

ADVANCING A VISION TO DIVERSIFY THE WORKFORCE AND PREPARE RACIALLY CONSCIOUS EDUCATORS

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ABSTRACT

Educator preparation programs have a responsibility to prepare professionals to meet P-12 learner needs. Research and changing demographics provide evidence and rationale of the importance to increase the number of educators of color and to prepare all educators to be racially conscious. Educator preparation programs, in tandem with P-12 school districts, need to make systemic changes in approaches, practices and policies in order to adequately prepare individuals for the profession. The author contends that without these systematic changes, workforce needs and, more importantly, P-12 student learner needs, will not be met. The article shares research about diversifying teacher education programs and shares a college's educational planning efforts toward reaching its vision, to inspire lifelong learning and professional engagement through racial consciousness, social justice, and inclusion within a global context, to diversify the workforce and prepare racially conscious educators.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the United States the inability to ensure high levels of learning for students of all races persists. Since 1975, White children have consistently outperformed African American and Hispanic children with no significant change in the width of the gap in achievement levels between students of color and White students (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2012). The changes in student enrollment demographics in conjunction with achievement gaps heighten the urgency to improve the predictable achievement trajectory for students of color. The National Center for Educational Statistics reports,

From fall 2002 through fall 2012, the number of White students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools decreased from 28.6 million to 25.4 million, and their share of public school enrollment decreased from 59 to 51 percent. In contrast, the number of Hispanic students enrolled during this period increased from 8.6 million to 12.1 million students, and their share of public school enrollment increased from 18 to 24 percent. (Kena et al., 2015, p. xxx)

The Minnesota Department of Education (2014) data reveal a predictable racial disparity pattern that mirrors the national pattern. Mathematics and reading data from the last five years show a steady and unchanged racial discrepancy between the achievement levels of White and Black students, with White students demonstrating results approximately 30 percent higher than Black students (Minnesota Department of Education, 2014). The changing enrollment percentages of students in public schools also bring to attention the contrast between student demographics and educator demographics. Students of color constitute over 50 percent of the nation's K-12 population; yet the teaching workforce remains about 82 percent white (Educators for Excellence, 2015). Approximately 34 percent of K-12 students in the state of Minnesota are nonwhite, while teachers of color make up only 5 percent of part-time and full-time teachers (The Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota, 2019).

Educators and researchers have approached the issues associated with changing student enrollment demographics in conjunction with achievement gaps in a variety of ways. The literature in the field of culturally relevant teacher education addresses the issue by emphasizing the importance of increasing the number of educators of color and of preparing all educators to be racially conscious (Gist, 2018; Jackson, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Paris, 2012; Picower, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz, 2011).

In order to increase the number of educators of color and to prepare all educators to be more racially conscious, educator preparation programs need to examine and change approaches, practices, and policies (Lenski, Crumpler, Stallworth, & Crawford, 2005). Curriculum and instruction is one area needing examination. For instance, Stanton and Morrison (2018) observed,

Curricular tools (e.g., curriculum frameworks, standards, and textbooks) used in educational institutions in the USA generally sustain socioeconomic hierarchies, perpetuate Eurocentric views of economic progress, and exclude Indigenous knowledge, even in content areas that claim focus on cultural experiences, such as social studies. (p. 730)

In addition, Nguyen (2008) noted that Vietnamese Americans “operated frequently from their Vietnamese cultural frame of understanding, and therefore had difficulty with socializing into U.S. teaching” (p. 113). He asserts it is time for all students to see more ethnic minority members in education and that preservice education curriculum should be broadened to examine inclusive and exclusive practices (Nguyen, 2008). The lack of racial equity pedagogy has many ramifications; Cheruvu, Souto-Manning, Lencl, and Chin-Calubquib (2015) noted a “common thread was the struggle experienced by participants...[as they] contend with the domination of Whiteness in course content and in student teaching placements” (p. 259).

