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## How Affinity Groups Can Help With Bipoc Teacher Support, Retention, And Growth

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HOW AFFINITY GROUPS CAN HELP WITH BIPOC TEACHER SUPPORT, RETENTION,  
AND GROWTH

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
in Education

Hamline University

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction

Renowned author and poet, Maya Angelou, once said, “It is time to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.” This message especially carries relevance in the education field and in creating a positive recognition of diversity in the classroom. Our classrooms have become increasingly diverse. “Currently, Teachers of Color (TOC) comprise approximately 20% of the U.S. public school teacher population, and Students of Color represent about 52% of public school students” (Carter, Andrews, et al. 2018, p. 7). It becomes difficult to model affirmative acknowledgement of diversity in the classroom when most of the adults fit into the demographics of White, cisgender, middle class, and female. To help all students, but especially BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) students, we as an education system must first address the importance of Teachers of Color and the crucial need to support and retain them through having BIPOC affinity groups. This brings about the question: *How do affinity groups support BIPOC staff and how can an affinity group resource support future groups?*

In this chapter, I delve into the why behind why supporting and retaining teachers of color are important to me, my history with this topic, and the professional significance of my research question. First, I will share my personal rationale to show why the topic of Teachers of Color is important to me. I will then highlight the professional rationale and context behind Teachers of Color and affinity groups. This introduces the literature and research supporting Teachers of Color.

## **Defining TOC**

Throughout this capstone, Teachers of Color (TOC) is used to describe teachers who are BIPOC. This term is an inclusive, umbrella term that welcomes, capitalizes, and honors diverse teachers. As a TOC, I feel that it is the most accurate, current term that encapsulates the intersectional, multilayered experiences of Teachers of Color. As Dr. Kohli states in her work:

‘Students of Color’ references individuals of indigenous, African, Latina/o, Asian/Pacific Islander descent. It is intentionally capitalized to reject the standard grammatical norm. Capitalization is used as a means of empowerment and represents a grammatical move toward social and racial justice. This rule will also apply to the terms ‘Teachers of Color’ (Kohli, 2009, p.250).

I also adopt this rationale for capitalization throughout this capstone to intentionally capitalize, prioritize, and focus on TOCs’ experiences, perspectives, and voices.

## **Personal Rationale**

“Ms. Dech! This teacher in the book looks like you!” shrieks one of my first graders. I am reading the picture book *Our Class is a Family* to my class and pause for this comment. “Wait, this kid looks like me! And this kid looks like Natae!” adds another student. The class starts to buzz as more students notice likelihoods of themselves in the book. I gently guide the class back to reading but not without first celebrating seeing our classroom community reflected in a book, a rarity in itself.

My school is located in a predominantly White suburb outside of the Twin Cities and there are not many BIPOC staff at my school, yet my school has about 34% Students of Color. This is not a unique problem. Only 5% of Minnesota’s teachers are BIPOC. According to the

Coalition for Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota, this percentage has remained stagnant over the past two decades (TOCAIT MN, 2021). If we want to grow our number of Teachers of Color, we must focus on retaining and supporting them. As one of two BIPOC teachers, I deliberately received most of the first graders of Color in my classroom. My classroom is noisy, does not strictly follow many of the White norms my colleagues follow, and is celebratory of our diversity and multiculturalism. Not only do my students like their classroom, I often have last year's students stop by saying they miss their old classroom, older siblings of my current students who shyly stop by, and BIPOC staff who bring their work to my classroom because it feels safe and calming. Outside of my classroom, it can be exhausting to work in a predominantly White setting. However, if I was further supported by an affinity group, my classroom would feel even more welcoming.

The topic of supporting and retaining Teachers of Color is important to me because I am a Teacher of Color. I am queer and half-Chinese and never saw myself in my education growing up. I did not have any Teachers of Color, did not see myself in any picture books, and was not represented in my school's curriculum. Combined with growing up in a small town and being one of the few Students of Color in my school, I felt isolated. I don't want any of my students to experience that. It's not until adulthood that I finally embraced my Asian-ness and my queer-ness, came out of the closet, and found queer, Asian friends like me. Instead of mulling over how I didn't fit into my education, I began to wonder how to create a space for fellow Teachers of Color and me. Having representation in our schools matters to our students. Not only does this matter to our Students of Color with the role model effect, it also shifts White students' perspectives by directly challenging stereotype threats. Teachers of Color also show a precise

depiction of what it means to live in a multicultural society (Dee, 2015, p. 159, 160, 162).

However, this cannot happen until Teachers of Color feel supported and retention grows.

I first began to research how to grow, support, and retain Teachers of Color for my undergraduate thesis at the College of Saint Benedict. I investigated the ethical importance of having Teachers of Color for our students and how this could change the course of the opportunity gap. After college, I taught in Sweden at an international school for two years. I loved teaching in Stockholm, and I especially loved working with an extremely diverse and multicultural staff. The teaching staff were from all over the world and that influenced how we taught, strengthened our collaboration, and helped us celebrate the diversity of our student body. When I moved back to the United States due to Covid-19, I experienced a shock when teaching in a predominantly White, suburban school. Suddenly, it was as if I was back in the elementary schools I had grown up attending where teachers who are now my coworkers asked me where I'm really from and made assumptions about me. I questioned if I am here as a half-White, half-Chinese teacher due to my proximity to Whiteness or due to the fact that my partial Whiteness and Asianness makes me the most palatable token for White people to work with. In addition to teaching during a difficult Covid school year, I faced microaggressions, color blindness, and an overall system that I still don't see myself in. My end goal in education is to help support and retain Teachers of Color whether that be through research, professorship, mentoring, or going into administration. After two years of teaching in the US, it feels like this is all an uphill battle. I am tired of being the token, of being the only one, of worrying that I'm overthinking the comments from White colleagues that make me feel like what they just stated was a microaggression, of the underlying message that says, "just get used to it", of putting in



twice the emotional labor to advocate for myself and my Students of Color. These experiences made me yearn for a community of teachers with whom I could work, where I wouldn't have to prove myself, over-explain these experiences, or question why I am exhausted. I reached out to a fellow BIPOC teacher and my instructional coach, who is also Asian American, and we started to discuss the serious need for a BIPOC affinity group.

Schools have historically and structurally not been set up to serve Communities of Color. This includes Teachers of Color. We face emotional labor and Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF). RBF is defined as “the psychological, emotional, physiological, energy, and time-related cost to fighting against racism” (Pizarro and Kohli, 2020, p.969). Not only are we trying to carve space for ourselves in predominantly White workspace settings, we are also advocating endlessly for our students, teaching in the American education system, and attempting not to burn out. Teachers of Color also experience hostile racial climates such as color blindness, microaggressions, and macroaggressions (Kohli, 2018, p.307). Additionally, when there are only 5% of us in Minnesota, we know that we are far and few between. When I interviewed a BIPOC colleague this summer and asked him about racial battle fatigue, he simply responded, “There’s so much pressure. Of knowing that I might be their only Black teacher until college. I want to give them the best experience and give them everything.” My school tried to have a restorative, community circle last year for BIPOC staff with an outside mediator to voice our concerns and experiences with RBF in our district. However, this fell flat and received quizzical inquiry from White colleagues about why this group was even necessary. While writing this capstone, I started a pilot BIPOC affinity group for teachers at my school. Within the first session, BIPOC staff already reported feeling validated, supported, and heard.

## **Professional Rationale and Context**

After feeling the exhausting fatigue of teaching in a predominantly White suburb, my question is this: *How do affinity groups support BIPOC staff and how can an affinity group resource support future groups?*

The answer to this question has a potential impact on my classroom, school, and district. I love teaching and being with my students. However, if I feel supported with an affinity group, it will then transfer to my teaching. One can't pour from an empty cup; having an affinity group will help fill my cup so that I can continue to authentically teach my students. My school and district will also be impacted by the answer to this question. Administration knows that we need more Teachers of Color (TOC). It is not a coincidence that the newest teachers at our school are all BIPOC. When I asked my principal permission to start a BIPOC teacher affinity group, she wanted me to start the group from a grassroots sense instead of having it be top-down and administrator-led. I agreed with this because the principal was new in a district with extremely low turnover. In addition to being recruited, Teachers of Color also need to be retained. TOC leave every year at a rate 24% higher than White colleagues (Kohli, 2018, p.312). Teachers of Color report greater job dissatisfaction, higher turnover up to 50% in the first 5 years, and attrition (Achinstein et al. 2010, p.72). Higher turnover equates to a continuing lack of stability, resources, and curriculum coherence (Achinstein et al. 2010, p.73). However, if TOC feel supported and validated from an affinity group, there is a higher likelihood of us staying instead of leaving.

