

## SOAR Research Proposal, Summer 2018

Title: The Underrepresentation of Teachers of Color: Using Narrative Inquiry to Address the Imagination Gap

Student: Ellyce Nieves

Faculty Mentor: Tristan Gleason, Assistant Professor, Department of Education

Dates: June 4<sup>th</sup> – August 24<sup>th</sup> (12 weeks)

### Project Overview:

The goal of this project is to explore and respond to an important dilemma facing contemporary education: the underrepresentation of people of color in the teaching profession. The percentage of students of diverse background in public schools has steadily increased during the last several decades, while the portion of the teaching force identifying as non-white has remained relatively constant (Howard, 2010). For example, in New York state public schools, over 70 percent of students are youth of color, while over 80 percent of teachers are white (Emdin, 2016). This problematic phenomenon has been studied from various perspectives and methodological approaches, and this project seeks to add to this research base through the framework of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). YPAR is an effort to value the knowledge production of youth who most directly experience educational contexts and inequities that researchers often seek to understand. Accordingly, this research project will focus on the lived experiences of Ellyce Nieves, a young woman of color who is in the process of becoming a certified secondary English teacher here at Moravian College.

YPAR is a research framework that is defined by its epistemic commitment to positioning youth as critical inquirers, activists, and producers of knowledge, and draws from diverse methodological traditions including critical ethnography, counter story-telling, and arts-based research (Caraballo, Lozenski, Lyiscott, & Morell, 2017). The goal of our particular research is to produce a narrative case study (eg. Chang & Rosiek, 2002) that serves two purposes: first, to open up new lines of inquiry about the underrepresentation of teachers of color; and second, to spark the imagination and interest of other students of color in the community who may or may not already be considering a career in education.

During our proposed research this summer, Ellyce and I will be exploring different methodological traditions that are common to critical scholarship in the field of education, and the precise form and direction that this research will take is necessarily undefined to ensure that Ellyce is empowered to choose a methodology and form of representation that best honors her developing engagement with this topic. Regardless, we believe that this research will help address what we term the *imagination gap*, where certain futures, such as becoming an educator, are precluded because of the inability of individuals and communities to imagine their possibility.

### Roles and Responsibilities:

During the first seven weeks of the summer SOAR term, Ellyce will be actively engaged in the process of becoming a teacher, working with the Lehigh Valley Summerbridge program to teach

a group of 8-10 diverse middle school students. This experience will provide a unique context for Ellyce to consider while exploring her emerging identity as an educator. In addition to teaching five days a week from 8:00 AM – 3:00 PM, Ellyce will write daily entries in a blog, exploring her emerging identity as an educator, while also continuing to work on a piece of creative non-fiction that narrates the particular journey that has led her to consider a career in education. Ellyce and I will meet twice a week during this part of the project to discuss her experience, to explore themes that emerge in her daily blog, and to identify future topics and readings that will forward her emerging research.

Ellyce and I will continue working together for an additional five weeks after the Summerbridge program, where we will focus more concretely on exploring relevant literature, and developing multimodal narrative representations of her journey. We will explore various narrative and arts-based research forms, including but not limited to: ethnodrama, autoethnography, collective biography, and multimedia formats. During this time, we will meet daily to discuss readings and to workshop emerging writing and other multimodal products.

Timetable:

Weeks	Activities	Outcomes
1-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ellyce will teach in the Summerbridge program from 8 AM – 3 PM, five days a week;</li> <li>- Ellyce will write daily blog entries about her experience becoming an educator;</li> <li>- Ellyce will continue working on a piece of creative non-fiction describing her own educational journey;</li> <li>- Ellyce and Dr. Gleason will meet twice a week to discuss themes and ideas that emerge in her blog and narrative writing to identify additional topics of interest and readings for the next research phase.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Daily blog posts;</li> <li>- First draft of Ellyce’s narrative about her personal educational journey;</li> <li>- Identification of topics and readings for second phase of research.</li> </ul>
8-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ellyce and Dr. Gleason will meet daily to discuss readings and to workshop emerging writing and other multi-modal products.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transform Ellyce’s narrative into a co-authored conference proposal with Dr. Gleason that addresses the underrepresentation of teachers of color;</li> <li>- Transform Ellyce’s narrative into a multimodal presentation to share with the broader Moravian community.</li> </ul>

## Discipline Appropriate Research Opportunities:

This past fall, Ellyce took EDUC 260 with me, where we explored the work of Chris Emdin (2016) as an example of research that combines insights from lived experience with contemporary social theory to develop a philosophy of education that addresses the needs and lived experiences of students of color. During this spring, we have continued to meet informally, and have read both popular press articles about the underrepresentation of teachers of color, as well as examples of educational research that use narrative research to address educational inequalities.

In addition, Ellyce took a course on creative nonfiction (ENGL 211), where she began writing a personal memoir that we will build upon during our time together this summer. Ellyce also took a course called Writing as Activism (ENGL 263), which is also relevant to the work we will be doing this summer.

This summer, we will continue to explore diverse methodological approaches to critical educational research, focusing on narrative and arts-based research methodologies that best fit with Ellyce's emerging goals and aims. In addition to producing a multimedia presentation that Ellyce hopes to share with students in the local community, we will also submit a conference proposal to the annual International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry to present in the spring of 2019.