In addition to curricular changes, educator preparation programs should prepare aspiring educators to be racially literate. The concept of racial literacy refers to a set of practices designed to teach individuals how to recognize, respond to and counter forms of everyday racism (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2014). According to Sealey-Ruiz and Greene (2014), “Educators who develop racial literacy are able to discuss with their students and with each other the implications of race and the negative effects of racism in ways that can potentially transform their teaching” (p. 60). Sealey-Ruiz and Greene (2014) contend that developing racial literacy skills in aspiring educators could mitigate the lack of understanding and insensitivity to cultural differences with their students in field experiences and in their future classrooms. Reflecting on his teaching in a teacher education program in the Midwest, Yu (2012) affirms the need for racial literacy and notes:

A socio-cultural analysis of education was particularly missing. Differences in human learning and education based on race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. were not emphasized in their preparation to become better teachers.... (F)or Whites to become effective multicultural teachers, culturally relevant and socially competent, they must become racially educated; they must understand the larger racial histories, struggles, injustices, and the role Whites play in them: and they must further understand issues such as White dominance, White privilege, and White racism and how these realities have underlined and entrenched value systems and conceptual framework which directly or indirectly influence their philosophy and practice as teachers. (p. 48)

Sealey-Ruiz (2011) contends,

Racial literacy in teacher education promotes deep self-examination and requires actions that can lead to sustainable social justice and educational equity for all students, and Black students in particular; without it, teacher educators and their students will continue to find themselves powerless in dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline and other inequitable educational systems on the basis of race. (p. 120)

Durden, McMunn Dooley, and Truscott (2016) argue that another area of relevance in preparing racially conscious educators is for educator preparation programs to provide teaching methods focused on race and racial identity:

[Rather than a focus in teacher education on only becoming knowledgeable of students' culture, the focus instead should be on examining teacher candidates' understandings of how student's racial identity in the US inevitably pre-depotes them to certain struggles or opportunities. (p. 1004)

In an effort to establish racial equity, educator preparation programs need to create an anti-racist environment (Gist, 2018). Gist notes, "Understanding the strengths of Teachers of Color and the lessons they have taught the profession is in the common interest of all committed to eradicating educational inequality and creating a rigorous and respected professional teaching corps" (p. 518). Picower states, "...it is imperative that White teachers develop this awareness, or critical consciousness around issues of race, privilege, power, and oppression in order to be successful with students from diverse settings" (2009, p. 199). Picower continues by noting, "There is an underlying assumption in this literature on race and teacher education that helping teachers, particularly White teachers, to develop cultural competence and socio-political consciousness will help them to become better educators" (2009, p. 199); and "schools of education must make a commitment to transform themselves in order to interrupt the hegemonic understandings of pre-service teachers by implementing strategies, programs, and reforms with this objective. (2009, p. 211)

Educator preparation programs have a responsibility and opportunity to impact the existing racial disparity in education. One means of impacting the existing racial disparity in education is for educator preparation providers to diversify the workforce to reflect the changing student demographics. Another is to provide programs that prepare racially conscious educators who are equipped to disrupt hierarchies of oppression and establish racially just learning environments. Picower (2009) contends,

A priority must be made to increase the number of teacher educators of color, and an effort also must be made to recruit more pre-service teachers of color, including but not exclusive to beginning in high schools in the communities that have been labeled *hard to staff*.... Aside from the unequivocal need for increased representation and all that comes with it, another benefit is that by bringing the voices of people of color into teacher preparation programs, the typical White female pre-service teacher would have an opportunity to interact and learn from people different from themselves (p. 212).

The purpose of this article is to share the transformative efforts of Minnesota State University, Mankato's College of Education educator preparation programs as they embrace the responsibility to diversify the workforce and prepare racially conscious educators. The transformation involves an investment in professional development, system changes, academic program changes, and partnerships.

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION EFFORTS

As a part of a mid-west, comprehensive public university that consists of a primarily White and culturally isolated student population, the Minnesota State University, Mankato's College of Education has struggled in its efforts to diversify the state's educator workforce and to more adequately prepare racially conscious educators. Minnesota Department of Education (2019) data reflects there are only 5.33% teachers of color while 34.3% of K-12 students are students of color (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). As of spring 2019, the college has 1326 teacher candidates enrolled in licensure programs; 115, or 8.7% identify as people of color (Integrated Student Record System).