My research question also has larger implications in our education system. In Minnesota, the system of recruiting and retaining TOCs has become political. Teachers of Color make up

about 5% of teachers across the state (Lonetree, 2021). Since 2015, the Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers (TOCAIT) has worked to raise awareness of the TOC shortage in Minnesota, advocate for legislation such as the Increase Teachers of Color Act, and create affinity spaces for TOC (TOCAIT MN, 2021). The latest state education funding bill increased funding to about \$13 million annually on TOC recruitment, retention, and specifically to “grow your own” programs throughout Minnesota that help educational assistants and paraprofessionals gain teaching coursework and licensure (Lonetree, 2021). Part of my research question involves creating a guide for facilitating BIPOC teacher affinity groups. As state funding continues to hopefully increase for retaining Teachers of Color, a resource guide could help newly funded spaces for BIPOC affinity groups.

### **Summary**

This chapter introduces the need for Teachers of Color and the challenges they face. It brings about the question: *How do affinity groups support BIPOC staff and how can an affinity group resource support future groups?* The term Teacher of Color (TOC) is defined for the rest of the capstone. My personal rationale and professional rationale behind Teachers of Color is shown to provide context behind why this topic matters to me so much so that it evolved into this capstone. Additionally, the context and background knowledge is provided for the affinity group that I facilitated in my school district. This affinity group is referenced and helped shape my capstone project that is later discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

### **Conclusion**

In my classroom last year, I was lucky enough to have a first grader who is also half-Asian like me. At the beginning of the year, she was bullied for her home lunches of sushi

and other Japanese foods. I addressed the issue with the class and individually with her and told the class that I used to be bullied for bringing my chopsticks, fried rice, and dumplings to school. The bullying stopped and I didn't think much more of it until I received a note from her parents in December stating, "You completely flipped her worldview. She is more open and strong to share who she is and we cannot say thank you enough for positively influencing her like this." This is why representation in the teaching force matters. It's my "why" at the end of long school days. To address the opportunity gap in education, Teachers of Color must be recruited, retained, and supported. Our students deserve to have teachers that reflect who they are, create safe, culturally affirming spaces for them, and cultivate their whole selves. Only then, will we live up to Angelou's quote of seeing the beauty and strength in diversity.

In the upcoming chapters, the research behind Teachers of Color is broken down. The research consists of a historical background over why there is a lack of Teachers of Color (TOC), the benefits of having TOC, how we grow TOC, issues and barriers TOC face, and how to support and retain Teachers of Color through affinity groups. Additionally, chapters three and four provide a resource guide for facilitating BIPOC teacher affinity groups. Lastly, the value of this work and the ways in which it can be used to support BIPOC teachers is reviewed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Do we even belong in education? As Teachers of Color (TOC), this question bounces around in affinity groups, in hostile work environments, and in teacher education programs. This literature review overwhelmingly answers that yes, we belong in education and that the education system needs us. This literature review shapes an understanding of the context behind TOC, of how to grow and support TOC, and of affinity groups for TOC. This research was used to develop a comprehensive resource guide of how to facilitate affinity groups for schools so that their TOC can feel supported and retained.

This review of the literature provides coherence between the various areas of research around TOC. This includes the historical background of TOC in the United States, the benefits of having TOC, and the issues TOC face. These points show why and how TOC can be supported and grown through preservice education programs, alternative pathways to becoming teachers, and by applying culturally sustaining pedagogy and critical race theory frameworks when working with current TOC. This leads to the need for affinity groups for TOC. It is centered around the idea that TOC are vital to our education system and their concerns and issues are valid, systemic, and worth recognizing. The current education system is not designed for People of Color and this includes Teachers of Color.

The literature reviewed breaks down *the context, the ways to grow and support TOC*, and the *benefits of affinity groups*. It is used to inform an answer to the question, *How do affinity groups support BIPOC teachers and how can an affinity group resource support future groups?*

## **Context**

This section examines the context behind Teachers of Color (TOC). First, this section will investigate a deeper look into the history of Teachers of Color (TOC) in the United States in how the demographics have shifted throughout time and how that has led to our current demographics of teachers in the United States. Second, this section will look at the benefits of having TOC in schools. These benefits are not just for Students of Color, but all students. Lastly, this section juxtaposes the benefits of having TOC with the current issues that TOC face in our education system. These issues include racial battle fatigue, overall racism, and a push to leave the education field.

## ***Historical Background***

History has shown that Teachers of Color can be powerful unifiers within their communities. Before the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, 82,000 Black teachers educated over two million Black children and were valued within their community as role models, leaders, and mentors. In particular, Black female educators served as “womanist” teachers in which they exemplified warmth and leadership while challenging racial, class, and gender discrimination. However, after the Brown decision, nearly half of the Black teaching force lost their jobs across 17 states. This caused Black students to be integrated into the majority population and the dismantling of Black schools (Graves and Stevenson, 2013, p.80). This section will look into the lack of TOC in the US and our current demographics.

*Brown v. Board of Education* led to a whitification of teaching and teacher education by directly causing the dismissal, demotion, or forced resignation of qualified, experienced Black educators (Souto-Manning, Emdin, 2020). Of the 82,000 Black teachers and administrators from

before the *Brown* decision, 38,000 lost their jobs. White parents did not want Black teachers. White teachers retained their positions while Black teachers were let go (Haddix, 2017, p. 142). The new Civil Rights Act in 1964, federal deregulation guidelines of 1966, and subsequent legislation did not include any language around the retention of Black teachers in schools. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 reclassified the general teaching position, which was held by most Black teachers. When schools failed to comply with federal requirements to receive poverty aid that accompanied the ESEA, funds were cut and the general teaching positions were first to be let go (Carter Andrews et al., 2019, p.7). Additionally, schools with high percentages of Black teachers got rid of their tenure laws, did not replace retired Black teachers with other Black teachers, and assigned Black teachers to teach out of their content field so they could be rated as incompetent (Graves and Stevenson, 2013, p.81).

Whitification also played out when schools prioritized White children and families over Black families and children. For example, when Darla Buchanan, a teacher in Topeka, Kansas was fired in 1953, the superintendent wrote to her stating, “the majority of people in Topeka will not want to employ Negro teachers next year for White children. It is necessary for me to notify you now that your services will not be needed for next year” (Souto-Manning & Edmin, 2020, p.3). Black teachers being dismissed led to an erasure of a Black cultural perspective on curriculum, pedagogy, and school community. This impacted the educational experiences and outcomes for Black children.

The post-*Brown* layoffs affected teacher education programs. Between 1975 and 1985, teacher education programs saw a 66% decline in Black students majoring in education (Souto-Manning & Edmin, 2020, p.4). Given the firings and demotions of experienced and

qualified community and family members in schools, this is a reasonable outcome. Further, from 1984 and 1989, “37,717 minority candidates and teachers... were eliminated as a result of newly installed teacher certification and teacher education program admissions requirements” (Souto-Manning & Edmin, 2020, p.6).

Given this historical background of pushing out Black teachers, it is no surprise that our current demographics reflect the lack of Teachers of Color. In 1999, Professor Talbert-Johnson of the University of Dayton conducted a study of the demographics of teachers nationwide. She found that teacher demographics had shifted with a growth in White females, which they predicted would continue to rise. Talbert-Johnson also predicted that across all realms of education the maleness of educators would decrease but the whiteness factor will continue to grow (Talbert-Johnson, 1999, p.201). In 2017-2018, the U.S. The Department of Education National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) found that 79% of public school teachers were White, 9% identified as Hispanic, 7% were Black, 2% were Asian, 2% were multiracial, and less than 1% were American Indian (NCES, 2020). Additionally, the NTPS found that schools that had a majority of students who were not White also had a majority of White teachers. To compare, in 2017, 49.1% of all K-12 students were BIPOC (NCES, 2020). While the growth of BIPOC students shows a need for TOC, Teachers of Color benefit all students. The next section delves into these benefits.

### ***Benefits of Having TOC***

In 1998, then Secretary of Education Richard Riley declared, “Our teachers should look like America” (Goldhaber, Theobald, Tien, 2019, p.25). As the gap of teacher demographics and student demographics grew and persisted in the United States, the realization that TOC are



needed also grew. There is substantial research on how Teachers of Color (TOC) lead to better outcomes for all students. These benefits include showing a multicultural society, increasing the role model effect, having high expectations for students, and drawing on TOC' own cultural contexts in schools. This section will show the research behind why having TOC is impactful for all students and why we need more TOC.

