

Exploring Careers in Education and Leadership (ExCEL): Outcomes from year one of a high school education camp

Exploring
Careers in
Education and
Leadership

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims to address the increasing issue of teacher shortages and the lack of diversity in America's educators. Highly diverse communities need ways to support community members interested in careers as teachers. This article explores one promising approach to reach and inspire high school students considering the teaching profession. Camp ExCEL (Exploring Careers in Education and Leadership) provided a pathway allowing rising high school seniors an opportunity to explore the teaching profession. This pathway utilized the Grow Your Own framework, recruiting students from a diverse community and providing them resources and information that would further efforts to become an educator within their community.

Design/methodology/approach – The current study examined outcomes from an education summer camp, using qualitative thematic analysis to reflexively interpret participants' (n = 29) feelings and beliefs about effective teaching, culturally responsive teaching (CRT), project-based learning (PBL) and their camp experience. Data were collected using Google documents and surveys. The four connected themes that emerged were obstacles and barriers to teaching, qualities of an effective teacher, the impact of culturally responsive teaching and project-based learning on classrooms, and the importance of mentorships within education.

Findings – The paper provides insight about how an education camp can support high school students as they explore a career in education. Results suggest that focus on high-quality pedagogy can support student understanding of the career. Students also suggested their perception of effective teaching that includes acknowledging the needs of the whole student, modeling high-quality teaching practices and displaying positive professional dispositions.

Research limitations/implications – Because of the chosen research approach, the research results may lack generalizability. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to conduct and examine education camps further.

Practical implications – The paper includes implications for the development of other education camps, especially in areas with highly diverse populations.

Originality/value – This paper fulfills an identified need to increase the number of persons pursuing a career in education. The focus on a highly diverse community is also an area of need in education. This article details

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the description of an education camp and the curriculum used, along with findings from data collected during the first year.

Keywords Teacher recruitment, Education camp, Grow Your Own, High school education camp, Teacher shortage, University-school partnership

Paper type Research paper

One answer to the teacher shortage may lie within our own communities. This study examined a partnership between a university and an urban school district to facilitate a summer camp for high school students interested in teaching. The partnership and camp seek to address two challenges in the field of education: lack of diversity among educators (Villegas & Davis, 2008) and a compounding teacher shortage (Sutcher *et al.*, 2016). Prior to the pandemic, Sutcher *et al.* (2016) anticipated the education community would see a teacher shortage of approximately 110,000 teachers across the country by the 2017–2018 school year. A teacher shortage of this magnitude could have dire results impacting student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009; Kraft & Papay, 2014; Ronfeldt *et al.*, 2013; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020), which would cost public schools billions of dollars (Carroll, 2007; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The reality of the teacher shortage has become even more dire since Covid-19 further exacerbated the problem (Dos Santos, 2021). Due to this ongoing teacher shortage, schools face multiple challenges and heightened pressure. High teacher turnover further disrupts the standardizing of effective teaching practices and building consistent positive reputations within a district (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Teacher shortages are even more severe in hard-to-staff schools, such as urban, high-poverty schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). For the 2021–22 school year, many schools and districts around the country reported significant teacher shortages (NCES, 2022).

A second prominent and related problem in education is the lack of a diverse teaching force. Villegas and Davis (2008) argued for deliberate effort to recruit and retain teachers of color. Teachers of color serve as role models for students of color, hold higher expectations than white teachers for students of color and can use their own life experiences to “build bridges to learning” (Villegas & Davis, 2008, p. 584) about the everyday lives of their students of color. The authors concluded, “a comprehensive effort is needed to recruit, prepare, and retain people of color in teaching” (p. 601). Education needs to make more of an effort to intentionally recruit a diverse population into teacher education programs and classrooms, which will, in turn, address a portion of the needed teachers.

One potential solution to both the teacher shortage and the need to recruit people of color is the idea of Growing Your Own (GYO) educators. A GYO initiative attempts to recruit and retain potential teachers already attending schools in, or working within, their school community (Garcia, Manuel, & Buly, 2019). While the majority of existing GYO programs focused on preparing adult learners from the community, there has been a shift to begin recruiting in high school (Gist, 2021; Tandon *et al.*, 2015). Initial research has suggested that recruiting prospective teachers within a community to teach in the same community has yielded higher teacher recruitment than traditional methods (Garcia *et al.*, 2019; Gist, 2021; Gist *et al.*, 2019). Several GYO initiatives draw on critical and culturally responsive pedagogies (Lau *et al.*, 2007; Rogers-Ard *et al.*, 2012).

