Chapter 5
Classroom Equity and the Role of a Teacher Leader:
Making Classrooms Equitable to All Students

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ABSTRACT

Classrooms are filled with students from multiple backgrounds. Teachers see students of different races, genders, and socioeconomic statuses. Providing the best education for these students is a necessity to produce productive members of society. To do so, teachers must work toward classroom equity. The research collected in this chapter can help teachers move toward an equitable classroom environment. There are many factors that need to be considered in creating equity. Once these factors are contemplated, the ability to change can be easily instituted. Teacher leaders have the potential to initiate change, but there are circumstances within the school that can hinder or support this change. Once schools meet the necessary criteria to create change, the role of teacher leaders is imperative in making equitable classrooms a reality.

INTRODUCTION

According to the 2019 population estimates made by the United States Census Bureau (n.d.), over 39% of the population in the United States is non-white, with 50% of the total population being female. In addition, research from Semega et al.

(2020) found that 34 million people are living in poverty. All of these facts present major implications in classrooms across the United States. The children that teachers see vary widely, due especially to the diverse makeup of the United States as well as the male to female ratio of the total population. Also, children that fit into the above categories possibly bring with them the burden of growing up in homes that are struggling financially. In order to help students feel valued in the classroom, which will encourage participation and thus help bring learning success, teachers have a duty to meet the needs of all students not just in theory, but also in practice. While not an easy task to undertake, it is not unachievable. A teacher leader has the potential to be the driving force behind changing the face of education. However, there are factors within a school or school system that can hinder or support this change. With the necessary structures of support, teacher leaders can turn this idea into reality.

BACKGROUND

Teachers play a crucial role in driving the educational experiences of children and helping to shape their future. Teacher perceptions of students' abilities in the classroom influence student experiences. Also important to note is that the relationships teachers develop with students would be a natural influence on how students may interact or participate in the classroom. In other words, teachers can design classrooms that support or hinder students' abilities and motivation to succeed. Because it is the teacher who plays a predominant role in deciding the path a child's educational career will take, there is a necessity for a classroom to not only offer equality concerning accessibility but also ensure the classroom is equitable.

The difference between equity and equality may seem trivial, but in reality, there is a great contrast. The first step in moving toward educational equity is to understand the difference. According to Mann (2014), ensuring all students have access to education is equality, but making sure students can obtain extra resources to succeed is equity. Equity is realizing that some students need more and meeting those needs, even if it means giving more. Equity is recognizing that a student's needs are different based on their race, gender, or financial status and offering whatever is needed to make his or her education meet his or her needs (Ferlazzo, 2020). Providing equity may look different when looking at race, gender, or poverty. However, there are also times when the lines between them coincide. Regardless, the necessity to move toward equity in the classroom has become abundantly clear, and this path can start with teacher leaders stepping up to the plate.

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