Teachers of Color ensure that all students, including White students, experience a more precise depiction of what it means to live and work in a multicultural and democratic society (Ladson-Billings, 2005, p.231). A diverse teaching force shows that the education field's actions match its rhetoric involving diversity and appreciation of others, demonstrates a multicultural perspective, and promotes self-worth to all students (Miller and Endo, 2005, p.5). TOC help students cultivate more empathy for individual differences and normalize people of color in leadership roles (Kim & Cooc, 2020, p.196). This also holds true for colleagues of TOC, who may have never interacted or worked with BIPOC colleagues before. TOC can utilize their own cultural perspectives while teaching and interpreting students' behavior which leads to a more culturally responsive classroom. The presence of TOC also sways decisions outside of the classroom regarding curriculum, policies around school culture and behavior, and instruction in schools, which then prepares all students for a globally diverse society. The opposite occurs when there is a lack of TOC.

While Teachers of Color (TOC) are crucial for all students, they especially benefit Students of Color through the role model effect and by having high expectations. TOCs can sway educational results of their students through passive teacher effects generated by a teacher's racial, ethnic, or gender identity, not through overt teaching (Dee, 2005, p.159). This causes the

role model effect, in which simply having a demographically similar teacher boosts a student's academic motivation and expectations (Dee, 2005, p.159). In particular, the role model effect also helps alleviate the stigma of "acting White" for BIPOC students (Goldhaber, Theobald, Tien, 2019, p.26). The opposite of this effect is the stereotype threat in which students' academic identity and achievement change due to a perceived stereotype that their teacher passes to them inertly (Dee, 2005, p.160). A student is 1.36 times more likely to be seen as disruptive by the teacher, 33% more likely to be seen as inattentive, and 22% more likely to not complete their homework when the teacher does not share the student's racial background (Dee, 2005, p.162). Students of Color who did not have a TOC had less of an opportunity to be identified and served in gifted education. However, in New York City Schools, when Black students have Black teachers, they are three times more likely to be placed in a gifted program (Morgan, 2019, p.158). The role model effect also comes into effect when a Teacher of Color's experience can serve as a source of understanding and empathy when it becomes a mirror of a student's experience (Miller and Endo, 2005, p.4). For example, when a Black male student has a Black male teacher in 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade, his likelihood of dropping out of high school is lowered by 39% (Kamantz, 2017). Research has also found that matching Teachers of Color with students of the same race raised math and reading scores of all students, including White students (Morgan, 2019, p.160).

Additionally, Teachers of Color are more likely to hold higher expectations for their Students of Color than White teachers (Goldhaber, Theobald, Tien, 2019, p.26). High expectations lead to high achievement (Carter Andrews, et al. 2019, p.6). In a study of Latinx young adults, Alexa, a second-generation Dominican woman described her indigenous teacher

by remarking, “He was like my father... It’s really important to have somebody who listens to you and who really appreciates what you’ve done for the day... and your progress. I respected him” (Cherng & Halpin, 2016, p.408).

Clearly, TOC are valuable in the many ways that they impact students and school. However, we can not only talk about the benefits without also bringing attention to the issues TOC face in the education system that serve as barriers and affect retention.

### ***Issues TOC Face***

Socially and cognitively, prospective Teachers of Color (TOC) and current TOC face emotional labor in a predominantly White profession (Carter Andrews, et al. 2019, p.8). Schools have historically and structurally not been set up to serve Communities of Color. Racism has a cumulative and ongoing impact throughout the education field and Teachers of Color are often hit the hardest. This section will thoroughly discuss the issues TOC face. The first part will focus on racial battle fatigue, the second part will look at overall racism that TOC face, and the last part will look at how this impacts TOC leaving the field. While there are many tensions or barriers that TOC face, I am focusing on these three because they especially highlight the need for affinity groups.

Racial battle fatigue (RBF) has been defined as, “the psychological, emotional, physiological, energy, and time-related cost to fighting against racism” (Pizarro and Kohli, 2020, p.969). RBF research has shown that People of Color in predominantly and traditionally White spaces can experience hypervigilance, hyper-visibility and hyper-invisibility, social withdrawal, self-censorship, loss of self-confidence, giving up personal goals for professional acknowledgement, and adopting white norms (Pizarro and Kohli, 2020, p.973). For People of

Color this can lead to anxiety, frustration, anger, helplessness, hopelessness, depression, loss or increase of appetite, extreme fatigue, hypertension, and other effects (Pizarro and Kohli, 2020, p.973). For Teachers of Color, RBF becomes difficult to combat while protecting their own self and also trying to create an educational environment where their Students of Color can thrive. This leads to confronting dominant White norms alone, being on high alert for the next racist encounter from colleagues, and feeling pressured to be hypervigilant in their work to protect themselves and their students (Pizarro and Kohli, 2020, p.985). RBF is a chronic, layered manifestation of institutionalized racism.

TOC face RBF and overall racism in school systems. In a 2018 study, over 200 Teachers of Color were interviewed on their experiences in the education system. Teachers of Color overwhelmingly experienced a hostile climate, color blindness, microaggressions, macroaggressions and RBF (Kohli, 2018, p.319). These are the same experiences that prospective TOC faced in their teacher education programs. Schools create hostility in large (macro) and small (micro) ways. Macro-racism includes policies, infrastructure, and schoolwide practices that maintain a racial status quo. The racial status quo upholds White norms that end up harming communities of color and perpetuates Whiteness and racialization within schools. Micro-racism includes personal and peer interactions that are racially charged (Kohli, 2018, p.314). This hostility becomes especially blatant for TOC who advocate for racial justice. TOC also face color-blindness in their schools' approaches to the race and culture of students. A silenced discussion of race squashes a discussion of racism and any progress towards justice. In addition, Teachers of Color also face subtle verbal and non-verbal microaggressions, layered insults/attacks, and cumulative insults/attacks (Kohli, 2018, p.319). TOC feel profound respect

and connection to their Students of Color. Thus, microaggressions towards students are also profoundly felt by TOC (Kohli, 2018, p.321). While single microaggressions may not seem like much, collectively they become exhausting.

Teachers also reported feeling isolation and toxicity. “While racial justice should be a universal issue of concern, people of Color are often left with the responsibility of identifying and addressing racism” (Kohli, 2018, p.318). Collectively, these add up. Schools often utilize Teachers of Color to connect with Students of Color. This overreliance stems from stereotypes about students’ communities of Color and a limited knowledge about individual Teachers of Color beyond their race (Kohli, 2018, p.319). The Education Trust conducted a study in 2016 that showed that Black and Latinx teachers felt disrespected and de-professionalized at work even as they performed additional emotional and physical labor compared to their White colleagues. They also felt like they need to prove their worth as teachers, noted that they are looked over for job advancements, and are not respected as pedagogical experts (Carter Andrews, et al. 2019, p.8). Another study on AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) teachers found that over a quarter of AAPI teachers interviewed described how their physical appearance had implications for their interactions with coworkers and students. Additionally, closely related to physical appearance were AAPI teachers’ experiences of being treated like a perpetual foreigner or outsider in school communities (Kim & Cooc, 2021, p.207).

It’s no wonder that Teachers of Color leave the field every year at a rate 24% higher than their White colleagues (Kohli, 2018, p.312). Teachers of Color reported greater job dissatisfaction, higher turnover of up to 50% in the first five years, and attrition (Achinstein et al. 2010, p.72).The reasons for attrition include teacher demographic characteristics, teacher

qualifications, school organizational characteristics, school resources, and school student body characteristics (Achinstein et al. 2010, p.76). Teachers of Color also tend to work more in hard-to-staff schools than White teachers. However, teacher turnover is also higher at hard-to-staff schools thus exasperating and continuing a lack of stability, resources, and curriculum coherence (Achinstein et al. 2010, p. 73). This becomes a revolving door. In 2003, 104,688 new TOC entered the field. However, by the end of the school year 105,086 TOC left, showing more than 200,000 job transitions by TOC (Achinstein et al. 2010, p. 81). Given that TOC are already underrepresented, this data is troubling. A TOC who recently left the field wrote,

Lived experience cannot be refuted, and it cannot be explained. So when TOC are skipped over for promotions, excluded from conversations around school culture, or kept from sharing their insights about what Students of Color need to succeed, it is insulting. As was the case with me, it pushes too many of us out of the classroom. (Pitts, 2019, p.11).

TOC face many challenges that become exhausting, angering, and, as Pitts puts, insulting. These feelings are valid and show a crucial need to grow and support TOC. The next section shows research-based ways to do this.