In response to this research, Camp ExCEL (Exploring Careers in Education and Leadership) was created as an immersive education camp designed to give high school students hands-on teaching and learning experiences. Providing high school students with career exploration opportunities is beneficial to them as well as to the profession. Through this camp, students discovered different career paths in a safe and supportive environment. They gained insight into the day-to-day operations of the teaching profession, as well as the skills and knowledge needed to succeed. The camp also built relationships between students and professionals in the field. This created a network of support for students and a pipeline of

qualified candidates for the profession. A summer camp focused on education allowed student participants to better determine if teaching is a field they are interested in pursuing. Students had an invaluable opportunity to test the waters, discover more about the profession and build relationships with those in the field.

Few such education summer camps for high school students exist in the United States. Similar camps exist for high school students interested in the medical field (Butler *et al.*, 2013; Daumer & Britson, 2004), and STEM careers (Kitchen *et al.*, 2018a, b; Mohr-Schröder *et al.*, 2014), but there is no literature that explores the impact an education-focused camp has on the attendees' perceptions of the teaching field. Research of medicine and STEM camp programs noted an increase in attendees' interest in pursuing professions in the fields (Butler *et al.*, 2013; Daumer & Britson, 2004; Kitchen *et al.*, 2018a, b; Mohr-Schröder *et al.*, 2014). Camp ExCEL creators hoped to produce similar results. Potentially, teaching as a profession faces additional challenges to overcome. Lortie's (1975) theory of apprenticeship of observation suggested students likely view teaching through their own school experiences. That familiarity affects their perceptions of teaching as a profession. As such, if a student had a negative school experience, they are much less likely to consider a profession in education (Welch *et al.*, 2010). Providing students with an opportunity to explore teaching from different viewpoints may increase the chances that they would consider teaching as a profession. In light of this previous research, the research team believed that Camp ExCEL could serve both as a strategy to recruit new teachers to the local community and to enrich high school students with additional life experiences, such as cooperative learning, problem solving, mentorship and career counseling.

Camp ExCEL

This article describes a summer camp experience offered to rising seniors in a diverse, Title I school district in the Midwest. The district partnered with Midwest University (MU), a large, regional state university with a four-year teacher preparation program through a five-year, privately funded organizational partnership grant. This large-scale school district-university partnership aimed to improve teacher efficacy, satisfaction and retention. To achieve this goal, the partnership employed several initiatives including creating an induction program for novice teachers, providing support and giving professional development opportunities. Another goal of the partnership is the recruitment and development of future teachers through a dual-enrollment project, this education camp and a student-teaching pipeline. The grant included Camp ExCEL to provide opportunities for high school students to obtain higher education experiences and exploration of the teaching profession through an education camp.

Planning for the camp began at the start of the 2019–2020 academic year, with the camp scheduled for summer of 2020. University faculty planned an immersive, one-week, on-campus experience for 30 rising high school seniors. During winter 19–20, recruitment began. The partnership was leveraged during this phase as district faculty and administrators shared the opportunity and encouraged potential applicants to apply. The onset of Covid protocols in March of 2020 meant MU needed to work with the district to restructure the camp. The district asked the MU team not to cancel the camp, as many others had, but to instead look for an alternative option. Given the stay-at-home orders, the first ExCEL Camp planned and offered an online course lasting four weeks, with both whole group and small group instructional opportunities. Parts of the camp were held synchronously (3 hours each week), and parts were asynchronous (approximately 4 hours each week). Scholars (as the campers were known) were divided into small groups of three to four to engage in discussion. Camp curricula focused on culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and project-based learning (PBL). Other camp activities included sessions and guest speakers related to college and career readiness, opportunities to make connections with faculty and community building.

Culturally responsive teaching

One of the overarching goals of the partnership was the district's desire to build a GYO program to recruit and better retain scholars of color who will go on to be teachers of color within the local community. Teachers of color leave the profession at higher rates compared to white teachers, though they are more likely to remain in urban schools than their white counterparts (Achinstein *et al.*, 2010). Many approaches to recruiting and retaining teachers of color have been examined, including professional development and modified preservice coursework (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Gist, 2017). MU's partnership with the district focused on training, recruiting and retaining educators to more accurately reflect the demographic of the district. As scholars and educators committed to culturally responsive pedagogy, MU professors planned an introduction into the field of education with a foundation in asset-based approaches to culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. Scholars were given the book *Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain* (Hammond, 2014). After reading select chapters from this book and watching instructional videos provided by camp leaders, students led and engaged in virtual small group discussions. Scholars examined and debated poverty, microaggressions, implicit bias and coping skills (Hammond, 2014). Camp leaders encouraged scholars to think about these issues in the context of teaching and learning.

