by adapting instruction to the specific strengths, needs, and interests of a group of learners. Therefore, differentiation for TA/TCs is critical to create a culturally responsive approach. We frame these findings to address the tensions identified above.

Differentiating for Tensions Between Roles. University faculty noted that it is important to personalize expectations for TA/TCs based on their past experience, another aspect of culturally responsive and sustaining instruction. For example, a faculty member expressed that newer TAs needed support in communicating with their mentor teachers about the expectations for their programs because they had "a harder time speaking up for what they needed." More experienced TAs had a different set of challenges in that they "deferred to their mentor teachers' approaches," teaching lessons the same way they had been observing for years rather than incorporating instructional strategies learned on campus. University faculty often worked one-on-one with the TA/TCs to negotiate the tensions between the familiar role of TA and the new role of teacher candidate.

Differentiating for Tensions Between Classrooms. Candidates for certification in grades one through six who were working in special education classrooms were required to work under the supervision of a mentor teacher in a general education setting to complete their fieldwork experience. One faculty member chose to hold a meeting with each TA/TC to clarify these expectations and answer questions. In addition, she encouraged TA/TCs to make a determination as to whether this arrangement would be a "good fit" for their position. TA/TCs were then expected to receive verbal permission from their building principal and mentor teacher before formal written agreements were sent. In addition, individual meetings with mentor teachers and principals were described as an important way to differentiate the TA/TC's experience. Each classroom context is unique, and this conversation helped the university faculty member to begin to develop an understanding of the context in which the TA/TC's field placement would occur. It was also an opportunity for the faculty to share expectations and answer questions that are unique to each mentor and school. Especially important was the faculty member's conversation with the building principal. In this conversation, the faculty member was able to share the critical features of the field placement (e.g., time required in general education classroom, key experiences and assignments), potentially avoiding situations in which the TA/TC would have demands placed on her time that would conflict with responsibilities as a teacher candidate.

Differentiating for Technology Tension. As noted above, university faculty noticed that not all students had the same level of knowledge regarding teaching with technology and learning management systems. To address this need, faculty worked to get Google Classroom added to university accounts increase candidates' experience with this tool. Google Classroom is the most common learning management system in the surrounding school districts, followed by Microsoft Teams. One faculty member chose to have students do all of their assignments through Google Classroom. Another added content to the first class of the semester on using technology to instruct, including how to create assignments and rubrics in Google Classroom, how to create screencasts and videos of instruction and link them to Google Classroom, and how to use Google Slides for interactive lessons.

Differentiating for Tensions on Time. Every teacher candidate experiences tension when it comes to time management, but it is clear that TA/TCs experience this tension to a tremendous degree. In addition to being full-time employees and teacher candidates taking at least twelve credits per semester, many of these individuals were also the heads of families. As a result, many felt as if there were not enough hours in the day to meet all of their responsibilities. As noted earlier, the faculty member who found it helpful to meet with each of her TA/TCs prior to the beginning of the semester reviewed the expectations of the fieldwork component of the course. This was also an opportunity to communicate realistically about the demands of the six-credit course. In many cases, TA/TCs were enrolled in the six-credit math course and the six-credit English language arts course simultaneously. This faculty member described a situation in which this conversation led to one TA/TC rethinking her ambition to enroll in both courses simultaneously. The TA/TC decided to take only one of the six-credit courses at a time. Upon following up with this faculty member later, we learned that she felt this was a critically important decision for this student to be successful in her class.

Discussion

In an effort to increase the diversity of the teaching force, this program supports current TAs in an urban district, urban charter schools, and surrounding schools who aspire to become teachers. These individuals, many of whom are people of color, face tensions regarding their roles and identities, their classroom settings, their access to technology, and their time. Additionally, issues of racial identity can complicate the transition. In what follows, we apply the concepts of *role conflict, role clarity,* and *role enactment* to show how TA/TCs' dual-role challenged their formation of a professional identity. In light of these findings and informed by role theory (Bishop et al., 2020) and an understanding of the role of identity in learning (Bakhtin, 1981/2003; Muhammad, 2020), successful programs may benefit from a focus on helping TA/TCs negotiate these tensions by differentiating in three ways: (a) through support for TA/TCs to develop their identities as teachers and understand the role of racial identity in this transition, (b) through strong communication protocols, and (c) through increased access to tools and knowledge.

