Benefits of Teacher Diversity: Leading for Transformative Change

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Abstract: This essay articulates the benefits of teacher diversity by illustrating six themes: a) leading for social justice through local and global civic engagement; b) developing an inclusive school culture; c) culturally relevant pedagogy; d) cultural translators and transformers; e) role models; and (f) benefits accrued by White students. The authors draw from evidence in supporting arguments surrounding the benefits accrued when teacher diversity reflects the demographics of students served and the role educational leaders can play in advancing efforts to recruit and retain a diverse faculty pool. They challenge readers to consider the benefits accrued when deliberate efforts to increase teacher diversity are made in light of advancing student academic success.

Keywords: teacher diversity, student success, educational leadership

Teacher diversity symbolically conveys a message of hopefulness that diverse students can see themselves in professional roles. This stands as a democratic imperative. Yet, it is essential that diverse teachers possess effective teaching skills needed to advance culturally responsive practices. This will allow them to deliberately use their background and professional knowledge to support cross-cultural learning in the classroom and the greater school environment. At the same time, this responsibility should not be placed solely on the shoulders of diverse teachers. All teachers should be culturally competent and able to relate to students' background and knowledge in order to advance academic achievement (Graham & Nevarez, 2017). The assertion that teacher diversity "automatically" advances better student outcomes is questioned (Dee, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Ehrenberg et al., 1995). Rather, it takes purposeful effort to advance culturally responsive practices irrespective of the background of teachers. Although it is important to note that due to the common lived experiences shared by a student-teacher racial/ethnic match, the social, cultural, and emotional foundation is established with minimal effort (Gay, 2010).

The emphasis of this essay is on teacher diversity. The authors primarily provide descriptive data on *teachers of color*[1] due to the dearth of research, scholarship, and policy interest on the broader topic of teacher diversity (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; National Education Association, 2008). Dilworth and Coleman (2014) note that "although teacher quality has been accepted and internalized as a mantra for school reform, the imperative for diversity is often marginalized rather than accepted as central to the quality equation in teaching" (pg. 3). This sentiment has stalled efforts to deliberately tailor programs and initiatives to increase a teaching force that represents the nation's racial/ethnic diversity. Actually, the percentage of racially/ethnically diverse teaching force has lost ground in proportional representation. As of two decades ago, 26% of the teaching force was comprised of teachers of color, while today they constitute 18% (Dilworth & Coleman, 2014). Deliberate tailored policies and programs do work in decreasing disparities between the percentage of minority students and minority teachers. Ingersoll and May (2011) provide evidence of increased growth in teachers of color through investment and tailored purposeful practices supported across various sectors (i.e., business, policy, schools, and community at large). In a 20-year period (1988–2008), the increase of teachers of color was twice the rate of their White counterparts. The authors primarily attributed this growth to philanthropic, government, and nongovernment investments. Unfortunately, the growth in increasing teachers of color was not sustained long term by these charitable

funding sources (Dilworth & Coleman, 2014). The persistent disparity gap between the percentage of minority students and minority teachers has been attributed to the student achievement gap experienced by minority students (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015; Ingersoll, Merrill, Stuckey, & Collins, 2018; Torres, Santos, Peck, & Cortes, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2004; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005).

Considering the long-standing and on-going disparity of the student-teacher racial/ethnic match, it becomes imperative to advance the cultural awareness of all teachers, especially when noting that 82% of teachers are non-Hispanic White and only 21% of new teachers entering the profession are teachers of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). School leaders are front and center in asserting and advancing the cultural proficiency competence of teachers (Graham & Nevarez, 2017). The growth of student diversity beyond urban and rural regions and into suburban areas serves as political pressure for school leaders to increase and retain teacher diversity and/or cultural competence of teachers. However, the rate of teachers of color leaving the teaching profession is significantly higher than that of White teachers, with an annual turnover rate of 45 %(Ingersoll et al., 2018).

