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Diversity Among Educators in Minnesota

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Diversity Among Educators in Minnesota

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2021), 94% of our teacher workforce in Minnesota is white. As a Black girl growing up in the Twin Cities suburbs, I knew that to be the case. Representation in our teacher population has always been a problem in our state and across the nation. Students of color are taught about white people, for white people, from white people. This not only damages their self-perception but also inhibits their learning. Therefore, my research question focuses on finding out how we can create better programs. *How can Minnesota cultivate a more racially diverse teaching workforce that represents our BIPOC students?* This research is vital to the future of Minnesota as we continue to grow and diversify as a state. Representation has affected me as a person, my career choices, and what I want to contribute to the world. My experiences are not abnormal, and I want to improve the future for my students of color.

According to research through the Minnesota Department of Education (2021), all students benefit from a racially diverse teaching workforce. Minnesota has created ways to encourage diverse individuals to become teachers, but these efforts are not strong enough, as they have still not increased the number of teachers of color. Programs like Minnesota's Grow Your Own Teacher, provide funding for educational opportunities for BIPOC individuals to attend college and work towards teaching licenses to be hired in schools to create a more diverse workforce (Hood, 2021). Even though there are programs like this being implemented in schools in Minnesota, none of the thirteen economic developmental regions have yet to have a teaching workforce that is near the

amount of diversity as their students (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standard Board [PELSB], 2019). This inequality needs to be addressed and handled appropriately in order for a change to be made.

Minnesota's teacher workforce has not improved its diversity in the past decade. From 2009 to 2019, the percentage of non-white students in Minnesota increased from 24% to 34% and is continuing to grow (Eischens, 2020, para 7). In 2018, the proportion of non-white teachers increased to just over 5% (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standard Board [PELSB], 2019). Even though it has been shown in research that students benefit from seeing people who look like them in positions of authority, the number of diverse educators is still extremely low in Minnesota and is not showing much improvement (Eischens, 2020, para 15). Despite that research has shown how beneficial it is for students to have diverse educators, we are still not seeing the gap close.

In this chapter, I will address the lack of diversity in Minnesota's teacher workforce, how it directly affected my childhood, and how it continues to affect children today. I will provide an in-depth rationale for my research question and first-hand experiences I have had as a student and teacher of color in Minnesota. I will also introduce my goal for this research and how I decided to study this problem.

Background of Researcher

I grew up in a predominantly white community. My neighborhood was all-white, and the school district I attended lacked diversity. Leaving the house, I would not see people that looked like me. My school teachers were white, my doctor was white, and my fellow children in the neighborhood were white. Growing up in a community like this

caused me to feel confused and lonely. I felt myself constantly changing to fit in, but nothing was ever good enough. I always wanted to be like everyone else, but it was impossible, no matter how hard I tried. Representation in my childhood was far and few between; the characters in books and movies did not look like me. As a child, it seemed like people with my skin tone did not exist outside of my family.

Representation Matters

It is confusing and damaging for a child not to see any representation of themselves in their adolescence. Even though there are now more instances of representation in our community, it is still not enough. There are not enough teachers of color in our school system, and that lack of representation is very damaging to adolescents. I attended the same school district for my entire educational career—thirteen years. I never once had a Black teacher. Not having any representation growing up impacted what we learned in the classroom. If I had teachers who looked like me, I may have learned more about my culture and felt less isolated in school.

I will never forget one day in middle school when my physical education teacher made a comment about my future high school. My class was discussing what physical education looked like in high school. As we discussed this, my teacher mentioned that there “are not a lot of chocolate chips in the cookie” at the high school I would be attending next fall. This comment was not only highly racist but left a lasting impact on my self-esteem. I was nervous to attend my new school due to fear that even in a new environment, there would still be no one who looked like me. Unfortunately, when I reached high school, nothing seemed to change. Even though I was in a bigger school

with more students, even fewer peers looked like me. There were also no teachers who resembled me. I felt utterly isolated and felt like I had no one to turn to.

Reflecting on my past, I now understand how representation affects students of color, especially at a young age. The lack of representation I experienced during my adolescence shaped the woman I am today. I will forever be grateful for my upbringing and community, but I need to acknowledge the hardships I faced and strive for a better future for my students of color—there must be a change. It is not right to experience fear and loneliness in a place where you are supposed to feel safe. Students should not have to feel the same way I did growing up; it is time for changes to be made.

Experiences as a Teacher

During my first year of teaching, I was blessed to have lots of diversity in my class. I teach first grade in a public school in the suburbs of Minnesota. My class had seven students out of twenty who spoke more than one language. These students received intervention services to help support their English learning. One of my students had moved from Mexico right before the school year started and did not speak any English. He needed lots of extra support and encouragement at the beginning of our time together because there weren't many other faculty or students that spoke the same language as him. I did everything in my power to provide the support this student needed. I worked extremely hard to learn key phrases in his first language so we could communicate with each other. We also used a lot of pictures to help show each other what we were talking about. By the end of the year, this student could not only speak full English sentences but also read English sounds and read and represent his numbers to one hundred in English. I put so much effort into helping this student so he could feel less isolated from the class.

Students can create meaningful relationships and feel like they belong by having teachers who represent them. If he had been placed in a different classroom, he would have had a different learning experience during his first year in Minnesota.