On the last week of camp, scholars were asked to share their thoughts on what they believe makes a good teacher, what factors influence teachers' relationships with their students and how relevant CRT is to effective teaching and learning (see Appendix). Scholars' perspectives included terminology and knowledge based on camp discussions and readings about CRT. Scholars created brief videos that were combined into one large video, giving current district teachers and administrators advice based on their own school experiences and new understandings of the importance of CRT.

Project-based learning

Unlike lecture-based learning, instructors using PBL facilitate student understanding through research and problem-solving that draws on students' interests, prior knowledge and experience (Dewey, 1916; Kokotsaki *et al.*, 2016). Teachers can guide student learning in a student-centered manner (Larmer *et al.*, 2009). As an instructional strategy, PBL equips students to tackle societal problems through an academically rigorous project. Because the problems are intentionally open-ended, students learn to think critically, analyze information and collaborate with diverse classmates to present unique solutions to their audience. In order for PBL to accomplish this depth of learning – called the Gold Standard PBL – it needs to include the seven essential project design elements: challenging problem or question, sustained inquiry, authenticity, student voice & choice, reflection, critique & revision, and a public product (Boss & Larmer, 2018).

During ExCEL Camp, scholars were introduced to the seven essential project design elements. They were asked to create an abstract piece of art to model their assigned element. After sharing models and explaining their elements, scholars were introduced to the PBL unit they would complete during camp. When planning the camp, a PBL unit was developed on a social justice topic. It used the books *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2017) and *The Rose that Grew from Concrete* (Shakur, 2006) to build a literary playlist. Scholars were asked to create a presentation of their literary playlist. This was to answer the question: How can we use music to communicate about characters and themes in a story or poem to create awareness of police brutality? Because of limited options during summer 2020, scholars presented these final presentations to the entire camp virtually.

Theoretical framework

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) was used to guide both the design of Camp ExCEL and our analysis of the data gathered from the scholars. Both PBL and CRP are rooted in constructivism

founded in student-centered and experience-based learning (Glazewski & Ertmer, 2020). CRP employs a constructivist view of learners, valuing students' lived experiences, where teachers are socio-culturally conscious, hold affirming views of diverse learners and use effective instructional strategies (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2015; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). CRP views students' culture, knowledge and experience as assets that should be foundational in guiding decisions on what is taught and how it is taught. Kondo (2022) explained, "pedagogically embracing the linguistic and cultural assets of historically marginalized students interrogates the demographic imperative because students' lives become the bridge between the cultural disparities instead of the gap" (p. 67). Beyond valuing and building from students' lives, CRP seeks to develop critical consciousness in students to "investigate power differentials, critique injustice, and be empowered to challenge it" (Kondo, 2022, p. 68). A constructivist CRP framework that focused on PBL and CRT provided an orientation with awareness of the historical, socio-cultural and institutional shortcomings in education. Camp ExCEL afforded scholars the opportunity to do just that, both as current high school students who may benefit as learners in a CRP environment and as potential future educators who may later engage CRP as educators.

Procedure and context

Before beginning camp, approval was received from the MU Campus Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects to conduct this research project. An information letter and parental consent form were sent to each student interested in attending the education camp. Scholars who returned the parental consent form were included in data collection and analysis. Participants were informed verbally and in writing that participation was voluntary, and consent to participate was obtained from parents and scholars. The survey solicited no identifying information in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. Opting not to participate in the study did not preclude scholars from participating in the summer camp. All 29 scholars who attended the virtual camp returned the consent forms and elected to participate in the study.

As a result of the Covid pandemic and necessary restrictions during spring/summer 2020, the education camp was held virtually through Google Classroom and Meets. The original plan was to bring rising scholars interested in an education career to the college campus for a five-day residential camp. The camp organizers planned excursions to several sites and evening events with university stakeholders. Additionally, the team had campus activities planned each day with various undergraduate students, faculty and staff. As it pivoted to a fully virtual camp experience, camp planners tried to keep as many elements from the original camp plan as possible. The summer camp was held over a four-week span with camp-wide synchronous meetings one day a week for two hours, and small group meetings once a week for an hour. Scholars were divided into assigned groups and given activities to complete during camp-wide meetings on Mondays. The groups met on their own to discuss and complete assignments, which related to CRT and PBL units. Each week, small groups engaged in reflection activities.