School leaders are in an optimal position to promote cultural teacher competencies and advance an inclusive school environment that bridges cultural divides in and out of the classroom (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2010). Of particular emphasis is the transformative leadership approach. Transformative leadership is a proactive approach well suited to advance the cultural competence and teacher diversity among the teaching force. According to Nevarez, Wood, and Penrose (2013), "transformative leadership is a social-justice oriented approach undergirded by notions of democracy (e.g., opportunity, equity, fairness, freedom)" (p. 143). Transformative leaders are keen to empowering teachers through shared knowledge in advancing social justice practices. They see themselves as servant leaders and use themselves as a tool to impart culturally relevant pedagogy and practices.

Transformative leaders think strategically and long term in advancing equitable school practices. On the issue of teacher diversity, they personalize the issue by posing the following questions:

> What is the school's response, if any, to teacher diversity?

> Is teacher diversity viewed as an integral part of the school district's approach to advancing student success?

The need to diversify the teaching workforce becomes more apparent considering that national population trends reveal that the increase in racial[2]/ethnic[3] diversity over the past 35 years will continue. The percentage of every racial/ethnic minority group in the United States will increase between the years 2000 and 2050, while the percentage of Whites will decrease. The largest increase of any single racial/ethnic group will continue to occur with Hispanics/Latinos, who will account for nearly a quarter of the nation's population by 2060; this represents an 11.8% increase. These trends are displayed in Table 1 (United States Census Bureau, 2014).

Schools serve as a microcosm of greater population trends, illustrating a decline of White student enrollment and growth in enrollment of students of color[4]. White students represented 59% of the public school enrollment in Fall 2003; however, by Fall 2013, this sub-group fell considerably 50% of enrollment. In contrast, enrollment for students of color stayed fairly consistent or grew slightly. The largest enrollment shift came from the Hispanic/Latino public school population that increased from 19% in fall 2003 to 25% in fall 2013 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Unlike the growth in the general population and school diversity, the academic achievement trends among the majority of students of color remains low. There are numerous achievement gaps between students of color and White students, including academic, suspension and expulsion, high school graduation, college attendance, and social-emotional

Table 1

Population Projections from 2014 to 2060, by Percentage and Race/Ethnicity

	Black/ African American	Asian American	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Hispanic/ Latino	White
2014	13.2	5.4	1.2	17.4	77.5
2060	14.3	9.3	1.3	28.6	68.5

Note. Data from United States Census Bureau (2014).

Table 2

National Assessment of Educational Progress Scores in 2015, Percent at or Above Proficient by Race/Ethnicity

Test Grade & Subject	Asian	White	American Indian/	Hispanic	African
8th Grade Reading	54	44	22	21	16
12 Grade Reading	49	46	28	25	17
8th Grade Math	61	43	20	19	13
12th Grade Math	47	32	10	12	7

Note. Data from U.S. Department of Education (2016).

gaps (Goleman, 1994; Lochman, 2004; Owens & McLanahan, 2018). One such example is the assessment test scores in Math and English among Black/African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Hispanic/Latino students in the 8th and 12th grade that reveal significant disparities in the success of these students in comparison to White and Asian students[5]. Low academic performance in reading and math (see Table 2) hinders overall student academic performance and has a direct effect on graduation rates as well as college enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Grigg, Donahue, & Dion, 2007; Lee, Grigg, & Dion, 2007a, 2007b).

Table 2 illustrates the academic achievement gaps between Asian and White students and American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic, and African American students. The largest discrepancy for math scores was a 40% difference between 12th grade Asian students, who had 47% at or above proficient, and 12th grade African American students, who had 7% at or above proficient. The largest gap for reading was between 8th grade Asian students, who had 54% at or above proficient, and 8th grade African American students, who had 16% at or above proficient. Additionally, graduation rates from four-year public high schools vary by race/ethnicity and have further implications for future learning (KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007; Levin, Belfied, Muenning, & Rouse, 2007). In the 2013-2014 school year, the adjusted cohort graduation rate that measures students who attain their high school diploma within four years of starting 9th grade was as follows: 73% African American, 76% Hispanic/Latino, 70% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 89% Asian, and 87% White (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These gaps substantiate the need for additional school reforms to help close the various race/ethnicity achievement gaps. An important component of such a new reform is increasing the percentage of teacher diversity (U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Oakes,

Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

The fast-rising growth of increasing diversity in society, and particularly in schools, is well documented (Kohler & Lazarin, 2007; Passel & Cohn, 2008; Taie & Goldring, 2018; United States Census Bureau, 2014). However, the lack of representation as it relates to teacher diversity is evident. In the 2015-2016 school year, the United States Census Bureau surveyed teachers using the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) and found that White teachers account for 80.1% of teachers in elementary and secondary schools, whereas, teachers of color represent only 19.9%. A further examination of teachers of color by race/ethnicity reveals that K-12 teachers in the U.S. are 6.7% Black/African-American, 0.4% American Indian/Native Alaskan, 2.3% Asian and 8.8% Hispanic/Latino. Further, the percentage of some groups of teachers of color seems to be declining (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015; Gay, Dingus & Jackson, 2003). Between the 2003-2004 and 2015-2016 school years, the actual percentage of teachers of color stayed consistent or dropped as follows: Black/African Americans 7.9% to 6.7% and American Indian/Alaskan Native from 0.5% to 0.4%. It is important to note that Hispanic/Latino teachers increased from 6.2% to 8.8%. Similarly, Asian teachers increased from 1.3% to 2.3%. Although the increase for Hispanics/Latinos and Asian teachers is positive, the representation of teacher diversity is still greatly disproportionate to the student population.

Benefits of Teacher Diversity

The following section provides information on why there is a need to increase teacher diversity and the benefits accrued when teacher diversity reflects the demographics of students served. Figure 1 illustrates six themes that epitomize the contributions of teacher diversity.
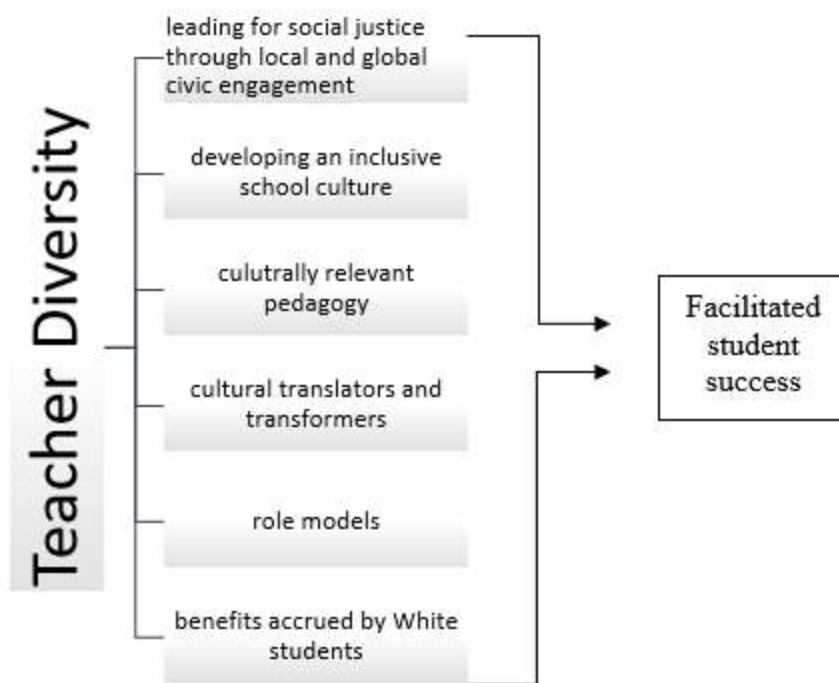
Figure 1. Six themes that epitomize the contributions of teacher diversity.

Leading for social justice through local and global civic engagement

Preparing individuals for civic engagement in a democratic society is an integral responsibility of the educational system, especially if that engagement is centered on social justice. Baptiste (1998) states that "social justice in schools is accomplished by the process of judicious pedagogy as its cornerstone and focuses on unabridged knowledge, reflection, and social action as the foundation for social change" (p. 107).