I also had a young girl in my classroom whose family did not speak English. She had learned English from school, but her parents had not yet learned much. This made communication with the family complex. Fortunately, my school district was able to find a solution to the communication barrier and found a program that allows parents to communicate with their child's teacher in their home language, and it is translated into English for the teacher. This would work the same way when teachers send messages to the families, as it would also translate for them. For this specific student, her family owned a restaurant, and I was able to introduce myself to her parents and show them that they can now message me, and I will be able to message them back right away in their language. I was able to show them that I am a person of color and I am here to support your students in all the ways I can. This small introduction opened many doors for this student. Her parents were able to communicate with me about her school progress or if she would be absent. They were able to ask me questions whenever they needed to, and I was able to give updates on their child. I believe that due to the color of my skin, they were able to see that their child was not alone in a predominantly white school and that they could come to me to help them. I want more parents of color to feel this comfortable with their children's teachers, and a great way to do that is to increase diversity in school faculty.

On the first day of school, I met a little girl with the same skin color. She looked at me in awe. At some point during the day, she lost her way to the classroom coming

back from the bathroom, and another staff member asked her who her teacher was. She responded by saying, “The really pretty girl that looks like me” (Personal Communication, 2022). Due to that one sentence, the staff member could lead her back to my classroom because she knew I was the only Black teacher in the building. Later in the day, when the staff member told me about this interaction with my student, it really put into perspective why this is so important. Students are taught to look up to their teachers as teachers are in a position of power. Having a teacher who looks like you as a child can show you that you can also be in a position of power in the future. Growing up, I did not experience having teachers who looked like me, but I know that I now give students opportunities that I did not have and positively impact their lives. Representation really matters, especially in school.

Rationale

In order to minimize the negative feelings I felt about my diversity growing up, I propose a solution to bring more representation into schools and to provide a possibility for more positive experiences in school for future students of color. After seeing and experiencing feelings of isolation for years, I wondered if the lack of representation in schools was a widespread issue and not just a problem in my community. I want to know if other students felt the same way I did growing up and if they ever overcame those feelings. I want to know why there hasn't been a change and why I am one of the only staff members of color in my building. My curiosity made me wonder how I could make a change and bring awareness to this problem.

I desire to find out how this affects students like myself and how representation can be improved in the future. It is clear that there is a need for diversity amongst a

teacher workforce, but adding diversity in school faculty is easier said than done. I am looking to find answers to my research question: *How can Minnesota cultivate a more racially diverse teaching workforce that represents our BIPOC students?* As a way to decrease the negative feelings I felt about my diversity growing up, I propose a solution to bring more representation into schools and to provide a possibility for more positive experiences in school for future students of color.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced my personal background and how it influenced my research question. I also spoke in regard to experiences I have had as an educator of color and how these experiences working with students and families of color have added much meaning to my career path. I have provided details on the lack of representation in Minnesota's schools and how current efforts to make a change have not worked. I have also proposed creating a solution to bring more diverse representation in schools. In chapter two, I will review the literature regarding this project's multiple aspects, including racial equity, representation, and student perception. I will also dive into Minnesota's tiered teaching licensure system, which was created to promote diversity in the staffing of schools. Additionally, I will be researching the inequities of Minnesota's teaching workforce and discovering ways to improve this problem. Chapter three will present the project I created to help support prospective teachers of color. Finally, chapter four will discuss the results from the project and further plans for improvement.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Minnesota has a long-running history of underrepresentation in our education system. As we continue to diversify as a nation, our student population will continue to change and adapt to newfound diversity in the state. With that said, our teacher workforce must adapt and change to the rising trends in racial diversity—we need more teachers of color.

This literature review begins with an exploration of what the research says about the impact of representation in the learning environment. The section also examines the numerous attempts Minnesota has made, past and present, to increase diversity in the teacher workforce. As we investigate, we are analyzing research to solve the question, *How can Minnesota cultivate a more racially diverse teaching workforce that represents our BIPOC students?*

Before looking at potential solutions to cultivate a more racially diverse teacher workforce, it is vital to review research about diversity in teaching, how underrepresentation affects students, and the state's attempts to increase its teacher-of-color population. Reviewing past attempts and future ventures fosters inspiration toward new goals and achievements. Doing so provides an understanding of the state's current situation.

This literature review takes a deep dive into themes such as culturally responsive pedagogy and the whiteness of the teacher discipline to discover the importance of racial diversity in the teacher workforce and the significant impacts underrepresentation has on

our students. Understanding the need for representation creates drive—understanding the problem ignites passion toward a solution.

Representation in Schools

There is a lack of teachers of color in The United States (MDE, 2021). This lack of diversity connects inside and outside of the classroom with the lack of representation of people of color in media, resources, and school curriculums, and this underrepresentation of people of color is shown to be highly damaging to minority groups (Coalition for Educational Justice, 2020). The first part of this section will discuss the need for more representation and diversity in school materials. In the second section, culturally responsive pedagogy will be introduced, and the effects it has on schools.

Underrepresentation

Representation in our school often refers to the staff and students who play a significant role in our school environment. That said, the curriculum and resources we provide our students must embrace equity (Armstrong, 2021). Underrepresentation affects each and every student (Armstrong, 2021). It affects minority students by ignoring their stories and leaving their culture out of the picture. This tarnishes minority students' self-esteem as they grow into adults (Armstrong, 2022). Underrepresentation also negatively affects the dominant-culture as well. Students deserve to be surrounded by diversity as they discover their community and begin to understand the world around them (Armstrong, 2022).