An additional goal of the activities was for scholars to begin thinking about and preparing for college. Camp leaders posted expert speakers and videos for scholars throughout the camp. All the materials scholars needed were housed within Google Classroom modules. Prior to camp, scholars were provided with backpacks filled with books, laptops (if needed), college planners and other materials to complete camp tasks. At the end of each week of camp, the two leaders met to discuss whether modifications to the following week should be undertaken. For example, at the end of the first week of camp, it was clear students needed more time to collaborate in small groups. Camp leaders added sessions for this in the following weeks and provided Google documents for students to answer questions ahead of time. At the end of each week of camp, leaders facilitated a discussion on the questions during each group's meetings. After the sudden shut down of schools and pandemic-related stress,

students enjoyed connecting together and provided feedback of the value related to these discussions.

Data were collected using Google documents and surveys. Scholars were asked to respond to weekly reflections. Additionally, focus group interviews were conducted and transcribed each week. A demographic questionnaire was used to collect age, race, gender and college experience/plans. Last, scholars completed pre- and post-surveys related to their experiences and beliefs about teaching. Surveys and focus group questions can be found in [Appendix A](#).

The research questions were as follows:

- RQ1.* What insights about effective teaching and the process of becoming a teacher can be gained from attendees of a summer education camp for high school students interested in a career in education?
- RQ2.* How does engaging with culturally responsive teaching and project-based learning influence scholars' perceptions of core teaching practices?

Participants. In this study, data were collected from 29 adolescents (scholars) in the eleventh grade from the Midwestern region of the United States in an urban school district. There were 25 females and four males from diverse races and ethnicities: Hispanic or Latin ($n = 7$), Black or African American ($n = 12$), White or Caucasian ($n = 3$), American Indian or Alaskan Native ($n = 2$), four identified as "More than one Race" and six scholars preferred not to share. Twenty-eight of the participants anticipated becoming first-generation college scholars in their families. Four of the scholars identified themselves as "housing insecure." Twenty scholars indicated they worked full-time jobs while attending the summer education camp. To compensate the scholars for their time devoted to the camp, they were each paid \$500 for attending camp and participating in all sessions/activities. This funding was provided by the grant and distributed at the end of camp.

Of the two camp leaders, one was a university faculty member and one was a campus career navigator (whose job was to help high school students in the district explore and pursue career paths). The two worked together throughout initial planning for an in-person camp experience, the pivot to virtual camp when the pandemic hit and facilitated camp instruction/interactions. One of the goals of the school district was to increase the number of teachers from the community who stay to teach in the district. To this end, students entering their senior year were invited to attend. Once scholars were registered for the camp and after the pandemic forced a virtual space, camp leaders worked to make sure all had Internet access and computers. The grant provided these for students when they did not already have them.

Research method/Research design

Using thematic analysis (TA) to explore patterns across data sets, researchers used both electronic and hard copies of the data to reflexively interpret participants' feelings and beliefs about effective teaching, CRT, PBL and their camp experience ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)). The initial observations and interpretations were primarily deductive; through line by line coding, the two author researchers identified latent meaning from the scholars' words ([Glesne, 2016](#)). It was important for each author to maintain perspective on the subjectivity of their lived experiences, which could have influenced understandings of the scholars' meanings. Both author researchers identify as White women from middle-class backgrounds. By acknowledging biases and using the CRP framework, the researchers sought to center authentic student voice. In the second stage of data analysis, codes were generated and assigned. The two researchers independently coded the data using the existing coding while looking for any additional ideas that would need to be represented that did not fit into one of the existing codes ([Braun & Clarke, 2022](#)). The researchers then met to compare the coding and connect them together to find similarities and differences. Initially, six codes were

identified: effective teaching, mentorship, CRT, PBL, obstacles/barriers to teaching and pressure on educators. The two researchers met again to review and better define, clarify and combine the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Four connected themes emerged: scholars' views of effective teaching, scholars' experience with camp leaders' mentorship, scholars' views of CRT and PBL as effective pedagogies and scholars' perceptions of the obstacles and barriers to teaching. The themes are woven together to create an understanding of scholars' feelings and beliefs about becoming educators.

Findings: Actual outcomes and happy surprises

Overall, the scholars enjoyed meeting and participating in Camp ExCEL despite the challenges of it being fully online. Ninety-seven percent of scholars reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their camp experience (n = 28). One scholar (3%) reported a neutral satisfaction rating at the camp conclusion. During spring 2020, there were many schools closed in the area, so the scholars had few opportunities to interact with each other. However, the camp was able to foster meaningful connections through its online platform. Scholars reported feeling connected to their peers, being inspired by their work and enjoying the chance to learn from each other.