### **Growing and Supporting TOC**

This section will examine the various ways to grow and support Teachers of Color (TOC). With context now in mind, it becomes clear that a step back is needed to address the multilayered and assorted methods and resources to cultivate TOC in our education field. First, this section will examine barriers that prospective TOC face. This includes teacher education

programs, licensure requirements, and overall social, economic, and systemic barriers. Second, this section will compare and contrast alternative pathways for prospective TOC to help overcome the barriers listed in the first part. This section will also look at why these programs are successful and what these programs need to continue. Third, this section will examine what current TOC need for support once they are in the education field and are teaching. These areas of support include culturally sustaining pedagogy, culturally responsive pedagogy, and critical race theory.

### ***Barriers for Prospective TOC***

Prospective TOC face barriers in attending teacher education programs and keeping up with licensure requirements. Teacher education programs tend to be at historically and predominantly White institutions which recreates then reproduces the current demographics of White, middle class, cisgender, female teachers (Brunsmas et al. 2012, p. 719). This section will look at social, economic, and systemic barriers that prospective TOC face.

Even before prospective TOC attend teacher education programs, they most likely faced exclusion and racism in their K-12 education. Students of Color are more likely to experience racism, discrimination, Islamophobia, cyberbullying, verbal and physical assaults, and micro-aggressions (Booth Watkins, Beresin, 2022). Students of Color have also consistently been “told” they do not belong in schools through the lack of representation, history, perspective, and values of marginalized communities in US schools (Kohli, 2018, p.310). These experiences collectively create trauma for students. Without trauma-informed teaching, there is no social justice education. It provides a historical perspective to see the root causes of trauma in our current societal system from poverty, violence, and current-day racism. When teachers have an

awareness of students' trauma, they then build an awareness of students' disempowerment in their school and community context and how our education system contributes to this disempowerment (Crosby, Howell, and Thomas, 2018, p.17). Without safety, there is no learning. However, this safety does not happen for many Students of Color (Crosby, Howell, and Thomas, 2018, p.17).

When prospective Teachers of Colors' gain admission into preservice teaching programs, they often face additional obstacles of prevailing ideologies of whiteness such as overt and covert racism, linguicism, stereotypes, microaggressions, color-blindness, tokenization, and lack of support from faculty (Carter, Andrews et al. 2018, p. 8). Additionally, preservice TOC reported high levels of alienation, a disconnection from the overall program community, and not seeing themselves in their programs across all program curricula, field placements, and program faculty and staff (Brown, 2013, p.334). For example, at a predominantly White institution, a group of Latinx preservice teachers experienced cultural mismatch and low expectations from faculty, staff, and their White preservice classmates (Brown, 2013, p.335). AAPI preservice teachers also reported social isolation, cultural mismatch, and cultural disconnect to their coursework and social environment of their education programs (Brown, 2013, p.336).

Rather than being in programs that honor and build off of students' cultural knowledge with culturally sustaining pedagogy, preservice TOC are expected to thrive in White-centered teacher education programs (Haddix, 2016, p.145). Almost all preservice TOC reported experiencing racism across all studies (Brown, 2013, p.336). These experiences have long-term effects. Further studies of current TOC show how these programs bring up psychological trauma. When asked about their teacher education programs, TOC remarked how they felt invisible, were



framed as incapable, asked to be an expert “other,” and presumed to be incompetent in their programs (Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2020). This invisibility can lead to racial battle fatigue.

Besides teacher education programs, preservice TOC also face barriers with licensure. Licensure exams have been used as a way to screen-out preservice TOC since the 1960s. In 1967, the National Teacher Exam screened out around 3% of preservice TOC at Black colleges from admission into teacher education programs (Petchauer et al. 2018, p.324). When state legislatures change which licensure exams preservice teachers must pass, these changes, which are often abrupt and do not give programs time to adapt, have the most severe impact on preservice TOC (Carter Andrews et al. 2018, p.8). Additionally, the EdTPA, a portfolio-based assessment of preservice teachers, has proven to be another barrier. The EdTPA is already expensive and is often combined with a semester of unpaid student teaching. It also proved mixed results for TOC candidates. In Washington state Latinx teacher candidates were three times more likely to fail compared to White candidates in 2012-2013. In 2015, Black and White teacher candidates showed a growing effect size in score reports from 2.41 points in 2014 to 3.62 (Petchauer et al. 2018, p.330).

### ***Grow Your Own Pathways***

Since there are so many obstacles for preservice TOC, there has been a growth in grow-your-own pathways and alternative routes towards teacher education. This section will compare and contrast different types of grow-your-own programs and nontraditional programs that have successfully boosted TOC numbers. More TOC in the field provides more opportunities for us to support each other.

Grow Your Own (GYO) and nontraditional programs offer opportunities to preservice TOC by reducing barriers, building off of preservice TOC experiences in education, and utilizing preservice TOC community cultural wealth. Successful programs often focus on adults of the local school and wider community, including paraprofessionals, school cafeteria workers, security guards, custodial staff, parents, community activities, and religious leaders (Gist et al., 2019, p.15). For example, the Pathway to Teaching Careers program also offers a non-traditional opportunity for preservice TOC that come from backgrounds of paraprofessionals, uncertified teachers, career switchers, veterans, and other nontraditional pools to become teachers in urban communities by offering a partnership with a teacher education institution, a recruitment process and selection strategy that uses nontraditional criteria, teacher education curriculum that prepares participants and meets their needs (such as childcare and licensure exam preparation), a strong system of support, and tuition assistance (Clewell, 1999, p.308). This program also proved to be successful. Principals evaluated 425 Pathway Program graduates and were rated an average of 4.17 out of five for their teaching (Clewell, 1999, p.315). Another example is the Parent Mentor Program in Chicago which invested in parents of color, listened to their concerns for their childrens' education, created community resource centers, then recruited and created opportunities for parents to become teachers (Gist et al., 2019, p.15). Mindfully selecting community members who can successfully transition to become teachers helps boost growth and retention.

Grow Your Own (GYO) programs are also successful when there are strong community ties. For example, the Latin@ Teacher Project in California and the Navajo Nation Teacher Preparation Program in Colorado worked to increase the quantity and quality of TOC for Latin@

and Navajo communities (Beckett, p.2). These programs both have high success rates because they had strong leaders, support from the local community to implement these programs, and local and state policies that allowed for nontraditional teacher education programs to grow (Beckett, p. 6). Another program that has proven to be successful is in Nashville, Tennessee in which a local university partnered with school districts to create a nontraditional teacher and licensure program for BIPOC paraprofessionals. This program tailored the program to fit the specific staffing needs of local schools and research on what supports paraprofessionals need to pursue teacher licensure. This included scholarships, mentoring that addressed the intersectional identities and confidence building for BIPOC paraprofessionals, and changing admission requirements so that traditional indicators did not inhibit candidates from being accepted into the program (Delgado, Baese, Hauptman, 2021, p.20). This program would not have happened without the collaboration of the university and the surrounding school districts.

With more Grow-Your-Own programs and alternative pathways, preservice TOC face less barriers and more opportunities to become teachers. However, current TOC face challenges as well. This means we can now shift our focus towards supporting current TOC.

### ***Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy/Culturally Responsive Pedagogy***

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) “seeks to perpetuate and foster - to sustain - linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation” (Alim & Paris, 2017, p.1). Teaching with CSP and/or culturally responsive pedagogy allows TOC to create classrooms that reflect and honor our diversity and authenticity and create a safe, welcoming classroom environment. However, teaching with culturally responsive pedagogy can put TOC in a “double bind” of teaching with cultural relevance versus standardization. This can

take a toll on teachers and requires additional insight. This section will look at culturally sustaining pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy and how it impacts TOC growth and support in pre-service education programs and in schools.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy needs to first be taught in all pre-service education programs, not just to support and grow pre-service TOC but all pre-service education students. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) centers on students' cultural ways of knowing and being and utilizes that to jumpstart the teaching and learning process (Jackson, 2015, p.226). CSP builds off of that by not just utilizing students' cultural knowledge and authentic selves but also honoring it, cultivating it, and cherishing it in classroom and schoolwide communities. Teacher education programs need to not only have but also teach CSP to prepare all of their students to teach. In addition, preservice TOC have shown that when CSP/CRP are disregarded in their education programs, they feel that their world values are undervalued too (Jackson, 2015, p.231). Without CSP, preservice TOC also reported feelings of double consciousness in which they are insiders and outsiders in a racialized society (Jackson, 2015, p.232). Preservice education programs that do not have CSP/CRP then enable settler teacher syndrome. A teacher with settler teacher syndrome, "intentionally or unintentionally makes instructional and pedagogical decisions that serve to maintain settler colonialism, in that it justifies and/or organizes settler colonialism" (Cherry-McDaniel, 2019, p.244). In a study of urban TOC, successful TOC were between 30-50 years old, had raised children, held other jobs besides teaching, and had normal lives amongst a somewhat violent context. These teachers had successfully navigated settler colonialism and developed a critical consciousness to help them survive and stay in teaching

(Cherry-McDaniel, 2019, p.246). By teaching preservice TOC about CSP and CRP, we set them up to not only be a successful teacher but also to navigate living in the United States.