An integral component to addressing its responsibility was for the college to commit to uprooting the whiteness of its systems and structures. It did so by focusing on efforts: (a) to increase the percentages of education candidates, graduates, college faculty and administrators, and partner district teachers and administrators who are exposed to critical race perspectives necessary to disrupt hierarchies of oppression and who are prepared to establish racially just learning environments to expand marginalized students' access to education opportunities; and (b) to adjust institutional systems that acknowledge and foreground across the curriculum how race differentiates students' equitable access to educational opportunities; and support the ongoing professional learning of faculty and others (e.g., P-12 school district partners and university administrators and staff) around issues of racial justice.

Professional Development. The college initiated and continues to invest significant effort to provide professional development for faculty and students grounded in critical consciousness, including processes for deepening awareness of their own racial identities and behaviors. The college's Intercultural Competency and Development (ICD) Advisory Board has been instrumental in guiding formal and informal professional development experiences. The board is one of five advisory boards in the college. Its purpose is to guide the college in advancing a learning community that welcomes, values, supports and respects all persons and promotes an environment free of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation or disability. One outcome of the advisory board has been the implementation of college-wide working definitions around such terms as diversity, cultural competency and race. The college also implemented the use of the Courageous Conversation protocol by Singleton (2015) as a process to promote interracial dialogue. It was realized early on that if there was not a common understanding and use of terms and if there was not a process for engaging in difficult conversations about race, the ability to prepare racially conscious, equity-minded educators was seriously limited.

The ICD Advisory Board also plays a crucial part in the development and assessment of college-level professional development experiences focused on heightening the awareness and implementation of intercultural competencies in programs, policies, and procedures and an increase in the development of racial equity competency among White faculty, staff and administrative members. Through their guidance the college has learning from social justice experts such as Heather Hackman, Robin Dangelo, and Yvette Jackson. Heather Hackman (2016, 2017) not only provided individuals with a solid overview and understanding of underrepresented history and systematic racism, but she also introduced the value of using groundings focused on race at the beginning of gatherings. Robin DiAngelo helped individuals understand White racial literacy and the importance of remaining vigilant around awareness of racism. Her book, *What Does It Mean to be White: Developing White Racial Literacy* proved to be a foundational resource for a number of faculty and staff (DiAngelo, 2016). Yvette Jackson introduced the college to her work on the principles and practices of the

Pedagogy of Confidence, created to enable educators to accelerate the intellectual development and academic achievement of their students (Jackson, 2011).

The ICD advisory board was also instrumental in collecting and sharing data from current teacher candidates about their experiences in their preparation programs. Some faculty from the advisory board conducted a qualitative study that involved collecting data from two focus groups, one consisted of teacher candidates of color the other of white teacher candidates. Data shared provided evidence of the need for significant change in programs (Berry, Burnett, Krull, Eastman, Berschorner, Kruiuzenga, 2017). In general, findings noted that teacher candidates of color felt unsupported by faculty and unprepared; whereas, white teacher candidates felt supported and accommodated. Both teacher candidates of color and white teacher candidates noted an absence of race pedagogy and content taught in their programs. White teacher candidates wanted more content that centered on racially diverse populations; both commented that faculty were unconsciousness about the need for race content. Additional data shared demonstrated that teacher candidates of color entered the program racially conscious as compared to white teacher candidates who appeared to be racially unconsciousness and that teacher candidates of color related to feelings of exclusion within the program while White teacher candidates reported feelings of inclusion (Berry, Burnett, Krull, Eastman, Berschorner, Kruiuzenga, 2017). The data and the personal narratives that were shared prompted a number of faculty and staff to engage in racial equity changes with their teaching, advising and communications. Bringing the student voice into faculty, staff and administrators' learnings remains a powerful motivator and reminder of how much work remains to prepare racially conscious, equity-minded educators.

