



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION | UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

JOURNAL OF CURRICULUM, TEACHING,
LEARNING, AND LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

Volume 4 | Issue 1

Article 5

August 2019

Keeping Teachers of Color: Recruitment is Not the Problem

Ferial Pearson

University of Nebraska at Omaha, fpearson@unomaha.edu

Monica Fuglei

Arapahoe Community College, monica.fuglei@arapahoe.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/ctlle>

 Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pearson, Ferial and Fuglei, Monica (2019) "Keeping Teachers of Color: Recruitment is Not the Problem," *Journal of Curriculum, Teaching, Learning and Leadership in Education*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/ctlle/vol4/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Curriculum, Teaching, Learning and Leadership in Education by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
Omaha

KEEPING TEACHERS OF COLOR: RECRUITMENT IS NOT THE PROBLEM

Ferial Pearson
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Monica Fuglei
Arapahoe Community College

Abstract: This article reviews some of the recent literature on teacher recruitment and retention published in the United States. It describes the merits of having a diverse teaching force, and explains that the issue of a lack of representation of teachers of color in American schools is not a result of recruitment; rather, it is the retention of these teachers that is the problem at hand. The article uncovers the reasons teachers of color leave the profession, and makes suggestions about changes that would make it possible for these teachers to stay.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, children of color make up the majority of the population, while their teachers remain mostly white. In other words, American public school students are looking less and less like their teachers (Digest of Education Statistics, 2017). Every state in the USA has a higher percentage of students of color than teachers of color, according to a “Teacher Diversity Index” included in a 2014 Center for American Progress report (Boser, 2011).

While every teacher, regardless of race and ethnicity, should be able to teach all students of all backgrounds, research shows that students who are taught by teachers of color do better at school, particularly students in high-poverty and at-risk situations (Clewell & Villegas, 1998; Dilworth, 1990; Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2004). In fact, the literature points to the “role-model” gap in the teacher-student relationship as the reason why minority students experience an achievement and opportunity gap (Boser, 2011; Boser, 2017; Evans, 1992; Hess & Leal, 1997; Villegas & Lucas, 2004).

According to the research, there are three main reasons why minority teachers get better results with students. First, minority students, especially those who live and attend schools in disadvantaged contexts, benefit from seeing adult role models in a position of authority (Clewell & Villegas, 1998; King, 1993; Villegas & Lucas, 2004). In particular, some scholars have suggested that having an adult role model could alleviate the “burden of acting White” among underrepresented minority students by influencing the cultural value placed on academic success (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Fryer & Torelli, 2010; Ogbu, 2004).

Second, some scholars argue that minority teachers are more likely to have high expectations for minority students (Beady & Hansell, 1981; Ferguson, 2003). This can have a big impact on how well minority, and especially Black, students do, because they appear to be more sensitive to teacher expectations than middle-class White students (Irvine, 1988; Kash & Borich, 1978; McKown & Weinstein, 2002) and also because of the “self-fulfilling prophecy” phenomenon in which negative stereotypes seem to perpetuate poor performance of minority students (Brophy, 1983; Ferguson, 2003; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Finally, there appear to be critical cultural differences between teachers of different backgrounds in terms of instructional strategies and interpretation of students’ behavior, all of which can have long-term consequences for student achievement. For example, a plethora of literature finds that Black students are more likely to be disciplined (e.g., be suspended from school) than other students, even after accounting for the nature of students’ misbehavior (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Skiba, Michael, Narda, & Peterson, 2002). Recent data confirms these trends still persist (Farinde-Wu, 2018). A recent study from the National Center for Education Statistics (2017) shows that as recently as 2011-2012, Black students were more likely than any other student group to receive out-of-school suspensions as punishment. As a result, there is concern that the disparities in disciplinary actions could partly be based on teacher interpretation of student behavior, which may be informed by negative stereotypes and implicit bias (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Though innovative schools around the world attempt to address this problem by engaging in restorative justice programs, such changes still require faculty and

administrative buy-in and can be enhanced by diverse and inclusive faculty (Reyneke, 2011).

Many believe that the small number of minority teachers is caused by a lack of recruitment or intake; however, Richard Ingersoll and Henry May argue that recruitment is not the problem. The issue is retention. In their study entitled *Recruitment, Retention and the Minority Teacher Shortage* in 2011, they found that over the past two decades, the number of minority teachers has almost doubled, outpacing the growth of both white teachers and minority students. They also noted that minority teachers tend to be employed in public schools serving high-poverty, high-minority, and urban communities, so the data suggest that the widespread efforts over the past several decades to recruit more teachers of color and employ them in difficult-to-staff and disadvantaged schools have been extremely successful. In her study of Black female teachers, Abiola Farinde-Wu (2018) finds that female teachers of color show a strong desire to work in urban schools due to three significant factors: diversity, individual teachers' educational experience, and the perception of need for qualified teachers in difficult school districts. Additionally, minority teachers choose these schools due to their belief in what Williams, Graham, McCary-Henderson, & Floyd (2009) call "transformative transference," the belief that they can emulate their own strong mentors and craft educational opportunity for minority students whose school experience likely mirrors their own.