CSP and CRP also support current TOC by acknowledging cultural and linguistic relevance, creating a community of learners, and creating a pedagogical space for social justice. In a study of TOC and their opportunities within their schools to use CSP/CRP, TOC that were able to utilize CRP reported higher amounts of curricular autonomy, instructional decision making, and professionalized cultures that also committed to culturally responsive teaching (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011, p.21). These sustained TOC practices and retained them at their schools. These teachers also were able to prioritize social justice in their teaching. Meanwhile, TOC in this study who did not feel like they could enact culturally responsive teaching expressed many barriers and a lack of support. This included a tension between wanting to reflect their students' and their own cultural backgrounds in their curriculum while also adhering to their schools' uniform, standards-based curriculum (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011, p.12). TOC also expressed having to teach to the test and having a lack of underrepresentation in state curriculum standards. TOC are then caught in a double bind in which they try to honor their cultural and professional commitments to CRP while also working in schools that adopt policies and practices that challenge and block CRP (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011, p.26). If the education system wants to support TOC, we must allow space for CSP and CRP.

### ***Critical Race Theory***

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that shows how race is a social construct and that racism is systemic oppression, not just individual bias and prejudice (Kohli, 2018, p. 309). CRT can be used to show the nuances of racism within schools and how schools

affirm the racial status quo. This lens is helpful in investigating hostile racial climates of schools and how that affects TOC. CRT creates a foundation that supports both preservice TOC and current TOC. This section delves into how CRT can be used to analyze TOC experiences and perspectives.

CRT has four basic tenets. First, CRT states that racism is a widespread experience. These are common, everyday experiences for most BIPOC people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 8). Second, CRT acknowledges and listens to counter-stories of people of color. These might go against White norms but CRT acknowledges these differences and values it by giving it validity through storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 9). Third, CRT argues that racism requires radical change and a holistic approach, rather than just neutral color blindness and meritocracy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p.10). Lastly, CRT states that race is a social construct that is used to categorize, manipulate, invent, or retire when convenient (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 10). These tenets of CRT are applied within the education field to highlight the disparities of both students and Teachers of Color.

CRT provides validity and affirmation to preservice TOC and current TOC through counter-storytelling and providing a base of reasoning. These counter-stories disrupt the dominant and normative culture of Whiteness in the US education system. Within the education system, TOC are stuck in a frame that defines them as necessary role models for Students of Color and racial tokens. Using CRT enables TOC to be viewed as critical and thoughtful teachers who take their commitment to become effective teachers seriously (Brown, 2014, p.338). CRT moves away from the cyclical relationship between individual TOC as the savior and rescuer of BIPOC students and instead analyzes the nature of Whiteness within our education system

(Brown, 2014, p. 339). CRT also explains how schools historically and structurally have not been set up to service Communities of Color, including TOC (Kohli, 2018, p. 310). With CRT in mind, TOC can be supported and retained by taking a step away from the Whiteness of our educational system and examining the entire situation of what TOC need to grow, feel supported, and thrive. The next section shows how to do this through affinity groups.

### **Affinity Groups**

This section will look at the benefits of affinity groups for TOC and how they can help support and retain TOC. BIPOC Affinity groups are not a new concept in education. There have been affinity groups in various settings. This section will first investigate the benefits of having BIPOC affinity groups in workplaces and how that could be applied towards the education field. These affinity groups include mentorships, specific steps to retain BIPOC staff, and levels of support to advance BIPOC staff. Additionally, this section will look at other affinity groups that have been studied and the benefits they provided for TOC. This includes adapting liberatory consciousness frameworks, fitting affinity groups into professional development, building ally-ship, and creating a safe space for TOC away from predominantly White spaces. This section will also look at schools that have kept TOC and other ways that they improved retention.

### ***Affinity Group Examples***

Nearly 50 years ago, Angela Davis cautioned us that members of oppressed groups are not just exhausted but are kept exhausted deliberately so that they do not question abusive conditions (Garcia, de Mueller, Cedillo, 2021). Affinity groups provide a safe space to directly question these conditions and combat isolation with support. These affinity groups allow for

TOC to collectively heal and process racial trauma and reimagine teaching with activism and resistance (Kulkarni, Bland, & Gaeta, 2022, p. 46).

These have occurred throughout various aspects of the education field. For example, one of the first affinity groups for TOC is H.E.L.L.A. Educators of Color Group in the Bay Area of California. H.E.L.L.A. stands for healing, empowerment, love, liberation, and action. It was intended to be a one year project in 2015 but continued for three years until 2018 (Pour-Khorshid, 2018, p. 321). Results from this affinity group showed the benefit of giving space for testimonials, critical camaraderie, and fugitivity. The group regularly wrote and shared testimonios, or methodological, pedagogical, and political storytelling with each other (Pour-Khorshid, 2018, p.322). Not only did this align with Critical Race Theory's prioritization of counter-storytelling, it also gave group members time and space to reflect on how they navigate the world as People of Color. It allowed for members to show up as their whole, authentic, intersectional selves. Additionally, H.E.L.L.A. provided a learning space to regularly connect with other TOC. This group occurred across multiple schools. Group members remarked often that this type of group was not possible at their respective schools (Pour-Khorshid, 2018, p. 324). H.E.L.L.A. group members also expressed fugitivity in which they are able to reorient themselves in the education system and push against normalized oppressiveness and exhaustion (Pour-Khorshid, 2018, p. 326).

Affinity groups have also proven to be successful when focusing on specific sub-groups of TOC. One affinity group specifically focused on Special Education TOC. This group consisted of Special Education Teachers of Color attending a Bay Area university for their special education credentials. They met biweekly throughout March 2020 to September 2020 and



consisted of community-building activities, discussion, and check-ins. Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) came up with this group as well, particularly in their confrontations with White women (who consisted of many of the group members' colleagues and administrators). One member described these encounters as such, "They'll be like questioning my every move. And then I'll be like second guessing if I am doing things right. And then, on top of that, if I like to suggest, it's like they try not to hear me" (Kulkarni et al. 2022, p. 52). Group members also brought up Disability Battle Fatigue as they advocated and supported their students with disabilities in an ableist world. This affinity group provided a space to listen and hear these intersectional frustrations (Kulkarni et al. 2022, p.54).

Other affinity groups combined professional development within their affinity group to sustain and retain TOC. For example, the Black Teacher Project (BTP) utilized racial affinity professional development. Their approach involved having a liberatory consciousness framework of awareness, analysis, action, and accountable/ally-ship (Mosely, 2018, p.270). BTP also used workshops and other support as part of their affinity groups to cultivate racial literacy and critical consciousness of Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF). With these in mind, BTP met monthly and focused on Black teacher wellness and rejuvenation and book studies. Simultaneously focusing on healing and professional development not only supported Black teachers but also looked toward retaining them (Mosely, 2018, p.274). By the end of the study, Black teachers reported a decrease in isolation, strengthened racial literacy in authentic ways, and more collective trust (Mosely, 2018, p.279).

Affinity groups also work well when there is a mentorship component. An affinity group at a university for BIPOC faculty specifically focused on building mentoring-partnership models.

These mentorships prioritized a collaborative partnership where each individual grew and learned from the other (Endo, 2020, p.172). These groups included mentee-mentor pairings, new faculty and unit leader pairings, small groups, large groups, and brought in institutional and external mentors (Endo, 2020, p.175). Providing a variety of mentorships provided support and growth at all levels for all BIPOC colleagues involved and authentically built community.

Affinity groups have also occurred outside of schools for TOC. This has proven to be especially helpful for giving TOC a space to prioritize activism and social justice while combating isolation (Mawhinney et al, 2021, p.11). These groups also provide TOC an opportunity to network with like-minded teachers about social injustices, inequitable social structures, and to cope with oppression. One teacher remarked:

I have a really strong community, a lot of educators, but also lots of people who also are engaged in work, to some degree, to try and create a different world. So being surrounded by that is like we are all in it together. We're not... I'm alone in my classroom, but we are all in this. (Mawhinney et al, 2021, p.12).

