Amending Schlossberg: The Transition Issues Faced by Under-represented Transfers in a PWI

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Problem Statement
The United States faces a critical shortage of teachers of color (Tenore, Dunn, Laughter, & Milner, 2010). Diverse teachers have a dramatic impact in increasing the cultural competence of our classrooms and serve as a role model for our increasingly diverse school children (National Education Agency, 2004). With our student population becoming increasingly diverse, the question must be raised, who is teaching our children and what can be done to diversify our teaching force? The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2004) found that in the 2003-2004 academic year, 83.1% of all teachers were White, 7.4% were Black, and 6.2% were Hispanic. The data is shockingly clear that teachers rarely look like the students they instruct. This study sought to find a possible solution to this catastrophe.

Theoretical Framework
In simply reviewing the GPA performance of our transfers would be a replication of earlier studies and provide limited contribution to our understanding of the transition phenomenon. This study instead investigated the transition process as viewed through Schlossberg’s (Water & Goodman, 1995) Transition Theory (see also: Schlossberg, 1981, 1987; Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989). Through this theoretical framework, “an examination of what constitutes a transition, the different forms of transitions, the transition process, and factors that influence transitions” can be deduced (Evans et al., 2010, p. 214). The study evaluates four support mechanisms (Four S’s) across the individual’s transition into, through, and out of a new environment.

Literature Review
Shortage of Diverse Teachers
According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2007), one-third of America’s student population in public schools in 2005 was a racial or ethnic minority. Hispanics accounted for 32% of students were African American. NCES predicts that by the year 2020, the minority population in school will increase to 39% of the total population. Additionally, as Lewis, Bonner, Byrd, and James (2008) reported, “the research literature reports that African American males comprise approximately 2% of those enrolled in the 1,300 teacher preparation programs across the country, and 1% of the United States K-12 teaching force” (p. 225).

Community College Demographics
Eggleston and Laanan (2001) wrote, “Transfer students are a very diverse group of students; they vary in age, gender, racial and ethnic background, academic preparation, and employment patterns — among other things” (p. 95). To attempt to lump all transfer students from community colleges into one category would be a misguided practice for universities, however, work must be done to address common concerns faced by this unique sub-population on our campuses. As the authors mentioned, “Senior institutions are only just beginning to develop programs especially for transfer students. There is a strong need for senior institutions to continue to develop support programs for transfer students to enhance their retention and persistence” (p. 95). Transfer student growth is growing, especially for students of color, is not expected to decelerate in the near future. Cohen and Brawer (2008) estimated that by 2015, American community colleges will enroll 7 million students which will account for almost 43% of all students in post-secondary institutions. The authors postulated that “Assuming that financial aid availability for middle- and upper-income students does not increase sufficiently so that tuition differentials are offset, the community colleges will get an even greater share of the students as tuition at four-year colleges and universities continues its rapid rise” (p. 455).

Methods
This qualitative study utilized an embedded single-case design (Yin, 2009). This study was conducted at Southeastern University (SU) (a pseudonym for the actual institution). SU is a large, research institution located in the South primarily chosen for its robust predominantly White teacher education program and because it is a representative example of a PWI with an extremely small under-represented student enrollment. The participants in this study were comprised of seven, senior, upper-division, Hispanic and African American pre-service teachers who had transferred from a community college.

Data collection for this study was primarily ascertained through face-to-face interviews which lasted approximately 45-90 minutes. Each interview was transcribed from digital recordings. Additional data were collected via electronic journal, participant observation, and persistent engagement. Data were analyzed through a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) where themes emerged. Member checking as well as peer debriefing was implemented as a means to ensure the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study title and themes were presented using the narrative of the participants through in vivo coding (Charmaz, 2006).

Findings
The following themes emerged from the interpretation of the data: more good days than bad, I don’t know where I would’ve been without their help, providing academic support, the role of Intimate Support Structures.

I Don’t Know Where I Would’ve Been Without Their Help: The Role of Intimate Support Structures
The findings from this study suggest that three intimate support structures were utilized by this cohort for coping mechanisms – their friends, their family, and their relationship with God. Although Schlossberg et al. (1995) indicate that Support is a single coping mechanism, data in this study indicate that intimate and institutionalized supports have different, if not competing, influences on student academic performance.

Providing All We Need: Institutionalized Support Structures
Students demonstrated a reluctance to use academic support services because they felt they would be perceived as dumb or unable to handle the teacher education curriculum if they asked for help. Family responsibilities also prevented the after-hours support. University faculty proved to have a positive influence on academic progress. Although they felt everything they needed to survive was being provided, they may not have everything necessary to thrive in the academic environment.

Implications
Theme suggests the following:

- Schlossberg’s et al. (1995) Transition Theory must be amended to completely represent the experiences of the under-represented transfers in this study (Five S’s) – See handout for Figure 2.
- At each phase of the transition, the university must address specific needs of the students in this study.

Challenging but Rewarding: Confronting Situational Factors
The students in this study struggled with the upper-level math courses in their teacher education program. Although services for support exist to provide tutoring, they were being advertised ineffectively. This study describes this phenomenon as information camouflage.

10 Takes More Time and Commitment: Employed Strategies by Transfers
Overcoming the challenges faced throughout the transition impacted the students in this study and served as an unintended learning outcome. This newfound confidence served well as they progressed to student teaching and graduation.

Figure 2. Recommendations for Improved Transfer Student Retention at SU

References