However, Ingersoll and May (2011) also found that over the past couple of decades, the turnover rates among teachers of color have been significantly higher than among white teachers. During the 2012-2013 school year, for example, the turnover rate for minority teachers was nearly 19 percent, compared to 15 percent for non-minority teachers, and these high turnover rates undermine recruitment efforts. In addition, although schools' demographic characteristics seem to be highly important to minority teachers' initial employment decisions, this does not appear to be the case for their decisions to stay or leave later on. These characteristics include the school's poverty level enrollment, minority student enrollment, the proportion of minority teachers, and whether the school is urban or suburban. School poverty level does not increase the likelihood of leaving the teaching profession (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017; *The Condition of Education*, 2018).

What does affect the departures of minority teachers, Ingersoll and May (2011) found, is the organizational conditions in schools. The schools in which teachers of color overwhelmingly teach have, on average, less positive organizational conditions than the schools where white teachers are more likely to work, resulting in disproportionate losses of teachers of color. It would be simplistic to interpret these schools as "undesirable." Instead, it's important to note that the retention of teachers, particularly minority teachers, requires conditions that increase teacher autonomy and connectedness. The organizational conditions that were most strongly related to minority teacher turnover were the degree of individual classroom autonomy afforded to teachers, and the level of influence the faculty as a group had on decision-making. In fact, these factors were more significant than classroom resources, professional development, and even salary. Schools that allow more autonomy for teachers with regard to classroom issues and schools with higher levels of faculty input into school-wide decisions had much lower levels of turnover (Ingersoll & May, 2011).

In a time of increasing standardization, the protection, support, and development of minority instructors' differing teaching strategies is essential. Often, teacher education programs establish a standard of whiteness as the expectation for classroom management and curriculum (Kohli, 2016). While the noted consequence of such experience is the muting and attrition of minority teachers during training programs, it is essential to also note that this often means minority teachers, who are often connected to the communities they serve, engage in teaching methods that differ from these standards, like culturally responsive teaching. Minority teachers have high expectations and are likely to adopt an asset, rather than a deficit model in their classrooms (Kohli, 2016). In a closed organizational structure with limited instructor voice and significant restrictions on teaching autonomy, such efforts may be shut down or minority instructors may face microaggressions that question the credibility and value of these educational strategies. This alienation and hostility has a significant impact on minority instructors and a school's ability to retain them (Kohli, 2016).

Ingersoll and May's (2011) second focus on the level of influence of faculty extends the respect for diverse voices in our schools. Shaw and Newton (2014) identify the profile of servant leadership as strongly correlated with long term teacher retention. The qualities of servant leadership identified in their study echo Ingersoll and May's findings, particularly in a servant leader's commitment to the empowerment of both students and teachers in order to build strong relationships in schools. Additionally, the characteristic of trust insures that minority instructors' differing teaching styles are valued by their schools. Such flexibility in an organizational structure would also lead to a recognition of the unique experiences and strengths of minority instructors, validating their role in the institution and increasing retention (Mosely, 2018).

Further, organizational structures that trust and empower minority teachers can help build the overall school community, deepening the connectedness that increases overall employee retention rates (Minarik,

Thornten, and Perreault, 2003). Mosely (2018) identifies this connectedness as key to the sustainability of Black teachers. Several studies echo microaggressions, teacher disconnectedness, and the lack of community as traits that lead to minority teacher attrition (Williams, et. al., 2009; Kohli, 2016; Mosely, 2018; Farinde-Wu, 2018)

Finally, flexibility in organizational structure and recognition of the unique experiences and needs of minority teachers can lead to the development of specific, targeted strategies for retaining those instructors, such as the development and support of affinity groups and other minority-specific professional development. Establishing these programs requires openness, trust, and the empowerment of minority teachers to develop these support programs (Mosely, 2018). More inflexible organizational structures may revert to the ineffective method of “color-blindness” in order to standardize their professional development, but minority instructors need programs that acknowledge the complexity of their relationship with education, curriculum, and power structures (Kohli, 2016). Creating space and compensating the voices of Black teachers to engage in formal and informal professional development will have a long-term effect on minority teacher sustainability (Mosely, 2018). Such openness extended to all minority instructors will likely aid in building an asset-focused, trusting organization that listens to all instructors and empowers the voices of minority teachers.

Therefore, it follows that the solution to increasing the number of minority teachers in the education workforce is to improve the organizational conditions in all schools, with a particular focus on those that are in, and which serve, urban, disadvantaged, and at-risk communities, as these schools are likely to attract higher concentrations of minority instructors. If minority teachers have more autonomy to teach the way they know their students best learn, and more say in how their schools are run, they are likely to feel more satisfied and productive, and therefore stay in the profession and at the schools where they are most needed.