Support for TA/TCs to Develop Their Identities as Teachers: Addressing Role Conflict

Effective professional learning is grounded in teachers' own interests, motivations, and needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999). TA/TCs bring a unique set of motivations for pursuing teacher certification. Frequently, this follows several years of working in and, therefore, observing multiple classrooms and/or grade levels. These varied experiences are often the impetus for TAs to pursue teaching certification. TA/TCs bring many different areas of expertise to their positions, gleaned from a variety of prior experiences, and have developed their own unique identities throughout their lives. However, TA/TCs have frequently been socialized for many years into the role of TA, with long held behaviors and ways of thinking informing their practice. For example, often tasked with helping children who need extra assistance, TAs typically ask lower-level questions than teachers (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010) and assist children more than is necessary (Moran & Abbott, 2002). It can be challenging to suddenly take up a new identity as a teacher candidate and be expected to create learning experiences, design and interpret assessments, formulate high-level questions, and judge how much support is just right to support each learner. Holding these two roles at the same time may lead to *role conflict*, which is

characterized by tension between competing roles.

In addition, TA/TCs have deeply embedded identities, which may include being a TA and being a person of color, among others. As TA/TCs develop new ways of thinking and being, teacher educators must provide support to TA/TCs to affirm their existing identities at the same time that they enact new identities. Informed by Muhammad's work (2020) on the important role of identity, including racial identity, in learning, TA/TCs would benefit from an environment that supports the exploration of their multiple identities, including race, throughout the program. Muhammad notes that honoring and exploring students' racial identities is an important facet of rigorous and humanizing academic learning.

One potential support to address role conflict and identity exploration is for TA/TCs to work in collaboration with mentors and university faculty to set individualized professional learning goals informed by TA/TCs' identities, experiences, and interests. A set of questions focused on the TA/TC's interests and perceived strengths and needs relative to the outcome goals for each field placement and the areas of tension (i.e., roles, classroom setting, technology, and time) can serve as the starting point for the process. Either the mentor or university faculty member can serve as an active listener, with an eye on potential directions for continued development. In a sense, the mentor or faculty member identifies the seeds of future growth in the TA/TC's present words and ideas, anticipating directions for future development (Cole, 1996). As the more experienced other (Vygotsky, 1978), the mentor or university faculty member may also consider what goals the TA/TC might accomplish with support.

During this process, clear articulation of the desired outcomes of the field experience by the university faculty member is important. Through familiarity with the intended outcomes of the field experience, the TA/TC can take ownership of how those outcomes are accomplished, expressing their own evolving identity as a TA/TC, including racial and ethnic identity. For example, if one course outcome is for the TA/TC to become familiar with children's literature in a variety of genres that could be used for instruction, a TA/TC who identifies as Latina may choose to focus on locating books by Latinx authors and representing Latinx children. Another may choose to locate texts that represent the races and ethnicities of the adults and children in his or her classroom. The university faculty member and mentor can support the TA/TC by sharing resources about locating children's texts by authors and illustrators and featuring protagonists from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. In this way, the personalized learning plan is co-constructed by the TA/TC, mentor, and faculty member informed by the TA/TC's experience, interests, tensions, and course learning outcomes. This learning plan can help negotiate the conflict between the dual roles of the TA/TC, honor their existing identities, and articulate a vision of a cohesive approach to supporting their emerging professional identity.

Strong Communication Protocols: Providing Role Clarity

The ability to take up a new role is supported through *clarity* of role expectations (Kaye, 2010 as cited in Harris & Aprile, 2015). A shared vision of the role of the TA/TC is imperative when establishing school partnerships. This begins with a meeting between the university faculty member and TA/TC during the semester preceding the methods class field placement to clarify the expectations in terms of role and time commitment. This gives the TA/TC time to talk with the building principal and potential mentor teacher well in advance of the date the placement begins to establish mutual clarity. This meeting allows the university faculty member to build rapport with the TA/TC and ask questions about the TA/TC's strengths, interests, and goals for the field placement.

It also is vitally important for the university faculty member to communicate with the building principal. This individual makes decisions regarding allocation of time and resources that can either enable TA/TCs to take up their new roles or provide great obstacles. Since TAs are often expected to perform a number of jobs in a building beyond their job description, the university faculty member should communicate clear expectations to the building principal about the role of the TA/TC so that accommodations can be made to complete the fieldwork in the proper classroom setting. These expectations should include a clear delineation of the number of hours the TA/TC needs to spend under the supervision of the mentor teacher. A signed agreement with the principal also articulates the role, classroom setting expectations, and time commitment of the TA/TC. As conditions shift in the school throughout the semester, this meeting and agreement provide a touchstone and parameters for decisions regarding the TA/TC's responsibilities. The university faculty member can also emphasize the importance of access for the TA/TC to the school's learning management system.

A mentor teacher is heavily responsible for a TA/TC's growth, and their guidance is imperative as a TA/TC takes up his or her new role. There are several ways in which a university faculty member can help facilitate this process and support the relationship between the TA/TC and mentor. An initial meeting between the university faculty member and mentor teacher is critical to communicate the mentor's and the TA/TC's roles and responsibilities. The faculty member can provide information, such a calendar of topics, descriptions of desired professional dispositions, and lesson plan expectations. A second signed agreement from the mentor teacher provides role clarity and establishes a commitment to enacting these roles throughout the semester.