Students deserve to see themselves in their everyday lives, the media, and the community. As previously discussed, these examples of diversity are lacking in our current lives, but it is crucial for children as they are developing ideas of their self-worth

and knowledge of the world around them (Adam et al., 2017). This is where diversity in the classroom setting meets hand-in-hand. Educators teaching all ages have the opportunity to promote diversity in their classrooms. Diversity can be shown through positive depictions of minorities and culturally linguistic novels that provide students with a wide range of information about and from a non-dominant culture (Villarreal, 2014).

The Portrayal of Minorities in Text-based Literature

Growing up, I often noticed that the depiction of Black individuals in instructional texts often contained characters struggling due to their race. Examples of this include slavery or segregation. If we provide students with books with depictions of adversity from being a minority, it sheds a negative light on the community. For example, research shows that even the “culturally relevant texts” section of the National Book Award contains damaging depictions of race and ethnicity. (Bickmore, Xu, & Sheridan, 2017, p. 50).

Furthermore, authors Helen Adam, Caroline Barratt-Pugh, and Yvonne Haig found that diversity portrayed amongst minorities is in children’s literature collections “commonly misrepresented through stereotypical images often portraying outdated perspectives” (Adam et al., 2017, p. 2). Educators can and should provide students with instructional texts that show minorities facing adversity, but making this the norm can be seen as problematic (Bickmore, Xu, & Sheridan, 2017). A spot-on description of this is a “racial ‘mismatch’ between a non-White student public school population and a primarily White teaching force continues to be under examined through an appropriate cultural lens” (Adam et al., 2017, p. 2). We continue to ignore the implications of our lack of

diversity among educators. This racial mismatch continues to spread throughout the system. There needs to be an increase in representation in schools in order to create an inclusive learning environment.

As educators, we have the opportunity to provide students with culturally diverse resources that represent our student bodies and educate our students in an inclusive, meaningful way. Including diverse literature is one thing, but including literature that uplifts minority students is what truly makes a difference. Students of all ages should be provided with texts that tell stories and share cultures from around the world. There are many instructional strategies educators can implement to diversify their curricula. Ultimately, creating a culturally responsive classroom is a notable way to do so.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

As popularized in the 1990s by Ladson-Billings (2016), culturally responsive teaching allows students to understand and connect to their own culture while learning and acquiring knowledge about another. Culturally responsive or relevant teaching allows students to appreciate the cultures around them. Students are able to engage in cultures that they are unfamiliar with, in a safe space to learn and ask questions. This allows for important and engaging reflection for students and teachers. Culturally responsive teaching requires educators to make conscious efforts to understand and follow the needs of their culturally diverse learners (Ladson-Billings, 2016). This can be done by “implementing specifically student-oriented instructional processes as well as choosing and delivering ethnically and culturally relevant curricula” (Delpit, 1995). As previously mentioned, this curriculum should portray a variety of multicultural identities and show them in a positive light.

In education, culturally responsive teaching helps increase engagement and interest in school with students. According to Gay (2002), culturally responsive teaching is the process of teachers learning about different communication and learning styles to create a culturally diverse knowledge base. Not only does this practice keep students engaged academically it can also foster meaningful relationships between students and educators. By understanding students' diverse backgrounds, teachers can create curricula that intrigue students and involve their personal realities (Gay, 2002). This process takes time for educators to learn and integrate into their classrooms and is malleable and can be improved during an educator's career (Abacioglu et al., 2020).

Culturally responsive pedagogy is essential to provide students with a classroom experience that acknowledges and uplifts various cultures and ethnic backgrounds. It is very crucial for teachers to incorporate this practice into their teaching as it also “provides students with the knowledge and skills needed to function in mainstream culture while simultaneously helping students maintain their cultural identity, native language, and connection to their culture” (Siwatu, 2007, p. 1087). The skills that are taught in the classroom follow students into adulthood and beyond. By teaching students in a way that represents their culture as well as celebrates what makes them unique, educators are able to create positive learning environments.

In order for teachers to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy into their classrooms, they must be exposed to students with diverse backgrounds and cultures (Gay, 2002).

According to a study by Siwatu (2007), teacher candidates need to be introduced to this theory and practices to teach linguistically diverse students. These practices need to be

introduced early on in educators' training so they are able to integrate them into the classroom immediately.

To create an inclusive classroom environment, educators must understand these cultural differences and know how to appropriately interact with students in ways that allow for success for each diverse student (Ladson-Billings, 2016). Studies have also shown that students communicate and navigate language through displays of their culture. These displays of culture can be very different in terms of expression and behaviors compared to the more dominant cultural capital of White teachers (Goldenberg, 2013). It has been suggested that all teachers should participate in professional development surrounding the practices of culturally responsive teaching (Mburu, 2022). These professional development lessons are something I have been a part of myself, and I feel as if I have learned meaningful classroom advice. For schools with diverse student populations to thrive, teachers must teach in a culturally responsive manner and promote culturally responsive curricula (Mburu, 2022).

Student Perception

The representation and lack of representation of diverse teachers play a key role in the education of students. Their educators influence students' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about their educational experience. In the first section, students' relationships with school faculty and the influences these relationships can have will be explored. In the second part of this section, the impact of students' identity as it is shaped in school will be analyzed.

Relationships

One of the most crucial parts of an educator's job is the relationships they build with their students. These relationships can provide support and encouragement for academic and personal growth. Teacher relationships with students can bring positivity and a sense of community to individual students who may feel disconnected. “As teachers are seen as a vital element of school climate, the interactions between teachers and students can significantly affect students’ success” (Burell-Craft, et al., 2022, p. 2).