In general, students are not being adequately prepared for such engagement. Davila and Mora (2007), in a study of civic engagement that utilized data from the National Education Longitudinal Study, found that an individual's race was often a predictor of civic engagement. In this study, Hispanic students were found to exhibit the lowest civic participation. Teachers from diverse backgrounds are needed to counteract this phenomenon and orient students to civic engagement based upon principles of social justice. As a result, teacher diversity is needed in order to push for progressive change in local and global societies that addresses social, economic, and political inequalities (Gay & Howard, 2000; Oakes et al., 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Because of the shared experiences with societal inequities, diverse teachers are most apt to promote civic engagement and social justice. For instance, Quiocho and Rios (2000), in a descriptive synthesis of 476 studies on teachers of color, summarized that teachers of color are more likely to

> bring a critical, social justice orientation and consciousness that stems from their real, lived experiences with inequality. In a related way, they are often more willing to work actively to dismantle the personal and institutional biases that they find in schools as well as to move toward culturally responsive school-based reform. (p. 522)

Cavieres-Fernandez (2014) explored two teachers' use of a civic education program. Although the two teachers' ethnicities are not shared within his data, they both engage students in work that asks them to "research a problem in their communities, evaluate existing policies for the problem and develop an action plan to create or improve these policies" (Cavieres-Fernandez, 2014, p. 3). In one example, the students decided to focus on cleaning up abandoned warehouses in the Hmong community. Many of the students lived in the community and felt it was unsafe and a place where gang activity was widely present. The findings illustrate that the students enjoyed the work, learned from the community and one another, worked together, and gave beyond what the researcher called self-regarding individualism.

Vernez and Mizell (2001) state that a successful educational system coupled with a diversity-minded workforce will benefit the nation by: a) producing an

educated citizenry that is non-dependent upon social services such as "welfare, health, and law enforcement programs" (p. 16); b) significantly amplifying taxes for all levels of government (local, state and national); c) increasing the spending capability of the nation as a whole; and d) decreasing inequalities that exist among racial/ethnic sub-groups.

Developing an inclusive school culture

An inclusive school culture celebrates cultural characteristics, languages, communication styles, attitudes, experiences, and values. An essential component of such inclusion is developing a safe environment full of intergroup contact. In a meta-analysis conducted by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), intergroup connections reduced prejudice and enhanced positive relationships cross-culturally. Such relationships led to interdependence between groups, friendships, and positive attitudes toward diversity (Paluck, 2006; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Godfrey and Grayman (2014) conducted an analysis of the 1999 IEA Civic Education Study which examined, among other topics, dialogue in the classroom in connection to students' development of critical consciousness. Critical consciousness, which stems from Friere's (1973) work, is the act of understanding the world around you and taking action against oppression when it is present. Godrey and Grayman (2014) found that open dialogue in the classroom benefits youth's development and critical consciousness. Teacher diversity was not a component of the Godrey and Grayman (2014) empirical research, however teachers from diverse backgrounds facilitating the classroom dialogue would benefit all students by allowing them to hear the perspectives and approaches from diverse teachers. In addition, students from diverse backgrounds feel more comfortable speaking openly when teachers from diverse backgrounds are leading the conversation (Banks, 2006; Gay, 2000; Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2015). This has to do with the relatability of diverse teachers in that they are able to understand their cultural background and use this to establish student-teacher relationships. Therefore, developing a school culture inclusive of open communication that leads to enhanced critical consciousness is beneficial for all students and most beneficial when facilitated by teachers from diverse backgrounds.

Culturally relevant pedagogy

Scholarly literature on students is replete with the call for educators who can respond to the cultural diversity of students in the classroom. This call specifically speaks to the need for culturally relevant

pedagogy that accounts for the cultural background of students (Gay, 2000; Irvine, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Murrell, 2002) by taking into account their social, historical, political and economic needs and realities. Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). Culturally relevant pedagogy uses students' culture to empower them to critically examine educational content and processes and ask what role they have in creating a truly democratic and multicultural society (Christ & Sharma, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990). Many researchers affirm the need for pedagogy to enable students to take an active role in changing oppressive systems, institutions, and society as a whole (Banks, 1996; Durden, Escalante, & Blitch, 2015; Ginwright, 2004; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