References

- Beady, C. H., & Hansell, S. (1981). Teacher race and expectations for student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 18(2), 191–206.
- Boser, C. B. (2017, September 28). Revisiting the Persistent Teacher Diversity Problem. Retrieved October 07, 2017, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/news/2017/09/28/415203/revisiting-persistent-teacher-diversity-problem/>
- Boser, U. (2011). Teacher diversity matters: A state-by-state analysis of teachers of color. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.
- Brophy, J. E. (1983). Research on the self-fulfilling prophecy and teacher expectations. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 75(5), 631-661.
- Children’s Defense Fund (1975). School suspensions: Are they helping children? Cambridge, MA: Washington Research Project.
- Clewell, B. C., & Villegas, A. M. (1998). Introduction. *Education and Urban Society*, 31(1), 3–17.
- Digest of Education Statistics, 2014. (n.d.). Retrieved October 07, 2017, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_209.10.asp?current=yes
- Dilworth, M. E. (1990). Reading Between the Lines: Teachers and Their Racial/Ethnic Cultures. *Teacher Education Monograph No. 11*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education.
- Evans, M. O. (1992). An estimate of race and gender role-model effects in teaching high school. *The Journal of Economic Education*, 23(3), 209–217.
- Farinde-Wu, A. (2018). #Blackwomenatwork: Teaching and retention in urban schools. *The Urban Review : Issues and Ideas in Public Education*, 50(2), 247-266. doi:10.1007/s11256-018-0449-x
- Ferguson, R. F. (2003). Teachers’ perceptions and expectations and the Black-White test score gap. *Urban Education*, 38(4), 460–507.
- Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J. U. (1986). Black students’ school success: Coping with the “burden of ‘acting White.’” *The Urban Review*, 18(3), 176–206.
- Fryer, R. G., & Torelli, P. (2010). An empirical analysis of “acting White.” *Journal of Public Economics*, 94(5), 380–396.
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-116. doi:10.1177/0022487102053002003

- Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Noguera, P. A. (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 59–68.
- Hess, F. M., & Leal, D. L. (1997). Minority teachers, minority students, and college matriculation: A new look at the role modeling hypothesis. *Policy Studies Journal*, 25(2), 235–248.
- Ingersoll, R.M. and May, H. (2011). Recruitment, Retention and the Minority Teacher Shortage. *Consortium for Policy Research in Education*. CPRE Research Report #RR-69.
- Irvine, J. J. (1988). An analysis of the problem of disappearing Black educators. *The Elementary School Journal*, 88(5), 503–513.
- Kash, M. M., & Borich, G. D. (1978). *Teacher behavior and pupil self-concept*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- King, S. H. (1993). The limited presence of African-American teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 63, 115–149.
- Kohli, R. (2016). Behind School Doors: The Impact of Hostile Racial Climates on Urban Teachers of Color. *Urban Education*, 53(3), 307-333. doi:10.1177/0042085916636653
- McCarthy, J. D., & Hoge, D. R. (1987). The social construction of school punishment: Racial disadvantage out of universalistic process. *Social Forces*, 65(4), 1101–1120.
- McFadden, A., Marsh, G., Price, B., & Hwang, Y. (1992). A study of race and gender bias in the punishment of school children. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 15(2), 140-146.
- McKown, C., & Weinstein, R. S. (2002). Modeling the role of child ethnicity and gender in children's differential response to teacher expectations. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 32(1), 159–184.
- Minarik, M., Thornton, B., & Perreault, G. (2003). Systems thinking can improve teacher retention. *The Clearing House*, 76(5), 230-234.
- Mosely, M. (2018). The black teacher project: How racial affinity professional development sustains black teachers. *The Urban Review*, 50(2), 267-283. doi:10.1007/s11256-018-0450-4
- National Center for Education Statistics, 2017. Indicator 14: Retention, Suspension, and Expulsion. Retrieved August 1, 2018, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_rda.asp
- Ogbu, J. U. (2004). Collective identity and the burden of “acting White” in Black history, community, and education. *The Urban Review*, 36(1), 1–35.
- Reyneke, M. (2011). The right to dignity and restorative justice in schools. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 14(6), 128-171.
- Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). Pygmalion in the classroom. *The Urban Review*, 3(1), 16–20.
- Shaw, J., & Newton, J. (2014). Teacher retention and satisfaction with a servant leader as principal. *Education*, 135(1), 101-106.
- Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., Narda, A. C., & Peterson, R. L. (2002). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *The Urban Review*, 34(4), 317-342.
- Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(5), 797.
- The Condition of Education – Preprimary, Elementary, and Secondary Education – Teachers and Staff – Teacher Turnover: Stayers, Movers, and Leavers – Indicator. Retrieved August 1, 2018, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_slc.asp
- Villegas, A.M. & Lucas, T. (2004). Diversifying the teacher workforce: A retrospective and prospective analysis. In M.A. Smylie & D. Miretky (Eds.), *Developing the teacher workforce (103rd Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part 1)* (pp. 70-104). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Williams, E., Graham, A., McCary-Henderson, S., & Floyd, L. (2009). "From where i stand:" african american teacher candidates on their decision to teach. *Educational Forum*, 73(4), 348-364.