Teacher and student relationships impact student success. In a study by Federici and Skaalvik (2013), teachers provide emotional and instrumental support to decrease anxiety levels in the classroom. In a similar study, student perceptions of the school climate significantly affect achievement scores (Eugene, 2020). Building relationships with students early on in their educational careers has also been shown to positively affect them as they progress through their schooling (Miller-Lewis et al., 2014). Fostering these relationships with students allows them to engage with trustworthy adults on a daily basis. Building high-quality relationships with students during early educational years has been shown to reduce the rate of mental health problems for students as they continue school (Miller-Lewis et al., 2014). Based on this research, it is clear that in order for students to feel a sense of belonging, they must establish a positive relationship with their teachers. These relationships can help foster an encouraging and motivating school environment. Each student enters the classroom with a different lived experience. Educators cannot control a student's life outside of school but can aim to provide stability, comfort, and support inside the classroom.

Teachers' relationships with their students can also impact individual risks and protective factors. According to Battistich and Hom (1997), schools with positive communities can enhance student resiliency. As students spend the majority of their day at school with their teachers, they are influenced by the commutative relationship with their teacher. Teachers have the opportunity to provide learning that extends beyond academics. Students can learn behavioral norms and life skills from teachers during the course of a school day. Teachers respond to ways of assessing students based on the students characteristics rather than school policies (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2020). For teachers to make decisions on teaching different learning styles, they must establish connections with their students to learn how to teach each student best. This process can take time but can benefit students in tremendous ways that expand beyond the classroom. For students who are academically at risk, having a positive relationship with their teacher can be very encouraging (Roorda et al., 2011). Students with lower economic backgrounds and different learning abilities can benefit from building a relationship with their teacher (Roorda et al., 2011). Building relationships with students can also foster a sense of belonging for the educator. Relationships with students can bring an educator closer to the community, which can help benefit instruction.

Even though *Brown vs. Board of Education* prohibited racial segregation in schools, class segregation still exists. There is also evidence that students can have different experiences in schools based on the educational opportunities they receive due to their level of courses. In a study conducted by Modica (2015), the academic tracking of students created racial boundaries among school communities. Black students in honors classes felt silenced due to not fitting the given stereotype of their culture, that

stereotype being “ghetto” and “loud” (Rosenbloom, 2010; Tyson, 2011). The harsh reality of stereotypes in schools is that they can make groups of students feel disconnected and struggle to build and maintain relationships with peers of the same ethnicity (Modica, 2015). Students also deserve to be recognized as individuals. For students to feel connected to their teacher and school, it must be recognized that racism can affect teacher and student relationships (Leverett et al., 2022). When there are stereotypes surrounding groups of students, it can make it extremely difficult for students to be acknowledged as individuals. Instead of seeing each student as their own person, these students are frequently grouped together and do not receive the educational help they need (Leverett et al., 2022). Educators have the power to extinguish this mindset of grouping students and instead build relationships with their students in order to view them as individuals.

Impact on Student Identity

Educators also play a crucial role in the impact of a student's identity. As students participate in school during their most formative years, the school culture they are surrounded by plays a significant part in forming their identity. School culture includes the physical, environmental, and social aspects of school. These aspects can provide a positive community within the school and positively impact the identity of students.

There have been studies that have shown the importance of schools having teachers of color in their communities. In a study conducted by Pitts (2007), minority students did better on an exam in school when the ethnic composition of their educator matched theirs. In this study, the minority students were African-American and Hispanic students. This study showed how these groups of students benefited from the relationships with their teachers who shared the exact ethnic representation as

themselves, which contributed to their academic achievements (Pitts, 2007). Due to the problem of schools lacking teachers of color, many students across the country do not get the opportunity to experience learning from a teacher of the same ethnic origin. This prohibits these students from having the same educational opportunities as the majority, which is White students with White teachers (Pitts, 2007). According to Redding (2019), Black students scored higher on achievement tests when their class was taught by a Black teacher. Strong personal connections can be fostered when students feel a connection to their educator. These connections can help students perceive school positively and positively impact their feelings and outcomes in school (Pitts (2007)).

In school, not every subject is going to be easily understood by all students. Due to all students having different learning styles, students must be recognized as individuals. For students who are struggling in school, having an educator who supports them, listens to them, and praises their efforts can positively impact their identity (Muller, 2007). When students do not have someone there to support them, it can make school increasingly difficult. School can already be difficult for students of color who feel judged by White peers. Thomas (2011) studied girls at an urban school and noticed the tension from the harassment of students of different races. Experiencing forms of bullying can have a very negative impact on the identity of students. In many instances, bullying goes unreported due to uncertainty of who to turn to. Students are taught to report bullying to a trusted adult, but if they cannot identify a trusted adult themselves, how are these students supposed to get help? According to Kohli (2009), teachers of color are aware of the racism that can take place in school and the trauma that it can bring, whereas White teachers frequently have to be taught about the pain it can bring.

For students, having a teacher who already understands the hardships of being a person of color can make it easier for them to foster a connection and express their feelings during times of need.