The timing of this camp coincided with the unrest and awareness of systematic racism happening nationally after the murder of George Floyd. Scholars were appreciative, and honestly relieved, to be given a platform to share their experiences and opinions regarding police brutality, particularly against Black people. They were able to engage in meaningful conversations and express their feelings about the current state of race relations in the US. The camp also provided a safe space for scholars to learn, grow and come together to develop solutions to the issues they face. Despite the challenges of online learning at the time, the scholars were thankful to have been given the opportunity to connect, explore themselves and express themselves.

Data review

Four relevant themes were identified. First, scholars discussed the financial and emotional obstacles and barriers they perceived regarding a career in education. Second, scholars discussed the characteristics and behaviors they believe make teachers effective in the classroom. Third, the scholars noted the benefits of using CRT practices and PBL along with their roles in the classroom. Finally, scholars discussed their positive experiences with mentorship with the camp leaders.

Obstacles and barriers to teaching and applicable actions. One of the concepts heavily discussed among scholars was the obstacles and barriers related to an education career (total of 125 instances). During discussions with scholars, four subthemes emerged: lack of knowledge (36% of total instances), lack of financial compensation (33%), lack of non-financial resources (17%), the emotional hardship of the profession (14%).

The first idea of a lack of knowledge relates to scholars not understanding the process of becoming a teacher. One student admitted, "I don't really know what the process of becoming a teacher is like at all" (pre-camp survey). Since this was a shared concern, the camp team decided to adjust the curriculum for the last week to more explicitly address the process of becoming a teacher and provide resources scholars could use during their college application process. The team decided to involve MU's TRIO Student Support Services program, which helps first-generation college students meet their personal, academic and career goals. The director of TRIO joined the team to meet the scholars, present an overview of TRIO's services on campus and answer questions.

Scholars also held financial concerns. Many felt they did not have the necessary financial support to attend college in general. But the scholars also were concerned about the low pay

for the profession. Camp leaders provided scholars with information regarding the number of scholarships they were eligible for at both their school and university. Scholars found that while their financial concerns regarding tuition costs could be addressed to some extent, the pay gap between teaching and other professions was still a significant barrier. As one scholar aptly noted, “Teachers do not make a lot of money but have to spend lots of their own money” (post-camp survey).

The third obstacle scholars mentioned was a lack of non-financial resources. Scholars discussed a lack of time and family support. The issue of time was based on their interactions at school with educators. Scholars mentioned seeing teachers at school in the evening and on weekends. Scholars expressed feeling overwhelmed by the amount of time their teachers put into their jobs. They also felt teachers provide outside assistance to students such as tutoring that might not be compensated.

The last barrier scholars mentioned was their concern about the challenges associated with a career in education. The scholars indicated they felt there was too much pressure on the profession. One scholar explained,

I think one of the barriers of being a teacher is the stress and frustration. . . because you have to help a big number of students learn, and having to realize teaching kids is a big part of students’ lives. (focus group)

Scholars discussed the responsibility and gravity of educating a generation of students. They felt that educators were expected to achieve impossible standards with inadequate resources. Several scholars expressed beliefs that the public’s perception of teachers was often negative. Based on these concerns, camp counselors had many conversations with scholars about the importance of teachers not feeling the need to be saviors (Flaherty, 2016). The scholars concluded that these challenges made pursuing a career in education difficult and often discouraged talented individuals from entering the field.

What makes an effective teacher? When asked about their perceptions of an effective teacher, scholars’ responses fell into three subthemes gathered from the post-camp survey, weekly reflections and focus group interviews. Scholars felt an effective teacher acknowledges the needs of the whole student, models high quality teaching practices and displays positive professional dispositions. The subtheme that collected the most responses (60%) was acknowledging the needs of the whole student by making personal connections, being a support system for the student, going the extra mile and acknowledging their personal struggles. Scholars also felt that an effective teacher models high-quality teaching practices (37%): being a motivator, making learning fun, being passionate about teaching, letting students drive their learning, being an excellent communicator, using culturally responsive teaching and PBL and providing a safe learning environment. One scholar reflected:

I think it’s important that teachers help students become independent learners because it helps the student to be able to also rely on themselves and be able to create their own ideas and how to work through difficult things in life and school. (Focus Group)

Scholars felt these practices resulted in a more motivating, engaging, student-directed and passionate classroom environment. Another scholar urged, “Students should have a voice in how they learn and what they learn” (focus group).