Not only does this build a critical community to sustain teachers, it also works towards outward change.

### ***Affinity Group Counter Arguments***

As affinity groups have grown, they have also faced backlash. This has resulted in the criticism towards Critical Race Theory and the research around affinity groups.

Rick Hess, a director of education policy studies at American Enterprise Institute, argues that the evidence-based practices for racial affinity spaces is false due to the studies prioritizing testimonials from teachers and having a small amount of Teachers of Color from Pour-Khourshid

(the H.E.L.L.A. group facilitator) and others (Hess, 2021). A lawsuit in a Boston-area public school district ended affinity groups in the school district for students and staff of Color in February of 2022. The lawsuit argued that students were being racially segregated which violates the Civil Rights Act and the Massachusetts Students' Freedom of Expression Law (Schemmel, 2022). The nonprofit Parents Defending Education (PDE) also argued that the lack of research around affinity groups does not provide enough evidence to support having affinity groups in a public school setting (Schemmel, 2022). However, studies around affinity groups are often based in Critical Race Theory which prioritizes acknowledging and listening to counter-stories of people of Color. These might go against White norms, but CRT acknowledges these differences and values it by giving it validity through storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 9). Additionally, since Teachers of Color make up approximately 20% of public school teachers, this creates a small sample size to begin with (Carter, Andrews, et al. 2018, p. 7).

## **Conclusion**

The compilation of this research reveals the context, the ways to grow and support TOC, and the benefits of affinity groups. This foundation of research provides an opportunity to step-back and assess the overall importance of affinity groups for TOC. A synthesis of research shows the historical background of TOC, benefits of having TOC, issues preservice and current TOC face, the rise of Grow Your Own programs, the need for culturally sustaining pedagogy to support current TOC, the framework of critical race theory, and the need for BIPOC affinity groups. Chapter Three and presents the project design to facilitate BIPOC affinity groups for TOC that acknowledges the systemic issues TOC face while creating a space for healing and wellness.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### **Introduction**

Teachers of Color (TOC) bring incredible value to our education system. They benefit all students, increase multiculturalism in school systems, and break down the omnipresent whiteness that continues to plague the United States education system. However, they also face a complex web of challenges and issues. TOC deserve support to not only help them survive in our education system but also to grow and thrive as educators and humans. Thus, the central question for this project is, *How do affinity groups support BIPOC teachers and how can an affinity group resource support future groups?* As evidenced through the literature review in Chapter Two, Teachers of Color (TOC) need to be supported, retained, and grown. The context of the historical background of TOC in the United States, the benefits of having TOC, and the issues that both pre-service and current TOC face show a clear need for affinity groups for TOC. This can be done with critical race theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy in mind. This capstone contributes to a resource guide website for BIPOC affinity groups in schools. This resource guide approaches the multilayered issues that TOC face in a holistic sense in order to provide a strong foundation for affinity groups. This allows for affinity groups to validate and affirm TOC experiences and prioritize healing the disparities that TOC face. This chapter provides the rationale for choosing this topic and for presenting this work as a resource guide, a description of the resource guide created, including the frameworks that guided the work, the setting of the project, and the potential participants involved.

#### **Rationale**

This project began as a resource guide website aimed at providing the topics, context, and set up for BIPOC affinity groups for school districts to utilize for their BIPOC staff, particularly Teachers of Color (TOC). While there has been a recent push to hire more TOC to diversify the teaching field, these efforts are rarely accompanied by shifts needed in schools to train and support TOC's specific needs. Affinity groups meet these needs and serve as a powerful tool to retain TOC. Chapter Two has shown that affinity groups are necessary for TOC. The reason why affinity groups have been proven to be so successful is because they create a space for Teachers of Color to collectively access support, healing, and coping with racial trauma and working in a White-centric system (Kulkarni, Bland, Gaeta, 2022, p. 46). Affinity groups provide an opportunity to directly confront the realities of systemic racism and to draw on shared community and culture as strengths (Mosely, 2018, p. 270). This means that affinity groups must be set up mindfully and with multiple entry points so that the group can serve its maximum purpose. However, there is not much research yet about how to set up affinity groups. A resource guide was chosen because it was the best way to address this gap between schools knowing the benefits of affinity groups for TOC and having the tools to implement and facilitate an affinity group to provide meaningful support for TOC. This project gives new purpose to the research available about TOC by synthesizing the factors of raising awareness of the issues TOC face and retaining TOC into one goal: to support Teachers of Color. A website provides an accessible platform for schools to use that is easy to share and utilize that does not involve sharing a physical or electronic guidebook or PDF.

Administrators and Teachers of Color are the project audience. The purpose of this project is to support TOC by providing them a designated, safe space within school systems in

affinity groups. Administrators can use this resource guide to realize the significance of having affinity groups and by working with TOC to create time in TOC's schedules to have an affinity group. TOC can then use this guide to learn about the context of TOC in the education system, to guide their discussions in the affinity group, and to share the responsibility of setting up a safe space for each other that serves a purpose rather than just a space to vent.

### **Framework**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) can be used as a framework when setting up affinity groups. To review, CRT's four basic tenets are that racism is a widespread experience, that BIPOC counter-stories deserve acknowledgement and recognition, that racism requires radical change and a holistic approach, and that racism is a social construct used to categorize, manipulate, invent, or retire when convenient (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p.9). CRT provides an opportunity to challenge the ideology, policy, and practice of our education system. This allows us to dial into the nuances of racism within schools (Kohli, 2018, p.310). The four tenets of CRT can be applied in affinity groups by providing validation, affirmation, and a clear space for the counter-stories that Teachers of Color bring with them. CRT argues that schools have not been set up to serve communities of Color (Kohli, 2018, p.310). With this in mind, schools can clearly dedicate a space for Teachers of Color by providing time, support, and resources for an affinity group.

### **Project Description**

This project will result in a resource guide website for BIPOC affinity groups within schools. Affinity groups can be set up in a variety of settings and for various participants. This resource guide website will be designated towards affinity groups happening in a K-12 school setting with Teachers of Color. This resource guide is a compilation of the research that

highlights the history, benefits, challenges, and considerations for affinity groups of Teachers of Color. I have been facilitating an affinity group in my school as I have written my capstone project. While reviewing the literature around issues facing Teachers of Color, I would share it with the affinity group by creating short TL:DR (Too Long; Didn't Read) snippets of research for us to discuss at our affinity group. Seeing ourselves, our experiences, and our perspectives in academia and data validated our experiences in a predominantly White school setting. With this experience in mind, I include this research in the resource guide. The website has various pages that address the big-picture, multifaceted issues that Teachers of Color face. This includes a timeline of the history of Teachers of Color to understand why there are so few of us, the research that shows the benefits and importance of having Teachers of Color, issues that Teachers of Color face, research about affinity groups, and resources for affinity groups and TOC.

The resource guide website also contains suggestions for how to implement the group. This includes showing examples of affinity groups, the benefits of affinity groups, and suggestions for how to implement an affinity group based off of the group I facilitated. For example, the H.E.L.L.A. affinity group mentioned in Chapter Two used *testimonios*, or a methodological, pedagogical, and political form of storytelling to honor affinity group members' experiences (Pour-Khorshid, 2018, p. 324). This and other methods of creating shared spaces will be put in the resource guide. The affinity group I facilitated met biweekly for 30 minutes a session. This proved to be a doable amount of time to fit into teachers' busy schedules while still maintaining a community of support. I suggest in the resource guide that groups meet with similar timeframes.

The website also includes an overall compilation of resources for Teachers of Color. Pedagogical resources will address anti-racist, anti-bias teaching and tips on how to decenter curriculum from whiteness. If affinity groups are only able to meet during professional development days or less frequently throughout the school year then the guide can be adjusted to be used as such. There are also resources that address Teacher of Color wellness and self-care. This is to directly combat racial battle fatigue (one of the main issues that TOC face). Lastly, there are resources to connect TOC to groups in Minnesota and nationally. This includes providing information about the Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota (TOCAIT MN), Education Minnesota's various affinity groups for teachers who are in the union, and the Institute for Teachers of Color (ITOC). If there is only one Teacher of Color in a building, then these resources can offer additional opportunities to connect and reduce isolation.

### **Project Timeline**

Chapters One and Two of this project were drafted in the Spring of 2022, amidst an ever fluctuating global pandemic, a teacher strike in neighboring Minneapolis that included an increased awareness of supporting TOC, a mass teacher shortage due to exhaustive work conditions throughout the pandemic, and an overall fatigue in the state of the world.