Race not only impacts students emotionally, but it can also cause students to perceive themselves in a negative light. Students connect academic achievement with racial identity (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). When students are struggling to accept their identity and culture, it can make school more challenging. Students can be encouraged to separate their racial identity from their academic achievement by having an adult to turn to at a school of the same ethnicity. For teachers of color, there are many steps to develop racially just classrooms (Kohli, 2014). Students of color benefit from the extra processes teachers of color go through to develop racially just classrooms. “Teachers of color are linked to positive academic, social-emotional, and behavioral student outcomes and finds that these effects are driven, at least in part, by mindsets and practices aligned to what’s known as culturally responsive teaching” (Blazar, 2021, p.30). Culturally responsive teaching can positively impact students of all races but can benefit students of color experiencing racial challenges in schools. By having educators who know how to teach in a culturally responsive way, students will be positively impacted and supported during their identity development.

Impact on Student Success

There is a plethora of ways white supremacy can be seen lingering throughout our education system. Whether intentional or not, our education system contains many factors that contribute to the inequalities many people of color face growing up in the country. Famously known as the achievement gap, Black and brown students perform

significantly lower on average than their white counterparts. This can be seen all across the country but is specifically concerning for Minnesota, as we consistently maintain one of the highest achievement gaps in the country (Grunewald & Nath, 2019). The achievement gap is illustrated throughout the education system through graduation rates, reading and test scores, and college readiness, all of which Black and brown people maintain at the bottom (Grunewald & Nath, 2019). These achievement gaps directly affect the futures of Minnesotans of color as they have now received an education where their performance is systematically lower than white people. This is critically important when at least 74 percent of the jobs performed in Minnesota require some sort of higher education (Minnesota Department of Education, 2023).

The achievement gap is just one way that Black and brown students are given contrasting experiences in our education system, thus furthering white supremacy in the process. Minnesota consistently maintains one of the most significant achievement gaps in the nation. The teacher workforce might be the reason why. Landsman and Wayne-Lewis (2006) touch on a fundamental theoretical assumption that connects the dots. A majority white teacher workforce may have direct connections to the achievement gap. It is believed that white teachers often have the impression “that students of color do not already possess the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to succeed and learn can result in the development of curriculum and instruction that falls short of optimal teaching and learning” (Landsman & Wayne-Lewis, 2006, p. 81). These beliefs could naturally create implicit biases among teachers and their viewpoints of their students if educators have the assumption that certain students do not possess the capacity to learn, especially if their only potential downfall—in their eyes, is that they are people of color.

More teachers of color are able to offer different learning experiences that may bridge the gap between Black and white achievement. Minority teachers can rely on their own personal backgrounds to recognize students needing support (Driessen, 2015). By sharing a cultural perspective with their teacher, students are able to be advocated for (Magaldi & Conway, 2018). Teachers of color—specifically teachers of color who grew up in Minnesota understand the perspective of other students of color.

In summary, this section has highlighted the importance of positive student-teacher relationships and the impact on identity these relationships can have. School can be seen as a positive or a negative situation for students. By having an educator who cares about academic success and culture, students can feel more connected to their community and encouraged to try hard in school to be successful.

Diversity in the Past and Present

As we have learned by now, teachers of color are few and far between (MDE, 2021). As we dive deeper into this topic, it is crucial to understand why the minority teacher shortage began and previous attempts to amend it. In the first section, the background of the integration of minority teachers will be explained. This section will explore the recruitment and retention of teachers of color in schools. The second section will explore the history of whiteness in teacher discipline and professional development. Finally, the third section will explore recent efforts made by schools to hire more teachers of color to their schools.

Recruitment and Retainment of Minority Teachers

Across the nation, school districts have had a tough time recruiting and retaining teachers of color. In 2012, America's teaching force was 82% White (Sleeter, 2017). As

mentioned previously, the Minnesota teaching workforce is 94% White (MDE, 2021). This percentage is astounding as it shows that there is a very unequal amount of diversity among teachers in America. The lack of minority teachers in America, as well as the ability to increase diversity in school staffing, has been well-researched. In the past, researchers looked at the possibility of increasing teacher retention by offering Black women educators leadership roles. By reducing the workload for teachers and providing opportunities for leadership roles, schools may be able to retain teachers (Farinde et al., 2016). Minority teachers can offer insight into their culture for most teachers (Driessen, 2015).

There is also research that explains that due to inadequate support and poor working conditions, there has been a high turnover of Black teachers in America (Campoli, 2017). According to Ingersoll et al., (2019), in the past two decades, more minority teachers have been hired but are being employed in urban communities with high poverty and high minorities. “Minority teachers have significantly higher turnover than white teachers, and this is strongly tied to poor working conditions in their schools” (Ingersoll et al., 2019, p. 2). Working conditions need to be improved in order to reduce the turnover rates of minority teachers. School characteristics, conditions, and policies are correlated with their ability to recruit minority teachers (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Employees want to work in places that have high standards and support.

In any career, respect is a necessity for employees. Teaching has become increasingly hard for educators over the years. In order for teachers to want to continue teaching, their hard work must be recognized. With more support, hard working conditions can become easier to handle. Without recognition and assistance, teaching can

be a very taxing job. Increasing pay and decreasing the workload have been shown in data to contribute to higher rates of retention for teachers (Hughes, 2012). Higher salaries will intrigue more students to seek careers in teaching as it makes the profession more selective (Dolton & Marcenaro-Gutierrez, 2011). In order for teaching to be seen as a respected profession, changes must be made to gain interest for students to want to pursue teaching. Once there is more interest, more people of color will pursue the career. Not only is there a disproportionate amount of teachers of color in America, but the nation is also suffering from a teacher shortage. Teacher shortages directly hurt low-income students and students of color (TeKolste, 2018). There needs to be a solution to help combat these problems. Students deserve to have a quality education with a diverse staff that is able to help support them. Recruiting and retaining more minority teachers could help teacher storage in America (Driessen, 2015). Since teacher shortage is inequitable for low-income students, changes need to be made in order to provide a more equitable educational experience for all students, regardless of their family background.

