Chapter 29
Minority Students in Teacher Education:
Diversifying America's K–12 Teaching Force

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ABSTRACT

Educating a diverse population in America's K-12 schools continues to receive attention in the media and professional literature. Consequently, professionals within university teacher preparation programs are making continual attempts to find ways to attract students from diverse backgrounds. Yet, these attempts have not provided the needed solution to diversifying America's K-12 teaching force. This chapter summarizes current literature regarding the lack of minority students in teacher preparation programs across the United States. The chapter explores both institutional level and societal level challenges related to attracting minority students into teacher preparation programs. Current recruitment and retention systems are explored along with discussion of other factors that pose challenges such as stereotypes, systematic biases, and competing professional opportunities. The chapter ends with a discussion related to potential solutions at both the institutional and societal level.

INTRODUCTION

The population of the United States (US) continues to become increasingly culturally diverse, as a consequence, so too have its K-12 schools. For example, Sleeter (2008), utilizing 2006 National Center for Education Statistics data, reports that the student population in US public school is " only a little over half white, and a little under half students of colour" (p. 1949). Holden and Schelske (2000) further report:

Before the midpoint of the next century, these children [from minority backgrounds] will become the new majority in this country; in fact, they already constitute a majority of the school population in states such as New Mexico, Mississippi, Texas, and Hawaii and in 40 of the largest cities in the United States (p. 27).

Despite the diverse population within our K-12 school systems, a diverse teaching population is not represented in classrooms in the United States. In fact, although increased efforts to attract diverse candidates into teacher education programs has been a focus of teacher preparation programs across the country, many authors report only a slight increase of minority teachers represented in K-12 classrooms, or worse, a decline in teachers from minority backgrounds choosing education as a profession (Barnes-Johnson, 2008; Goodwin, 1991; Holden & Schelske, 2000; Hood & Parker, 1994; Newby, Swift, & Newby, 2000; Shen, Wegenke, & Cooley, 2003). "Current statistics on enrollment in teacher education programs indicate significant lack of minority representation" (Hood & Parker, 1994, p. 164) and more recently Sleeter reported "the teaching force remains about five-sixths white" (p. 1949). This is despite the fact that in 1988, The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education warned, "if a national intervention policy is not instituted to reverse this trend, the faces of teachers of color could disappear from the nation's classrooms" (as reported in Newby et al., 2000, p. 8).

Yet, the literature indicates faculty of teacher preparation programs value the notion of having highly qualified diverse teachers in our classrooms. This is evidenced by the number of innovate and unique programs designed to recruit and retain diverse teaching candidates found in the literature (Avery, Burling, & Counce, 1997; Ayalon, 2004; Burbank et al., 2005; Epstein, 2005; Fluckinger & Thompson, 2000; Goodwin, 1991; Holden & Schelske, 2000; Irizarry, 2007; Landis, Ferguson, Caraballal, Kuhlman, & Squires, 2007; Lau, Dandy, & Hoffman, 2007; Newby et al., 2000; Nichols, 2006; Nunez & Fernandez, 2006; Stevens, Agnello, Ramirez, Marbley, & Hamman, 2007; Villegas & Davis, 2007). Although value is placed on diversifying the nation's K-12 teaching force, these current recruitment and retention systems are not filling the need for minority teachers in the field as evidenced by the previous discussion.

Furthermore, stereotypes regarding the teaching profession, institutional biases, and competing professional opportunities prohibit the development of a diversified teaching population in US K-12 schools. This chapter will review literature that focuses on these factors as challenges related to diversifying teacher education programs and consequently, the K-12 teaching force. The chapter will end with institutional and societal recommendations.

BACKGROUND

Historically, and presently, education has been dominated by a White middle class system. This system has served to create "others" (such as African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, etc.) who have a choice to fit-in and be silent or speak up and be misunderstood or judged. Several theories based on sociological perspectives support this view. For example, functional theory posits that social roles are essential in order for a society to function and that "the needs of society are seen as determining the behavior and the rewards of the individuals within it" (Collins, 1971, p. 78). In relation to education (and potentially the representation of teachers from minority backgrounds), Woodson (2008) in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* discusses many examples of how education failed to socially advance African-Americans and illustrates examples of functional theory in our society. For example, Woodson states, "The trouble is that they [educated African-Americans] do not think for themselves" (p. 25). The contention is that African-Americans were historically convinced that "there were certain spheres [professions] into which they should not go because they would have no chance therein for development" (Woodson, 2008, p. 39). This supports the functional theory of educational stratification as social roles were defined as a function of society that African-Americans (and likely other minorities) had little control in overcoming. Furthermore, this may help

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