Though these results are based on a small sample, they may provide useful clues for future research into the topic of being an effective teacher. Related to these findings, scholars felt strongly that humanizing practices such as CRT and PBL should be part of preservice education and/or professional development opportunities because they address the needs of the whole student. Such practices can help teachers foster deeper relationships with their students, support student learning and ultimately lead to increased student success. Additionally, these practices help teachers better understand and meet student needs. Further research is

necessary to understand the full range of factors that contribute to being an effective teacher. Understanding these factors could assist educators to develop strategies to improve teaching practices and student learning outcomes.

Culturally responsive teaching and project-based learning. After learning about and exploring student-centered CRT practices like embracing students' cultural knowledge, scholars felt there were two major implications of this type of pedagogy. Scholars connected CRT with a positive impact on social and emotional well-being (52% of total instances), including reducing peer pressure, providing a support system that allows for empathy and the opportunity to acknowledge other students' struggles. In addition, scholars reported that CRT permits respect and understanding between peers as well as between teacher and student (41% of instances). They mentioned the importance of understandings developed around: increasing cultural competence, overcoming cultural barriers and helping students of color feel connected. One student concluded:

I think it's very important to make the class environment more interesting to students and to make school more fun for students and teachers. I think it's important that other practices such as project-based learning and culturally responsive teaching are used to teach because it gives students different ways to learn within a classroom. (Post-camp survey)

Another student responded:

Much like PBL, this type of teaching [CRT] is very amazing. Students find their own identity, and even finding or reflecting on their identity/role which can lead them to their intellectual potential and finding things that they never knew they were capable of. It also opens students' mind about their peers and collaborating to make a community that people in the higher power have failed to do. (Post-camp survey)

The scholars' responses reveal their insightful understanding of the purpose of CRT, especially noting the use of CRT in building of community, valuing student identity and encouraging student potential.

Scholars had similar positive remarks about the use of PBL. Scholars were immersed in a PBL environment from the first day of the camp. The literary playlist allowed students to debrief feelings after Covid-19 shutdowns, and the activism and turmoil heightened awareness of systemic racism following the murder of George Floyd. After this experience, scholars mentioned feeling that PBL allowed for increased 21st-century skills such as collaboration, independent divergent thinking and taking ownership of their own learning. In a survey after the close of camp, one student reflected:

More engagement and communication between students and a better work ethic may be produced as a result of PBL. (Post-camp survey)

Scholars felt PBL and CRT approaches also provided an opportunity for greater engagement in the classroom. They felt this engagement was the result of making learning more interesting through creative learning opportunities, student choice and differentiation. They also shared that PBL helped make learning more effective overall, helping students retain concepts taught in an authentic manner.

Mentorship. While not an initial goal of the camp, a healthy relationship developed between scholars and camp leaders. Many of these became lasting mentoring relationships that extended beyond the time frame of the camp. Several scholars identified having personal connections with the camp facilitators as a positive aspect of their experience. One scholar reflected, "[The Camp Leaders] made camp wonderful. I know I can ask them questions to help me with college later" (post-camp survey). Another added, "I loved that you guys were so willing to help us even if it was a crazy question" (focus group). Even now, at the time of publication (3 years after camp), several scholars still maintain regular contact with their

faculty mentor. For example, one of the scholars (currently an MU student) still contacts the first author for advice on their courses. Several camp scholars are enrolled in education programs; five are students at MU. These relationships built during an online camp continue to foster useful skills for navigating academia. While scholars were not specifically asked or surveyed about mentorship, this idea came up multiple times in their responses to open-ended questions about the camp. Mentorship to scholars also meant their own teachers being mentors in their lives. Scholars felt strongly that this mentorship piece was pivotal to their own school success. This is an idea to build on in future camps and research.

Implications/Discussion

Through this camp experience and learning with scholars, the team identified areas in the education landscape that merit further discussion. Among the most prominent areas were students' perceptions of pedagogy, their knowledge needed to enter the teaching profession and the financial impacts that might deter prospective teachers. Teachers, teacher educators and university-district partnerships can learn from students' perceptions of what qualities make an effective teacher and how important culturally relevant pedagogy and project-based learning are to their engagement and growth. This camp built a space for meaningful dialogue and collaboration between teachers, scholars and students. It has the potential to create a lasting impact on the education system.

Perceptions of pedagogy. Scholars communicated positive feelings regarding both PBL and CRT in their classrooms. Their feelings about the positive outcomes when teachers proactively address the needs of diverse students in a respectful, authentic manner are similar to those found in [Bonner et al. \(2018\)](#) when exploring the perceptions of practicing urban teachers. The high school students already understand the value of classrooms that provide high-quality teaching and learning experiences that honor students' racial, cultural, linguistic and economically diverse backgrounds. Scholars communicated the importance of both PBL and CRT in helping students feel a sense of belonging and connectedness ([Bender, 2012](#)). This connectedness helped to build a stronger community and foster a more equitable learning environment. This type of learning experience can have a positive impact on student engagement and academic success. Additionally, scholars' exposure to these pedagogies shapes their understandings of important core teaching practices and will hopefully influence the likelihood of implementation in future classrooms ([Whitaker & Valtierra, 2018](#)).