Current Efforts to Increase Teacher Diversity

Due to the widespread lack of diversity among teaching workforces, many efforts have been proposed to try and help improve this problem. These efforts have been created and implemented by school districts across the country. There have been varying levels of success of programs that work to increase diversity.

One program that many different schools around the country have implemented is the Grow Your Own Program initiative. This program supports students interested in teaching to come back and teach in their area. When programs are implemented, program

directors work with the college faculty to nurture students and help create opportunities for them (Swanson, 2011). This program is beneficial for students needing more access to funding for their education. Senator Tina Smith introduced the Addressing Teacher Shortages Act to help provide grant funding and staffing resources for schools. Although this has been introduced but not implemented, this bill could be very helpful in increasing diversity in America's teaching workforce (Smith, 2022). Acts such as the Addressing Teacher Shortages Act need to be implemented to help tackle the teacher shortage and lack of diversity in teachers in America.

Organizations such as Educators Rising aim to prepare high school students for future careers as teachers. According to the Educators Rising website, 51% of students in the Educators Rising program are students of color. This program supports students of color in high school and college to create a pathway for more diverse teachers (Educators Rising, 2023). By sparking interest in the teaching profession for high school students, there are more opportunities for these students to be supported in college. Colleges such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions with teacher preparation programs aim to increase diversity in the teaching profession (Carter-Andrews et al., 2019). Colleges provide many opportunities for students, and programs that aim to provide support to college students can help increase the diversity of teachers in America.

The state of Minnesota has created a way to increase the number of minority teachers in their schools. Minnesota has a tiered education license system. This system works by having different standards to gain tiers of licensure to teach in Minnesota. This

law allows people to earn a permanent teaching license by only taking one methodology class and then taking two tests to show competence without ever taking courses in pedagogy (Minnesota Department of Education, 2023). Unfortunately, there have been many problems with this system. School districts are more compelled to hire teachers who have a Tier 3 or Tier 4 license, and Tier 1 teachers are paid less than Tier 4 teachers. This contradicts the plan to increase teachers of minorities as these teachers may not have a higher tier license. This system was put in place to increase diversity but has been questioned if it is truly equitable. “Most problematic, however, is the narrative that suggests this route to teacher licensure is somehow necessary because teachers of color need this shortcut. The majority of teachers of color with whom we have discussed this issue do not want to be held to a lower set of standards, nor do they want a public narrative that insinuates that only by lowering teacher standards can we recruit teachers of color” (Maguire et al., 2023). As teaching is a career that requires continual professional development, teachers in Minnesota have the opportunity to move to higher tiers of licensure, but it is still offensive that standards are lowered for people of color to become teachers in Minnesota. Plans such as Minnesota’s tiered licensure program need to be improved to actually help increase the number of diverse teachers in the state.

Many programs, initiatives, and groups have been created to help increase teacher diversity in America’s education system. Even with all of these efforts, a significant change has not been made that has balanced the disproportionate diversity of teachers in America. The lack of diversity in America’s teaching force is a problem with many layers, but it can be improved with positive programming and initiatives.

Conclusion

The collection of this research reviewed what has been studied in the past about the diversity of educators. Research has shown the lack of diverse representation among educators in schools. Not only does it show the lack of diverse educators, but it shows the byproduct of this phenomenon. Research shows us that students' academic performance and identity are impacted by the diversity they experience in childhood. Students deserve to engage with texts and materials that are culturally relevant to them and their peers. Studies also proposed the importance of students having teachers of the same ethnic background and how this can impact their identity. A synthesis of research shows past and present efforts to increase educator diversity and the need for a solution that increases diversity in educators in a positive manner.

Chapter Three presents the project design to increase the diversity in educators of color in Minnesota that will accurately represent the state's BIPOC student population while acknowledging the systematic issues teachers of color face in the workforce.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

Chapter Two presented literature on the subject of the lack of diversity among school staff in schools in America and the need for culturally responsive teaching. As teachers of color bring a wide range of skills to the classroom that benefits all students, it is crucial that schools work towards creating a more diverse staff. The central question for this project is, *How can Minnesota cultivate a more racially diverse teaching workforce that represents our BIPOC students?* As it was shown in Chapter Two, teachers of color need to be hired, retained, and supported. In order for this to happen, there needs to be a resource for BIPOC individuals in Minnesota interested in becoming a teacher. This capstone contributes to a website for potential teachers of color in Minnesota to access resources to support their careers. This website will include the importance of creating a racially diverse teaching workforce and how future educators can be supported as they work toward becoming a teacher. It will also allow for questions to be answered and links to opportunities that will help benefit BIPOC individuals interested in teaching. This chapter will include the rationale for the choice of this topic and presenting this work as a website. The chapter then explains how the website was created, as well as the website's framework, setting, and participants.

Rationale

For this project, a website was created to help provide resources and answer questions for individuals of color interested in a career in the educational field. As teaching is such a wide career field, it can be very intimidating for potential educators to

know where to start when it comes to entering the field. When I first became interested in becoming a teacher, I did not know where to start. There was no guide available with what steps to take in order to receive my teaching license. I did not know about the scholarship opportunities that were available and I had so many questions I wanted to ask but did not know where to get the answers. By creating a website that provides resources for becoming an educator, it will help address the concerns and confusion that arise as BIPOC individuals seek out educational fields. Websites are accessible on many electronic devices and can be easily shared as a link that can be accessed by more people.