Chapter Three was drafted as the project developed in April of 2022. Chapter Four was written in Summer 2022. The project development coincided with me facilitating the first BIPOC affinity group at my school for the five TOC (myself included). Our biweekly meetings and insightful discussions shaped my ever-growing list of what to include in a resource guide. As our group evolved, so did my capstone and project. As I completed Chapter Two, I would bring back



new research that validated our concerns as TOC. Just knowing that our struggles were included in research was the affirmation our group needed to continue to work in a toxic district.

Additionally, three of the five TOC at my school were cut in the Spring of 2022 due to a union policy generally referred to as Last In, First Out (LIFO). This means the last person hired is the first one to be let go when there are budget cuts. Since TOC tend to be newer to the field, we are often the first ones to be let go. Our affinity group became a sacred, safe space for us to process these changes and be there for each other. As one of the teachers cut, this shaped my work and renewed my vigor to support, retain, and grow future TOC so that this becomes a less common issue and so that policies like LIFO do not stand as obstacles to TOC anymore.

This project is designed to be implemented in the Fall near the beginning of the school year. This is because the resource guide sets up affinity groups by providing them a foundation of knowledge and skills to meet regularly throughout the course of the school year. In some cases, affinity groups have counted towards professional development hours for TOC. If this group is facilitated and successfully set up at the beginning of the school year, then it has the potential to be intermeshed with district professional development to maximize teachers' time.

### **Participants and Setting**

The participants in my project first started as BIPOC teachers from my school. The school is a suburban K-6 elementary school. The students are predominantly White (63%), but the racial and ethnic make-up of the non-White population (37%) is diverse (MN School Report Card, 2022). Teachers at this elementary school are predominantly White. Including myself and our instructional coach, there are five Teachers of Color out of a total of 50 teachers. Staff at my school tend to stick to themselves and collaborate only in their grade-level teams when

absolutely necessary. Therefore, creating an affinity group was a new experience for the five of us and for our school overall.

The intended participants to receive the resource guide for affinity groups would be administrators and teachers. I hope to partner with the Coalition to Increase Teachers and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota (TOCAIT) to increase awareness of this resource guide. I am currently on the Core Steering Committee of TOCAIT and we are collaborating as a committee on ways to implement and support affinity groups across Minnesota. TOCAIT works to raise awareness of the TOC shortage in Minnesota and the need for TOC in Minnesota, to advocate for policy change and strategic investments in the Increase Teachers of Color Act in Minnesota state legislature, and create affinity spaces and convening gatherings for TOC (TOCAIT MN, 2022). If Minnesota districts are aware of the benefits of having an affinity group and want to truly invest in their TOC, they can use this resource guide to implement and facilitate BIPOC affinity groups. Teachers do not have a lot of time. Prep time is never long enough and there has been a consistent lack of substitute teachers throughout the pandemic. This has led to less time for classroom teachers as they have to sub for specialists and lose their prep time. Teachers are already stretched thin. By having a resource guide readily available for them to use, this can be passed to them to jump start their affinity groups.

### **Assessment**

In order to assess the question, *How do affinity groups support BIPOC teachers and how can an affinity group resource support future groups?* Data is collected two ways. First, data was collected from the current affinity group that I facilitated at my school. This included a pre- and

post- affinity group survey and individual interviews with participating teachers. The questions included the following:

- a. How do you feel supported as a Teacher of Color at school?
- b. How do you not feel supported as a Teacher of Color at school?
- c. What do you hope to get out of an affinity group?

The post-survey asks participants if the affinity group changed any of the pre-survey answers. The interviews asked similar questions but provided an opportunity to meet one on one with each educator and connect with each of them. Since so many of us had been cut, this felt especially meaningful. The second source of data will be from future affinity groups who will be asked the same questions in the pre- and post- group survey as my school's group. These, along with self-reflection questions for teachers to reflect upon while using the resource guide website are available for teachers at any point on the website.

I will know if my resource guide for affinity groups was successful if it helps with the creation of more affinity groups across school districts in Minnesota. This will be based on feedback from the reflection questions on the website and from continuing to collaborate with TOCAI. Given that my personal end goal in education is to help support, retain, and grow Teachers of Color, I hope to see more affinity groups for TOC across Minnesota and across the United States.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provided a rationale for creating a resource guide for affinity groups for BIPOC teachers with the goal of supporting TOC as they navigate the difficulties and issues they face within our education system. It clarified the choice to focus on TOC and it explained how

the resource guide answers the research question, *How do affinity groups support BIPOC teachers and how can an affinity group resource support future groups?* A plan for the resource guide includes the content and skills to be put in the guide and the timeline, setting, and participants were discussed. Chapter Four includes a reflection of the resource guide and description of future steps that can be taken to help support TOC through affinity groups

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PROJECT REFLECTION

#### **Introduction**

This project focuses on the question, *how do affinity groups support BIPOC teachers and how can an affinity group resource support future groups?* Though this question seeks to support and grow Teachers of Color (TOC) through affinity groups, the project is aimed at making affinity groups happen in school districts. This design was intentional based on research examined in the Chapter Two Literature Review.

In Chapter Two, the research showed a disconnect between the research and action. The research showed the historical impact of TOC, why TOC matter, the challenges TOC face, and hypothetical changes to be made in the education system to retain and grow them. However, the action part of purposefully working to retain and support TOC has less research. The goal of the project detailed in Chapter Three is to address this by providing a resource guide for districts to use when implementing affinity groups to support their TOC.

In this chapter, I share key understandings from the project, summarize important learnings from the literature review, and discuss implications and limitations of the project. Lastly, I discuss further research and the ways in which results will be communicated within the profession.

#### **Key Project Understandings**

While writing this capstone and completing this project, I also facilitated an affinity group at my school for Teachers of Color. I learned just as much from this group as I did in completing my project and researching my literature review. It is one thing to read about the

benefits of affinity groups for TOC and another to see it unfold in real time. Taking the time to step back, listen to my colleagues and their challenges, and synthesize that with the research I was simultaneously reading for my literature review helped me understand that supporting, retaining, and growing TOC is a multifaceted process that goes beyond just having a singular affinity group.

My project sought to create a resource guide website for schools to use for TOC affinity groups. The website contains different pages with information about the project, the history of TOC in the United States, the benefits of TOC, challenges TOC face, affinity group examples and facilitation recommendations, and resources for TOC.

***Key understanding #1: These Spaces Matter***

The affinity group at my school consisted of five TOC (including myself) in a building of 50 teachers. Administration changes, a pandemic, and a push for equity work after George Floyd's murder had created a work environment that was difficult and toxic. There was rarely any collaboration outside of grade-level teams, meetings were deliberately held without people, and cliques were the norm. Teachers did not trust themselves, each other, or administration. Additionally, there was pushback from the majority of the staff against any sort of equity or social justice work. Setting up an affinity group for the five of us amidst this work culture felt simultaneously daunting and needed. During our first meeting we established group norms and talked about what we wanted to get out of this group. It became clear that we needed space to process our negative experiences at this school together. With this intention, the floodgates opened and soon we were candidly sharing and empathizing with each other. While we met

biweekly for the next four months, that first meeting solidified that this space matters and is important for us.

***Key understanding #2: These Spaces are Needed***

While facilitating the affinity group at my school and writing this capstone, I learned that these affinity spaces are desperately needed. Throughout the four months that the affinity group at my school met, three of the five TOC were cut. My position was cut due to a union policy generally referred to as Last In, First Out (LIFO). This means the last person hired is the first one to be let go when there are budget cuts. Since TOC tend to be newer to the field, we are often the first ones to be let go. Another person felt pushed out of his position because his grade-level team contained two known toxic teachers who together created such an inhospitable and unwelcoming team that the superintendent eventually had to intervene. If he had not chosen to leave he also would have been cut due to LIFO. The third person cut was my mentor and instructional coach. Her instructional coach position was cut and she was told that she could be reassigned to my freshly cut position or leave. Reeling in shock, our affinity group became a sacred, safe space for us to process these changes and be there for each other. The three of us grappled with where to go from here and if there was anything we could do to advocate for ourselves amongst policy changes. The remaining two TOC processed how they were about to be the only two TOC in a staff of 50 teachers in a predominantly White school. The reason why affinity groups have been proven to be so successful is because they create a space for Teachers of Color to collectively access support, healing, and coping with racial trauma and working in a White-centric system (Kulkarni, Bland, Gaeata, 2022, p. 46). This proved to be true for our affinity group.