According to Quiocho and Rios (2000), the delivery of culturally relevant pedagogy is intrinsic to teachers of color who possess a cultural understanding of the educational needs of students of color. Thus, these teachers create and engage a curriculum that accounts for students social and community needs:

> Minority group teachers tend to have a greater sense of how to develop (and therefore enact) culturally relevant curriculums and to understand the human, social, and communal nature of teaching and learning. Perhaps the opportunities to learn, to laugh, and to imagine the possibilities of schooling in the context of making a real difference in students' lives can serve as a catalyst for minority group people to enter the profession as well as help to retain those who already work there. (p. 522)

However, as a majority of the teacher population is currently White, it is important to understand how these teachers can successfully teach our diverse student population. Christ and Sharma (2018) explore characteristics of culturally relevant teachers in their study conducted with 17 preservice teachers, all of whom self-identified as White. The preservice teachers were taught and given model lessons on the text selection and pedagogy prior to conducting the lessons on their own with students. The researchers identified the following four challenges to selecting and teaching culturally relevant pedagogy that emerged in their findings: (1) resistance, (2) limited view of culture, (3) lack of knowledge about students' cultures and identities, and (4) lack of opportunity for students to develop critical consciousness. Although challenges emerged, intellectual growth in the areas of culturally proficient practices were noted. Examples of

their growth included that teachers, "improved their ability to select culturally relevant pedagogy successfully, they learned more about their students' cultures, identities and ways of being in the worlds" (Christ & Sharma, 2018, p. 66). Most uniquely and timely were the implications suggested by the researchers that preservice teachers be taught to develop the following five characteristics: (1) believe in using culturally relevant texts and pedagogy, (2) engage in effective ways of learning about their students, (3) understand cultural dimensions and ways to analyze texts and pedagogy, (4) develop conversational skills that elicit more participation by students, and (5) engage students in conversations that promote critical consciousness and social action.

Cultural translators and transformers

Two important roles that diverse teachers can play in schools is being *cultural translators* and *cultural transformers*. In both of these concepts, the individual serves as a go-between in aiding individuals with their encounters and experiences with the variance of the cultural unknown. In developing this section, the authors do not want to ignore the class and generational differences that exist within diverse communities that are not homogenous. These communities, just like others, vary in complexity and perspectives. However, teachers from diverse backgrounds who have been socialized within diverse communities have added knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds that aid them in enacting the following roles.

Cultural translators are diverse teachers who aid majority teachers as well as their respective educational institutions in the process of cultural understanding, communication, and engagement with students, parents and diverse communities (Eubanks & Weaver, 1999; Villegas & Clewell, 1998). Similarly, *cultural brokers* are diverse teachers who aid students and their parents in the process of cultural understanding, communication, and engagement with majority teachers and educational institutions to remove barriers to academic achievement (Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Irvine, 1988; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Additionally, the authors have coined the term cultural transformers to exemplify those teachers who enact principles of cultural translators and brokers in addition to serving actively as agents for equitable change. It is the reflection of their experiences that drives teachers to become transformers. In general, diverse teachers are cultural brokers, translators, and transformers by virtue of their deliberate intent to be proponents for the underserved. According to Irvine (2003), diverse teachers

tend to be knowledgeable, sensitive, and comfortable with students' language, style of presentation, community values, traditions, rituals, legends, myths, history, symbols, and norms. Using their cultural expertise, they help students make appropriate adaptations for and transitions into mainstream culture. (p. 55-56)

Gordon (1997), in examining the benefits of Latino teachers, noted that they are able to "talk to the parents in Spanish; they understood some of the cultural differences among "Hispanic" groups; and they were more willing to contact the parents personally" (p. 13). Gordon notes that these teachers are seen as leaders who are able to navigate cultural barriers. As a result of assuming these roles, diverse teachers can increase parent involvement, community engagement, and reduce absenteeism. These benefits are a direct result of the acclimation and buy-in process that allows students, parents, and communities to feel that their needs are being addressed and that proper communication is taking place to encourage participation from all stakeholders in the educational process.