Framework

The website will be created using Wix as a web page framework. The website will have a user oriented aspect where users are able to suggest new features and topics. My website will also be education oriented with the goal to educate viewers on teaching and the process of becoming a teacher. The website will feature multiple pages with resources to guide future teachers of color. The website will also feature a history section that discusses the past efforts toward diversifying the teaching population. There will be statistics that show the need for teachers of color and strategies for districts to hire and retain people of color that are interested in becoming educators. Also featured will be a discussion page and updated opportunities to work with students. This website will combine these features to create a resourceful and accessible website for those interested in teaching and those that are currently teachers.

Project Description

This project will culminate in a website that will be accessible to BIPOC individuals interested in becoming educators. As there are many different approaches to

becoming a teacher in Minnesota, this website will serve as a guide on where to get started as well as links to resources that help support potential educators of color. This website will include the history of the lack of teachers of color in America, the benefits of becoming a teacher, and the steps to take toward working in the education field. As I was in high school interested in becoming a teacher, I did not know where to start or what was even required to become an educator here in Minnesota. I will use this experience to help guide the formation of the website and the resources that will be accessible.

The website will include multiple pages that address the lack of diversity among teacher workforces and how becoming a teacher will help benefit not only the reader but future students. The compilation of resources included on this website will address scholarships and programs in Minnesota that support teachers of color, steps toward licensure, forums to ask questions, and opportunities to work with students. The resources on this website will be useful for current teachers of color as well as they will be able to help answer questions and talk about their own experiences on the website. The website will help to foster community between educators of color and help them connect with one another to reduce isolation.

Project Timeline

This project began being drafted in the Summer of 2023. The research was gathered over the course of three months and was compiled into Chapters One and Two to provide insight into this project. Over the next 14 weeks of the Fall of 2023, the project and website were created and presented to a class of educators creating their own projects to receive a Master of Arts degree in Teaching. This project is intended to be implemented right away as a resource for those interested in joining the education field in

Minnesota. If this website is shared and accessed across the state of Minnesota, it will help spark interest and guide people of color to becoming educators.

Participants and Setting

This website is aimed to help provide support to BIPOC that are interested in becoming a teacher. The intended participants to access this website as a resource are those interested in teaching that can help diversify Minnesota's teaching workforce. As teachers in Minnesota are predominantly White, districts need to aim to hire more teachers of color. The purpose of this website is to provide resources for people of color that are interested in becoming educators. I hope that this website will be shown to high school students interested in teaching as well as linked on college websites as a helpful resource. If Minnesotans that are interested in becoming educators are aware of the resources, scholarships, educational opportunities, and steps toward licensure, they will be able to access this website to help launch their start in the education field. This website will also be used to help connect educators of color with one another. By using the form feature on the website, questions will be asked and answered and discussion about educational topics will be facilitated. As I am currently an educator of color in the state of Minnesota, I can use this website to access information on educational opportunities and use the forum to discuss my role as a teacher of color in Minnesota. The website will help to create a sense of community between current educators and future educators of color in Minnesota. This website will be open for access at any time of the year but would be most beneficial to be viewed while first working towards becoming a teacher.

Assessment

In order to assess the question, *How can Minnesota cultivate a more racially diverse teaching workforce that represents our BIPOC students?* The effectiveness of this website will be measured and reviewed as data is collected. On the website, there will be a link to a survey that asks questions about the experience the user had while accessing the website. These questions will be used to create changes and updates to the website. The questions included in the survey are:

- A. What did you learn from this website?
- B. What section was most helpful?
- C. Was the forum able to help answer any questions?
- D. What do you wish to see on the website?
- E. What questions do you still have?
- F. How did you hear about the website?
- G. Would you recommend this website to a friend?

These questions are aimed to see what more should be included in the website and how to make the website more helpful. I will be able to see if my resource is helpful based on the feedback I received from the survey. As it is my goal to create a website that is helpful for incoming educators of color, by receiving live feedback from users, I will be able to update the website to fit the current needs of those interested in becoming educators. I hope that the framework for this website can be integrated into other states and be used to help lay out the foundation for a resourceful website based on the licensure steps for different states. As more websites like this are created with resources based on the individual states, interest in teaching can be fostered, and more potential educators of color can be supported.

Conclusion

This chapter includes the rationale for the creation of my website aimed to diversify Minnesota's teaching workforce. The goal of my website is to help guide future educators of color as they begin their journey into the teaching profession. This website helps to explain the research question, *How can Minnesota cultivate a more racially diverse teaching workforce that represents our BIPOC students?* This chapter also included the timeline, participants, the setting, and future steps on how this website can be updated and used in Minnesota and other states. Chapter Four will include a reflection of the website and how it can be useful for teachers of color in the future.

CHAPTER FOUR

Project Reflection

Introduction

This project focuses on the question, *how can Minnesota cultivate a more racially diverse teaching workforce that represents our BIPOC students?* The project was created to provide an internet resource for prospective BIPOC teachers in Minnesota to access support and opportunities. Based on the research in the Chapter Two Literature review, I designed this website to provide a clear guide for future teachers as they begin their career in the education field.