## Works Cited:

- Chang, P. J. and Rosiek, J. (2003), Anti-Colonialist antinomies in a biology lesson: A sonata-form case study of cultural conflict in a science classroom. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 33: 251–290. DOI:10.1111/1467-873X.00263
- Emdin, C. (2016). *For white folks who teach in the hood...and the rest of y'all too: Reality pedagogy and urban education*. Beacon Press: Boston.
- Howard, T. (2010). *Why race and culture matter in schools: Closing the achievement gap in America's classrooms*. Teachers College, Columbia University: New York and London.
- Caraballo, L., Lozenski, B.D., Lyiscott, J.L., & Morell, E. (2017). YPAR and critical epistemologies: Rethinking education research. *Review of Research in Education*, 41, 311-336. DOI: 10.3102/0091732X16686948

### Application Part 3: Student Statement of Purpose

Title of Project: “The Underrepresentation of Teachers of Color; Using Narrative Inquiry to Address the Imagination Gap”

Student Researcher: Ellyce Nieves, English and Secondary Education, 2019

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Tristan Gleason

On-Campus Housing Requested

#### Rationale:

I identify as a first generation, Puerto Rican female, and from the time that I was in middle school until now, I have always pictured myself being a teacher. Now that I am a college student studying secondary education, it is troubling to see the shortage of students of color pursuing certifications in education. This lack of students of color taking education courses is evident in my classes at Moravian College, where I was one of three students who were either Hispanic, African-American, or Indian during my first semester here. Throughout the entirety of my educational career, from kindergarten until now, I have only been taught by two middle and high school teachers of color, and two college professors of color at Northampton Community College before I transferred to Moravian College this fall.

During this past semester while I was in Dr. Gleason’s class, EDUC 260 “Reflective Teaching,” I began to question why diversity among education majors and public school teachers is so limited, while the number of students of color is rapidly increasing. During EDUC 260, we read a book by Christopher Emdin, *For the White Folks Who Teach in the Hood*, which discussed the reality of teaching in urban public schools and demonstrated the disconnect that often exists between white educators and students of color. Emdin, an African-American educator, suggests that an approach called *reality pedagogy* is a way to address this dilemma, an approach based on his own experiences with teaching youth of color. He explains that we must increase the capacity of all teachers to value the reality and lived experiences of students of color, and to also increase the number of teachers of color in general. Reading this book fueled my desire to understand why the underrepresentation of educators of color exists. For my project, I will address how schools often provide students of color less opportunities to succeed in comparison to their white counterparts, and offer my own narrative to serve as a counterstory in order to motivate other students to consider teaching.

I strongly believe in the importance of all students having a diverse set of teachers who have a deep understanding of the students’ complex lived experiences, which is the reason why I want to participate in this project. Teachers serve as role-models for their students, and it is important for students to be taught by not only teachers who are representative of their own cultures, but also teachers from cultures that are different from that of their own. Throughout my entire education, my teachers have been significant figures in my life who have guided me in my journey to college. However, a significant problem is that there seems to be an “imagination gap,” where students of color believe that they are incapable of attending college, let alone studying to become teachers. After reflecting more on my experiences in school beginning in kindergarten up until now, it is shocking to me that I have only experienced classes with two educators of my own Hispanic heritage. As a first generation, Puerto Rican female, I am one of

the few students of color studying education. Through this project, I will investigate how my educational journey led me to study to become a teacher, and I will also gain experience with teaching students at Lehigh Valley Summerbridge for six weeks during the summer. I was a Summerbridge student in middle school as well, so I am excited to draw from my own experience as a past student and becoming a teacher to investigate how teaching these students from predominantly low income families will help them work toward closing the “imagination gap” that prevents many students from attending college. I know from my own experience as a student how the program has influenced my desire to pursue a degree in education. Now, as a future teacher, it is my job to address this challenge facing education today.

#### Expected Outcomes:

A large part of my goal with this project is to reach out to several audiences: the academic community, students from Moravian College, and, most importantly, high school students in the Lehigh Valley area. Additionally, there are several modes through which I could present my information. One of those options is to write a creative nonfiction piece about my educational journey, which I can develop into a multimedia presentation for high school students. I think that a multimedia piece, which includes writing, video, and audio, will fulfill my expected outcome to influence students because it will be most beneficial for a high school audience. High school students in particular are often more receptive to creative approaches, which are more personal because it allows them to make a more meaningful connection. It will also be more engaging for visual and auditory learners. By creating this piece, I will demonstrate that high school students that studying education, and even just going to college, is a possibility for them. My goal is to help begin closing the “imagination gap” that prevents students from choosing to pursue a college education and a career in teaching. However, I can also achieve this goal by using various formats such as an autoethnography, a case study, an ethnodrama, or a memoir. Another one of my expected outcomes is to create an education blog where I will write five days a week about my experiences teaching in a middle school classroom. The Summerbridge program that I will be working with is designed to teach students from middle schools in the Lehigh Valley who are from low-income families and are from a variety of racial or ethnic backgrounds. The students may also be multilingual and are often potential first generation college students. Writing the blog will help me record and organize the writing I will complete relating to my experience, which can also be shared with the community. Overall, my goal is to address the challenge of limited diversity that has plagued education today as well as in past, and to shed light on this issue by offering my own narrative.