Classroom educators should be encouraged by the scholars' interest and enthusiasm for this type of teaching and learning. Scholars felt the format in which teachers presented material was more significant than the content itself. Spending time planning and attending professional development integrating pedagogies that give students a voice in their learning and provide an intentional path for collaboration within an environment that values diverse perspectives and experiences is important. Dispositions that are culturally sensitive and allow students authentic learning experiences provide a pathway to success in school and life ([Bonner et al., 2018](#)). Evidence suggests that student engagement, achievement and success are positively correlated with the presence of meaningful and relevant learning experiences ([Witte & Jansen, 2016](#)). Therefore, we should prioritize creating learning experiences that are meaningful and relevant to our students' lives.

Knowledge to enter profession and the financial impacts. The two main perceived obstacles and barriers reported by the scholars were their lack of understanding of how to enter the teaching profession and financial concerns. Identifying the perceived obstacles and barriers was vital to understanding how to open a teaching career to future educators. Additionally, mentorship opportunities can provide invaluable support to those beginning their careers in teaching.

As a result of identifying what they perceived as challenges or barriers, the field can work toward removing those barriers. Educational institutions can provide support by creating

programs that offer guidance and resources to aspiring teachers. Scholars not understanding how to become a teacher were obstacles that camp leaders could remediate by working closely with the university to clarify that process. This information will be included in future camps. In addition, scholars' financial concerns (both the financial impact of attending college and the challenges of a low-paying teaching career) were partially addressed by the team working with the university to provide clarity regarding funding options at the university level. Unfortunately, the team's ability and power to remove all barriers was limited. In particular, the salary compensation for in-service teachers cannot be alleviated. However, incorporating advocacy as a component of future camps might provide benefit to scholars as they learn how practicing educators cope with challenges such as this. In addition, the scholars indicated challenges regarding lack of support in general, the pressure of the profession and so forth. While not able to directly alleviate each of these challenges, the team felt that by providing the scholars with increased exposure to the profession, different positive instructional strategies (i.e. CRT & PBL) and a platform to learn, grow and reflect, these strategies could possibly help alleviate at least the perceptions of some of these challenges. In addition, the information is vital for the camp planning team. Future camp sessions will continue to include opportunities to learn more about the process of becoming a teacher. They will also include funding options, and other sessions as needed aimed at alleviating some of those perceived challenges.

Making an effective teacher. Despite this camp's primary objective of supporting the GYO concept of recruiting students from that community into the profession, a great deal was learned from this experience. Several significant ideas were identified regarding students' perception of teaching. Existing research strongly supports their responses. The scholars identified the positive impacts of teachers (1) making personal connections with their students (Cornelius-White, 2007; Liu, 2013; Roorda *et al.*, 2011; Tatem, 2015), (2) acting as a support system for students (Shelemy *et al.*, 2019; Wentzel, 2010), (3) acknowledging students' personal struggles (Meyers *et al.*, 2019; Brunzell *et al.*, 2018), (4) modeling high-quality teaching strategies (Irving, 2004; Hattie & Clinton, 2008; Witte & Jansen, 2016) and (5) displaying positive professional dispositions (Hallam, 2009; Taylor & Wasicsko, 2000; Tatem, 2015; Vaughn, 2012). Students' understanding of what makes effective teachers is useful to inform future education camps hoping to encourage high schoolers' interest in teaching as a profession. Having effective teaching modeled during the education camp helped students internalize the qualities of effective teachers. The scholars' reflections also reinforce the existing research focused on core teaching and effective teaching practices.

Grow Your Own. We know that GYO programs address teacher shortage, retention issues and teacher diversity by recruiting teachers from their local communities (Lau *et al.*, 2007; Rogers-Ard *et al.*, 2012; Valenzuela, 2017). Although GYO programs can vary in many ways, we present one model that recruits at the secondary level and provides a summer camp opportunity to familiarize participants more closely with education. Additionally, Camp ExCEL provides an equitable opportunity for every rising senior, regardless of grades, class standing, prior course work or financial means. The open-enrollment allowed prospective teacher candidates to become familiar with the profession, regardless of their current academic standing. It is significant to note that a high percentage of scholars were from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Across all teaching areas and levels (elementary, secondary, math, social studies, etc.), teachers of color are underrepresented (Achinstein *et al.*, 2010). By recruiting from the local population of high school students, the diversity of scholars better reflects the local community. Providing a pathway from high school into a career in education enables students from all backgrounds to understand how they can fit within the profession (Valenzuela, 2017). By leveraging the partnership between the university and the school district, this camp supports the GYO concept by introducing students from the community through the university to the profession. Gaining knowledge, experience and insight into an

education career may increase the likelihood of scholars pursuing a career in the field. An effective GYO camp or similar program can be a key component in reducing the barriers of entry for students into the education profession by clarifying the process and making avenues more accessible.