Role models

The National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force (2004) notes that diverse teachers are needed in order to improve the education of youth. Villegas and Lucas (2002) state that same-race role models for students (especially students from diverse backgrounds) are very important due to the dearth of individuals who can positively fill these capacities and resemble these students racially, ethnically, and even linguistically. Diverse teachers are able to cultivate relationships with students and recognize the diverse backgrounds of the students that they serve. Irvine (1988) explains that oftentimes these relationships (which feature teachers as positive role models in the lives of students) may be the only prolonged relationship of this nature that these students will have. Additionally, one of the benefits of having diverse teachers as role models to diverse students is that they have high expectations with regard to "ability, language, behavior, and potential" (p. 508).

Teachers from diverse backgrounds tend to be successful role models for diverse groups of students (Hamann & Walker, 1993; Sheets, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Sheets (2000) states that this phenomenon may be attributed to "shared cultural experiences" that teachers and students from diverse backgrounds possess (p. 8). Although it must be noted that because diverse teachers are not a homogeneous group, various degrees of teaching styles, teacher student efficacy, and perspectives are held. It is

difficult to ascertain that all diverse teachers serve as role models for diverse students in a systematic way. For teachers who do not share these cultural experiences, they can become effective role models by affirming the students' culture and immersing themselves in the student's life experience, thus gaining an advanced knowledge of the cultural experience that creates the added bond between teachers and students from diverse backgrounds. In the end, role models who invest themselves in the lives of students and constantly seek their betterment will be effective role models.

Gordon (1997) conducted interviews with 114 teachers from diverse backgrounds in Ohio, Washington, and California in order to understand teachers' perceptions of the shifting views of teachers. Gordon states that diverse individuals are attentive to the fact that they need to serve as role models for non-minority children in order to help these children develop a positive view of non-whites. King (1993) provides some of the most convincing evidence that diverse teachers can aid student success by serving as role models. King conducted an analysis of African American teacher motivation to enter the teaching force. She found that the most significant factor reported by participants (69%) was the need to provide role models for students.

Benefits accrued by White students

With the current trend of 8 of 10 teachers being White, a large majority of students will not encounter teachers of color in the classroom. This becomes problematic in that a diverse teaching force provides students with divergent perspectives that better prepare them to function effectively in the diversity of the United States. The positive exposure to teacher diversity can serve to develop culturally proficient students who are equipped to promote cross-cultural consciousness and equitable social change. In not being exposed to a diverse teaching work force, all students will be at a disadvantage by being prone to insensibly heightened stereotypical behavior (Cherng & Haplin, 2016; Stuart Wells, et al., 2016).

In a response to the question *What impact can having more teachers of color have on our schools?,* Ladsen-Billings (2015) explained the benefits to both students of color and White students. She stated, "I want to suggest that there is something that may be even more important than Black students having Black teachers and that is White students having Black teachers!" (Ladsen-Billings, 2015). She went on to address the need for White students to see African American adults in respected roles. Such experiences help dispel myths and build cross-cultural respect,

relationships and understanding (Cherng & Haplin, 2016; Stuart Wells, et al., 2016).

Expanding on the benefits White students accrue from having diverse teachers, Cherng and Halpin (2016) utilized data sets containing over 50,000 student reports on over 1,680 teachers in order to answer the question: "Do students' perceptions of teachers vary by the race/ethnicity of teachers?" Specifically, they measured what they refer to as the *7 Cs*: challenge, captivate, consolidate, care, control, clarity, and confer. Their findings indicate that even when controlling for student demographics, academic characteristics, and addition teacher characteristics, all students have higher ratings for diverse teachers than White teachers (Cherng & Halpin, 2016, p. 410).

Although Cherng and Halpin's (2016) research does not expand to look into why these particular students feel this way, there is some literature discussing the benefits that White students accrue when they experience diverse teachers. One explanation is that teachers from diverse backgrounds tend to have more multicultural awareness, which results in more positive and connected classroom environments (Cherng & Davis, 2017). Classroom environments like this tend to be a safe place to learn and grow; therefore, students come to class and are engaged (Banks, 2006; Ladsen-Billings, 1994). Moreover, teachers from diverse backgrounds benefit White students because these teachers are more apt to purposefully speak about topics surrounding race relations and social justice (Cherng & Haplin, 2016). Providing these safe and constructive conversations helps White students more accurately understand the concepts and ways in which they can positively contribute to social justice.