Increased Access to Tools and Knowledge: Facilitating Role Enactment through Dialogue

Access is critical to developing the competencies and knowledge to enact a new role. Without appropriate tools, TAs are unable to fully participate in and take up their new role as a teacher candidate and to act on newly acquired knowledge. Without appropriate knowledge, tools cannot be utilized to their full potential. Enactment of new roles supports the development of TA/TCs' identities as teaching professionals. Therefore, it is imperative to provide access to both tools and knowledge needed to enact the role of TA/TC. For example, programs could budget for laptops and hotspots for TA/TCs to borrow during the semester. University faculty could provide hands-on instruction in the technology tools needed to be successful both in the university campus environment and in the school environment. Increasing access to tools and knowledge also communicates a message to the TA that validates his or her new role and identity.

However, technology changes rapidly and not all schools use the same tools. Therefore, most importantly, university faculty should work with TA/TCs to develop a growth mindset toward the adoption of new technology throughout their careers. This requires the instructor to model his or her thinking when encountering a new technological tool and the opportunity for social support as TA/TCs encounter new tools. Discussion has the potential to assist TA/TCs to make meaning of their experiences with technology. Identity development is supported through encountering others' ideas in dialogue. Dialogue encourages learners to look at their beliefs in a new way (Bakhtin, 1981/2003) and is culturally responsive because it helps learners to make sense of who they are (Muhammad, 2018). In this case, dialogue could help TA/TCs to develop their own beliefs about their ability to learn, adapt, and integrate new technology into their learning and their classrooms. As noted earlier, previous research supports the use of a dialogic and socially constructed approach to learning with TAs of color

(Burbank et al., 2009; Kohli, 2019).

Tools and knowledge can also support TA/TCs to deal with tension created by balancing their time. Tools include course calendars with key assignments and consistent use of the campus learning management system by university faculty to help TA/TCs stay organized. Knowledge can be provided in the form of specialized workshops on time management (Dandy, 1998). At the same time, tensions experienced by the TA/TC regarding his or her role and classroom settings can be addressed through access to knowledge about likely tensions they will face and coping mechanisms. As with technology, a gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) is important to support the TA/TCs to take up new ways of thinking about their time. Additionally, dialogue once again will afford TA/TCs the opportunity to encounter new thinking and challenge their previously held beliefs (Bakhtin, 1981/2003). Through access to knowledge and skills and by employing dialogue, those working with TA/TCs can facilitate *role enactment* and apprenticeship into the profession (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Limitations and Future Research

While our intention is to represent the lived experiences of these TA/TCs, we were limited by the amount of data we were able to collect from them. In future studies, it would be beneficial to gather interview data from participants before, during, and after the program to better represent the evolution of their roles and identities. In addition, our own positionalities served as limiting factors. All of the authors identify as highly-educated (master's and doctoral degrees) and most of us identify as White, which limits our ability to understand the lived experiences of all of our participants. This study is limited by the number of TA/TCs, mentors, and university faculty who were participants. It is also limited by including data from only one university and the fact that not all TA/TCs chose to participate, so voices of all those enrolled were not represented. Future research could compare residency programs in other locations and include more participants. In addition, it would be beneficial to look at long-term outcomes for TA/TCs, including employment statistics.

Conclusion

Residency programs for TA/TCs offer a promising pathway to prepare quality teachers while diversifying the teaching profession. This study offers insight into potential supports for diverse TA/TCs and ways to address role conflict, role clarity, and role enactment while supporting new TA/TCs to honor existing identities and develop new ones in a culturally responsive and sustaining manner. The goal of supporting teacher candidates of color is an urgent one given the persistent opportunity gap for children of color and evidence that teachers of color have great potential to help close this gap. Those tasked with creating and nurturing these programs must be aware that TA/TCs often report a tension between their roles as a TA, a paid position designed to assist the classroom teacher and students, and as a teacher candidate, which could be characterized as an apprenticeship in which the goal is to develop an identity as a teacher (Lave & Wenger, 1991). With assistance to achieve role clarity, TA/TCs can enact new roles and identities and become socialized into the teacher profession (Harris & Aprile, 2015). This process is particularly complex for TA/TCs of color, entering a predominantly White profession. Future research should track the challenges of these individuals throughout teacher residency programs to develop a more responsive approach throughout their journeys. Assisting TAs to recognize, honor, and develop their identities, establishing strong

communication protocols, and increasing access to knowledge and tools will strengthen the teacher education program's ability to mentor TA/TCs of color as they transition to the role of teacher.

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