Model of camp. As suggested previously, there were no articles identified regarding a camp with this focus. We cannot know if this lack of literature indicates that these types of camps are not being utilized, or if they are not being published. The field would benefit both from an increase in similar GYO programs and more programs' findings being published and shared widely. Additionally, collaboration between educators, parents and students should be fostered to ensure the success of future camps and similar programs. Although we were unable to bring scholars to campus and our opportunities to expose them to the teaching profession were limited because of the circumstances, we still had positive outcomes to begin to address the crisis of teacher shortage. These outcomes are encouraging for the education field as this model is further explored and future camps are built. Further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of this model and how it can be implemented in other contexts.

University-school reciprocity. Reciprocity was an important component of the partnership. After camp, the career navigator helped several scholars apply to MU and for scholarships. MU was able to increase enrollment and add to the diversity of preservice teachers on campus. In mentoring these students once they came to the university, the faculty member was able to better understand the needs of current preservice teachers/students. Additionally, the MU faculty member gained insight that would help them build a better curriculum for pre-service teachers and future district partnerships.

Looking forward

While the execution of this camp was not what was originally planned, due to Covid-related limitations, the team was very pleased with the outcomes (especially since so many programs were canceled across the country). Through this online camp, the team was given the opportunity to identify the most prominent areas of need for high school students interested in education but hesitant to pursue the field. Reflecting on the experience and collecting data before, during and after the camp offered the opportunity for the team to make necessary adjustments in future iterations of the camp. While year 2 will be discussed more thoroughly in a future publication, the team provided an in-person camp on a shortened schedule within the local school district with great success. At the time of this writing, the team is planning to host a fully overnight camp on campus in 2022. While, to this point, each iteration has been rather different in structure, each version of camp has shown significant promise in exposing scholars to the teaching profession.

One limitation of this study, and similar GYO programs, is the lack of funding for longitudinal data that follows participants through their career choices. The team encourages other partnerships to explore Grow Your Own camp endeavors, and, if possible, to consider long-term and longitudinal partnerships with their local school communities. While a short summer camp program may not guarantee participants choose careers in education, camps focused on teaching can build participants' understanding of the profession, engage them in culturally responsive and student-centered pedagogies, alleviate their fears and hesitations related to the process of becoming an educator and provide them valuable mentorship and guidance for the college and certification process. Grow Your Own programs paired with affirming and student-centered pedagogies can address a small part of the current and future teacher shortage to help ensure future generations are well-equipped to teach in an ever-changing educational landscape. It will also help to create a more diverse and qualified pool of potential teachers, which is essential in meeting the needs of all students.

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Appendix

Surveys and focus group questions

Pre-camp survey questions

- (1) Do you understand the process of becoming a teacher?
 - What information do you need to know to feel more confident pursuing that degree?
- (2) Do you know what project-based learning is?
 - If yes, have you ever used it in your own learning?
- (3) Do you know what culturally responsive teaching is?
- (4) What factors influence a teacher's relationship with their students?
- (5) What makes a good teacher?

Post-camp survey questions

- (1) Do you understand the process of becoming a teacher?
 - Do you feel like you've gotten the information you need to know about becoming a teacher?
 - If not, what other information do you need to know to feel more confident pursuing that degree?
- (2) Do you know what project-based learning is?
 - How could you see using it yourself as a teacher one day?
- (3) Do you know what culturally responsive teaching is? How important do you feel it is in classrooms?
- (4) What factors influence a teacher's relationship with their students?
 - Has participating in this camp changed your response to this question?
- (5) What makes a good teacher?
 - Has participating in this camp changed your response to this question?

Focus group questions

What makes an effective teacher?

What role does PBL have in classrooms?

How does it affect classrooms?

How important are teaching practices like PBL and CRT?

How important is it that student identity is reflected in the classroom (curriculum, teacher identity, relationships, etc.)?

[Note: These are the questions identified in the interview protocol; the discussions and follow-up questions were led by the students, so each discussion's responses varied slightly].

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