

TLM Teacher Feature: Derrick Cook

by Bridget Locke

As Teachers Like Me prepares to host its inaugural group of teacher recruits this fall, we're excited to share the stories of these unique individuals who are poised to become change agents in the field of education through their participation in the program. Check this space over the next several months for Q & A features on all teachers participating in the Fall 2021 cohort. Today, we introduce **Derrick Cook**.

Derrick (he/him/his) hails from Kansas City, Mo. With plans to attend University of Missouri – Kansas City in August, Derrick looks forward to studying elementary education and eventually, hopes to teach third grade. Recently, he sat down with Bridget Locke to talk about his journey to teaching, the importance of black male role models, the powerful possibilities to arise from collaboration, and more.

Bridget Locke: When/why did you decide to become a teacher?

Derrick Cook: At one point in time, I planned to become a police officer, but as community/police relations in our country grew worse, I grew less comfortable with that plan.

It just didn't seem like the right fit for me anymore. I started doing odd jobs here and there, then began working at a day care. I didn't think I'd work there for long, but I discovered that I really like working with children. I started working with older kids at other organizations, as well. I tutor third graders online. These two roles sparked my interest in teaching.



BL: Are there other educators in your family/inner circle? If so, how did they influence your decision to teach?

DC: My mom is a teacher, and she has been a big motivator for me. She's been with me every step of the way on this journey toward pursuing education.

BL: Do you have a teaching philosophy?

DC: I just want to help motivate kids who look more like me. I want them to know that they can go a different way than the stereotypical path that people establish for people of color—especially, for black men.

BL: How did you learn about Teachers Like Me? How did you determine this program would be a good fit for your needs?

DC: My mom knew about the organization; as an educator, she has worked with Dr. Davis previously. However, Dr. Davis recruited me through my work at the Literacy Lab, which is an organization that helps students to become better readers. She saw what I was trying to do, reached out to me, and told me more about the organization. I thought it was a super cool opportunity and wanted to see it through. It's a good fit for what I want to do in education, but



it's also something that every state needs. I've never heard of an organization go to these measures to get more people of color in the classrooms. I really believe that the work we're doing is right for today's times.

BL: What is the most appealing about the model?

DC: Getting more black men into teaching is what really excites me. Working with other black men who have the same interest in teaching is something that I look forward to the most. Who knows what's possible once we connect and collaborate? I'm eager to see.

BL: Why is a program like Teachers Like Me necessary? What role does education and Teacher Like Me play in the transformation of the youth and community of Kansas City?

DC: Education is so important, and doing more to meet students' needs to help ensure their success is what we need in today's age. It's important to put more role models in the classroom for all students. I had a lot of female teachers growing up, but I couldn't always relate to them because of our differences in culture and gender. This program will allow more students to see themselves as teachers and leaders. Just having someone who can relate to you in the classroom and who wants to see the best in you could transform students' lives. An important part of Teachers Like Me is that we'll be engaged in the community as well as in the schools and classrooms where we teach. This aligns with who I want to be for my students. I want them to feel that I'm a part of their families, and sense that they are welcomed, loved, and can pursue anything they want in life.