### ***Key understanding #3: It's Not Just About TOC***

There is a careful balance between prioritizing BIPOC experiences and perspectives and expecting them to do work for others. While affinity groups are important, there also needs to be work done outside of affinity groups to create hospitable, welcoming school environments. Additionally, the five of us felt pressured to expend more emotional labor in both experiencing racism and having to educate our coworkers about it. Beyond affinity groups, professional development for all staff should address systemic racism in our education system and a clear understanding of why affinity groups are being offered. There can even be an affinity group for allies for how to understand White privilege and how to be an effective ally. This component was lacking in my district.

### **Important Learnings from the Literature Review**

The literature review broke down the context, the ways to grow and support TOC, and the benefits of affinity groups. It informs an answer to the question, *How do affinity groups support BIPOC teachers and how can an affinity group resource support future groups?* The most important and impactful components of the literature review that shaped the capstone included the historical reasons behind the lack of current TOC, the validation and affirmation of seeing TOC's experiences reflected in research, and the prioritization of affinity groups for TOC in academia.

### ***How Did We Get Here?***

An impactful part of the literature review was the historical background of Teachers of Color. This helped provide the context behind the lack of TOC and why it feels like the rest of the education system was not made to support Communities of Color. To review, post *Brown v.*



*Board of Education* in 1954 led to a whitification of teaching and teacher education by directly causing the dismissal, demotion, or forced resignation of qualified, experienced Black educators (Souto-Manning, Emdin, 2020). After the Brown decision, nearly half of the Black teaching force lost their jobs across 17 states. This caused Black students to be integrated into the majority population and the dismantling of Black schools (Graves and Stevenson, 2013, p.80). The post-*Brown* layoffs affected teacher education programs. Between 1975 and 1985, teacher education programs saw a 66% decline in Black students majoring in education (Souto-Manning & Edmin, 2020, p.4). Licensure exams have also been used as a way to screen-out preservice TOC since the 1960s. In 1967, the National Teacher Exam screened out around 3% of preservice TOC at Black colleges from admission into teacher education programs (Petchauer et al. 2018, p.324).

Given this historical background of pushing out Black teachers, it is no surprise that our current demographics reflect the lack of Teachers of Color. Growing up, I had always learned the positives of *Brown v. Board of Education* and did not know about how it affected the lack of TOC, specifically Black teachers. When sharing this history in the affinity group this spring, we all had an aha moment of connecting history to our current challenges that TOC face. The whitification of schools has been a historical, systemic issue. Our presence as TOC in schools combats that. This realization was so powerful that I made the historical background of TOC in the United States its own section on my resource guide website for the capstone project.

### ***TOC's Experiences are Reflected in Research***

Reading about TOC's experiences in research has shaped and validated my capstone. Racism has a cumulative and ongoing impact throughout the education field and Teachers of

Color are often hit the hardest, particularly with racial battle fatigue. Racial battle fatigue (RBF) has been defined as, “the psychological, emotional, physiological, energy, and time-related cost to fighting against racism” (Pizarro and Kohli, 2020, p.969). In a 2018 study, over 200 Teachers of Color were interviewed on their experiences in the education system. Teachers of Color overwhelmingly experienced a hostile climate, color blindness, microaggressions, macroaggressions and RBF (Kohli, 2018, p.319). While reading this work, I often had to stop and pause to process the magnitude of TOC’s experiences and the fact that I was reading about experiences similar to my own in academia. I am not used to seeing myself in our education system. Knowing that I am not alone affirmed my experience and motivated me to continue researching this topic. Additionally, sharing about racial battle fatigue and defining it in our affinity group proved to be powerful. Suddenly, we had a name for our experiences. This terminology empowered and validated us. This research showed me that our experiences as Teacher of Color matter, need to be researched, and belong in academia.

### ***Affinity Groups Matter***

Researching affinity groups proved to be impactful for my capstone. Affinity groups are groups of people with a shared identity (race, gender, sexual orientation, age, veteran status, ability status, etc.) who gather with the intention to find connection, support, and inspiration (Kulkarni, Bland, & Gaeta, 2022, p. 46). These can happen within any profession or organization, including education. Affinity groups for Teachers of Color can include staff members of color and can become a space for TOC to provide support to survive the racial isolation that accompanies our education system. Affinity groups allow for TOC to collectively heal and process racial trauma and reimagine teaching with activism and resistance (Kulkarni,

Bland, & Gaeta, 2022, p. 46). Reading about affinity groups in research provided a blueprint for me to facilitate an affinity group and provided a research-based reason to talk with administrators about why we needed an affinity group in my school. The research around affinity groups also shaped my capstone project of creating a resource guide website to implement affinity groups. The various formats of affinity groups including mentoring, fitting affinity groups into professional development, and focusing on TOC wellness all informed the resource guide website.

### **Project Implications**

The best-case implication for this project would be an increase of affinity groups in schools for Teachers of Color (TOC). When I first facilitated the affinity group at my school, I felt like I was making it up as I went along. However, as I researched more and we allowed the affinity space to organically become what we needed it to be, my confidence grew. As I start at a new school, I now feel more secure in advocating for and facilitating an affinity group in a new space. Outside of my own work, my resource guide website has the components and suggestions for affinity groups to be implemented beyond my singular advocacy.

### **Project Limitations**

Growing, supporting, and retaining TOC goes beyond affinity groups. There needs to be funding and support for grow-your-own pathways and alternative routes to teacher education to increase the number of preservice TOC. Licensure requirements, the EdTPA portfolio, and teacher education programs need to be reexamined with an anti-racist, anti-bias lens so that preservice TOC can become teachers in the field. Once in the field, TOC face racial battle fatigue, microaggressions, macroaggressions, isolation, toxicity, and hostile work climates.

While affinity groups support TOC amidst this hostility, it cannot be the only solution. I focused on affinity groups for this project because it was within my locus of control as a part time grad student and full time teacher. This created the limitation of centering only around affinity groups rather than the overall, systemic changes needed to fully grow, support, and retain TOC.

### **Future Research**

Future research around TOC is needed. One of the counter-arguments against affinity groups is the smaller sample sizes of current research. However, TOC only make up 21% of all public school teachers (NCES, 2020). In Minnesota, only 5% of teachers are BIPOC (TOCAIT MN, 2021). Our experiences as TOC matter. They are valid, important, and speak volumes about the systemic issues in our education system in the United States. Future research can be done on the long term benefits of affinity groups, attrition rates of TOC, TOC's experiences when they are the only TOC or select few TOC in a school district versus when there are more TOC, how school-wide equity work affects TOC retention, and affinity groups for preservice TOC versus current TOC. The opportunities are endless.

### **Communication of Results**

I am sharing my project in a variety of ways. In the summer of 2022, I started collaborating with the Minnesota Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers (TOCAIT MN). This included presenting at their summer conference for Teachers of Color about the benefits of affinity groups and about the resource guide website that I created for this project. Beyond the conference, we will continue to work together to share this information across Minnesota for TOC. As I start at a new school, I also hope to start an affinity group for

TOC. I also plan to pursue a PhD after this to continue to work and research on how to support, grow, and retain TOC across the United States.

### **Benefit to the Profession**

This project benefits the profession by providing a tangible way to support TOC currently in the education field. As I have talked to coworkers, friends in the education field, and classmates at Hamline about this project, everyone has agreed that TOC are needed. However, there is a gap between the rhetorical need for TOC and the work being done to currently support and retain TOC. Affinity groups help address this gap. Additionally, the resource guide website provides tools and considerations for districts to use when implementing affinity groups.

### **Conclusion**

“Do we even belong in education?” My colleague’s question from an affinity group meeting bounced around my head while writing this entire capstone and while doing so, my fellow TOC colleagues and I have worked in a hostile environment, been excluded from conversations around school climate, been kept from sharing insights about what Students of Color need to be successful, and have been cut from our teaching positions. His answer would be no. However, as I continue to research Teachers of Color, I find the answer to be an overwhelming *yes*. We belong in education and the education system needs us. Without Teachers of Color, our students will not see the diversity that they so beautifully bring to our education system. Our students deserve to have teachers that reflect who they are, create safe, culturally affirming spaces for them, and cultivate their whole selves. TOC need to be supported and retained. This brings about the question: *How do affinity groups support BIPOC staff and how can an affinity group resource support future groups?* I cannot say that this project will change

our entire education system. However, it provides a starting point for and a tangible tool to support TOC. It is a chance and an opportunity to consider our experiences as Teachers of Color, to remind ourselves that we deserve to be here, and that we, too, bring beauty and strength to our education system.

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