In Chapter Two, the research explored the lack of diversity among school staff in the United States. Although research showed the underrepresentation, historical implications, impacts and current efforts to increase diversity of teachers of color, there has still not been a successful solution to help recruit and retain teachers of color. In Chapter Three, the goal of the project, to address this lack of diversity by providing a resource to guide, was stated and the website design was presented..

In this chapter, I reflect on the findings and understandings from the project. I also share the implications and limitations of the project. Finally, I share how further research and application of suggestions from the website's survey can be used to continually improve the website and can be shared within the profession to help other states recruit and retain teachers of color.

Key Project Understandings

During my time writing this capstone and creating the website, I continued to teach first grade as a teacher of color in a building that lacks teacher diversity. I was able

to apply my feelings of isolation and loneliness towards my project to support the creation of my website. As I grew up in a community with a lack of diverse teachers as well, I now see how it affects me as a teacher. I feel an immense desire for students of color to not have the same experiences I had growing up. Reading statistics about the low numbers of BIPOC teachers in America is very disheartening. Creating a website that shared these facts as well as ways to help address this problem helps encourage me to inspire others to pursue education. My website will be able to be used by prospective teachers of color to motivate them to make a difference in the education community.

The education career can be very confusing at first. There is not a book that tells you exactly what to do or how to become the perfect teacher. While working on my website, I was able to add the things to the site I wish I would have known more about while I was first becoming a teacher. I did not know about all of the opportunities that were out there for prospective teachers. My website explains those opportunities with links to pursue them, which will be very helpful for others. In order for a change to be made to the lack of diversity in Minnesota's teaching community, prospective teachers need resources that can help guide them in the right direction. My website will be able to guide BIPOC prospective teachers in the right direction and support them throughout their careers.

Important Learnings from the Literature Review

The Literature Review informs and answers my question, *how can Minnesota cultivate a more racially diverse teaching workforce that represents our BIPOC students?* As Minnesota only has 6% of BIPOC teachers in the state (MDE, 2021), it is very crucial that a change to the lack of diversity will be made. In my research, it is found evident that

there are many factors to this lack of diversity but there has still not been a solution to this problem.

As underrepresentation affects each and every student (Armstrong, 2021), it is crucial that a change needs to be made. As a teacher of color, I am able to see the perspective of students who do not have representation among their educators. It can be very hurtful to be in the minority and it tarnishes students' self-esteem as they grow into adults (Armstrong, 2022). This was very important to my project as I know with more support, there can be more teachers of color here in Minnesota and they will be able to represent our diverse community of students.

As the relationships between teachers and students can impact success, students need to be represented in order to feel a sense of belonging (Miller-Lewis et al., 2014). Schools with positive communities can enhance student resilience (Battistich and Hom, 1997). On my website, I discuss the benefits of becoming a teacher. One of those benefits being the interactions with students that can change their lives. Having a positive relationship with their teacher can be very encouraging for students who are at academic risk (Roorda et al., 2011). This research helped inspire me to add this information and explain the opportunities prospective teachers can do to spend time with students before becoming a teacher.

Limitations

As this website is aimed to help inspire more BIPOC individuals in Minnesota to become teachers, there are still limitations to my project. In order for this website to gain traction and to be viewed by prospective teachers, it needs to be advertised in teacher preparation courses as well as high schools. The website lays out examples of

opportunities that can be used to inspire prospective teachers to pursue teaching by taking advantage of them. The website also explains the benefits of becoming a teacher. As this website is aimed towards Minnesota educators, this information may not be accurate to other states. The website is also not a perfect solution to this problem but rather is just a guide to help motivate future educators to pursue the profession. As the website explains how Minnesota's tiered licensure works and the steps to becoming a teacher in the state, it is not going to fix the problem completely. Once more states adopt the creation of websites like this, the guidance will be able to help create more teachers of color in our nation.

Benefits to the Profession and Future Research

Once my website is used by prospective teachers to help guide them through the profession, our communities will experience the chance to hire more teachers of color. In order for the problem of the lack of diversity to be solved, there needs to be more BIPOC teachers in our communities. In the future, this website can be continually updated and reflect current teaching practices, licensure requirements, and opportunities. Since this website can be changed overtime, it will be able to help inspire BIPOC individuals interested in teaching for years to come. As more research is introduced about the harm the lack of diverse teachers in our communities can have on students, there will be even more motivation for this problem to be addressed.

My website will be able to be shared freely to help make a change in the lives of our future students. I will be communicating the results from my website survey with the users of my website as I continue to update the website and help add the information that prospective teachers desire to help them. In order for my website to receive more

viewers, I will be sharing the link with Hamline Education faculty and high school faculties so their students will be able to use my website as a resource. I will also be able to communicate the results of the benefits of my website with other communities by sharing the information on the discussion forums. In the future I hope there will be more teachers of color to represent our diverse student population but in order to do that, steps need to be made across the nation. Websites such as mine that help guide BIPOC individuals are just the first step towards making a difference in the lives of our students.

Summary

In this chapter, I lighted the research that helped guide me through the creation of my website. As this research was crucial in my understanding of how effective teachers of color can be for our diverse student population, it truly helped guide me through the process of creating my website. I examined the limitations that my project currently has and the way my website can be used and updated in the future.

I am very blessed to have been given the opportunity to express my feelings towards the lack of educator diversity in my community. I am hopeful that the communication of my findings will help inspire other BIPOC individuals to pursue teaching to change the lives of our students. This will lead to great changes in our nation and will help students be more successful. I intend to continue to inspire others to pursue teaching and help support them in every way possible so today's diverse student population is represented.

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