Critical Discussion

First, as noted by scholars such as Cooper (2003) and Ladson-Billings (1994), White teachers can be effective teachers of diverse students. Educators who are dedicated to the increased success of students, employ culturally responsive pedagogy, maintain high expectations, and are dedicated to the communities they serve (among many other factors) can be exemplars of successful teaching. Thus, the authors do not seek to diminish in any way the work of White teachers (especially those in urban schools) who are dedicated to the communities in which they serve. This article has sought to respond to Eubanks & Weaver's (1999) call to articulate the benefits of diverse teachers in hope that teacher education programs and school districts engage in deliberate efforts to increase the proportional representation of teachers from diverse backgrounds.

Second, ineffective teachers exist regardless of background. Simply being a person from a diverse background does not automatically mean that successful teaching practices will take place or that the achievement gap will decrease. Additionally, as noted by Bennett, Cole, & Thompson (2000), diverse teachers can also struggle with effectively educating diverse groups of students. Regardless of their struggles, their presence can serve to inspire diverse students.

Third, there is a body of literature that questions teacher effectiveness based solely upon race/ethnicity (Dee, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Ehrenberg et al., 1995; Ehrenberg & Brewer, 1995). Most studies which maintain this view are purely quantitative in nature. As noted by Klopfenstein (2005), "Empiricists like to study easily measured learning outcomes, for obvious reasons, but quantifiable outcomes are not necessarily the most economically or socially valuable (p. 426). Thus, there is a need for further research that addresses the benefits of diverse teachers from a mixed-methods perspective and that gives voice to the student experience with these teachers.

Leadership and Policy Implications

The need for qualified diverse teachers in the educational system is evident. Primarily, this article focused on articulating the wide ranging and positive benefits gained when a diverse teaching pool is represented in schools. Investigating the benefits of a more diverse teaching force can guide policy and practice in the future preparation, hiring, and retention of teachers. To this end, teacher diversity must be demonstrated by commitment from executive educational leaders (i.e., superintendents and education governing boards) and should be considered a top policy priority. This is imperative considering the lack of proportional representation of diverse teachers. This serves as an opportune time for education leaders and school constituents to develop and implement system-wide strategic policy plans that are used as a framework to drive teacher diversity recruitment and retention, as provided in this essay. Developing such strategic policy plans can serve as a tool to hold schools and districts accountable for increasing and retaining diverse hires. Elements within the developed strategic plans to diversify the teaching workforce should include: a) developing and conducting climate surveys related to teacher diversity; b) using creative methods to recruit, hire, and retain diverse teachers; c) ensuring that the search committees and applicant pools are diverse; and d) training search committees on Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) while also working with the human resource departments to create

consistent interview and hiring processes. Greater efforts to develop a quality representative pool of teachers from diverse backgrounds will serve as a major step in facilitating student success.

Notes

[1]Teachers of color refers to the 4-main racial/ethnic groups identified in the United States Census Bureau (2014) other than White, which are: Black/African American, Asian, American Indian/Native Alaskan and Hispanic/Latino.

[2]Race refers to "a category of people who are *perceived* as physically distinctive on the basis of certain traits, such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features" (Bucher, p. 13, 2000).

[3]Ethnicity "is defined as the consciousness of cultural heritage shared with other people" (Bucher, p. 13, 2000).

[4]Students of color refers to the 4-main racial/ethnic groups identified in the United States Census Bureau (2014) other than White, which are: Black/African American, Asian, American Indian/Native Alaskan and Hispanic/Latino.

[5]Data regarding the academic achievement of Asian Americans hides the realities of educational achievement for all Asian sub-groups. According to Ngo and Lee (2007), "Although the racialization of Asian Americans lumps all Asian groups in the United States into a singular, high achieving category, an examination of disaggregated data by ethnic groups reveals striking differences" especially among many Southeast Asians groups that score comparable to other students of color (p. 419).

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