In addition to established, college-wide professional development experiences, the advisory board has been instrumental in organizing and facilitating informal book studies that allow faculty and staff to further their knowledge and understanding in small group settings. Finally, the advisory board developed a college level professional development application process funded by the dean's office. The process provides faculty and staff with the opportunity to secure funds for research expenses, conference and training expenses, and research materials that support their continuing development and scholarly activity as it relates to the college's vision: To inspire lifelong learning and professional engagement through racial consciousness, social justice, and inclusion with a global context.

Systems Change. Three years ago, the college realized that if it was going to increase the potential for ongoing, sustainable systemic change that professional development efforts as well as other program and system changes needed to be more clearly guided by a vision, mission and goals that reflected the college's intentions to uproot the whiteness of its systems and structures and to prepare racially conscious educators. Through a collaborative approach by the college's leadership council, which consists of department chairs, college-level directors, and advisory council chairs, the college's vision, mission and goals were updated and implemented. The vision is "to inspire lifelong learning and professional engagement through racial consciousness, social justice, and inclusion within a global context." The mission is "to prepare professionals through research and evidence-based practices who demonstrate excellence in their profession." The college's goals include (a) inform decision-making through intentional integration of student needs and student development; (b) increase the ability to practice racial equity among faculty, staff, students, and partners by examining existing systems and structures; (c) provide infrastructure and resources to achieve excellence in advising, teaching, scholarship, and service; (d) use assessments, data, and research to support decisions and initiatives for program development and accreditation; and (e)

expand opportunities for students, faculty and partners to address social justice through engagement with local, regional, national, and international communities.

The work reflects what the college has invested in and serves as a guide for continuous review and adjustments with existing system practices, procedures and policies. The work also serves as a means to monitor efforts to improve support for educator candidates of color and address unintended bias that hinder the ability to prepare racially conscious, equity-minded teacher candidates. Examples of changes include the intentional use of racial consciousness and social justice language within the qualifications of position descriptions. The explicit references to racial consciousness and social justice in job postings have led to an increase in applicants of color and a hiring outcome of five new faculty of color. Teacher preparation programs have also changed their application criteria for acceptance into professional education to expand beyond grade point average and to include personal interviews and opportunities for students to respond to prompts focused on their understanding and disposition toward racial equity (DiAngelo, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Picower, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz, 2011).

Teachers of tomorrow. Beginning with support from an external grant focused on improving teacher preparation programs, the college has committed to recruiting and supporting students of color for the profession. The college began by creating a Director of Recruitment and Retention position with a focus on increasing the number of students of color in preparation programs. One of the first initiatives the director implemented was the Teachers of Tomorrow (ToT) program. It began with eight students in 2010 and now supports approximately thirty students. It is an academic support program designed for students from traditionally underrepresented groups. Through targeted, rigorous and purposeful support, the program addresses academic, social and emotional issues participants face as college students. A ToT strategy is to not only recruit, retain and graduate teacher candidates of color but also engage, expose and immerse them with their white counterparts to develop and cultivate culturally compatible, equity-minded teachers.

The college's Director of Recruitment and Retention and the Student Relations Coordinator are instrumental in the implementation of the program. They have developed a program that provides support for students of color who find themselves on a predominately white university campus and who may find the expectations associated with teacher preparation programs confusing and unwelcoming. The program is developed around characteristics found to support retention for students of color (Durden, McMunn Dooley & Truscott, 2016; Gist, 2018; Nguyen, 2008) such as providing a sense of belonging, bridging gaps from student culture to institutional culture, establishing authentic student-faculty interactions, and providing strong social and emotional support systems. Fenwick (2001) asserts that communities without minority associations or other minority groups or clubs have difficulty attracting new minority candidates. Students coming directly from high school expect to enjoy some sense of bonding with colleagues of their own culture; the ToT program creates a sense of belonging.

Scholarships. The college addressed a common hurdle with recruiting students of color for the profession by establishing scholarships that begin year one. With admission into professional education not occurring until the end of year two, many of the existing education scholarships are not implemented until students are accepted into a teacher preparation program. Realizing this limited recruitment efforts, the college worked with university personnel and solicited donors to financially support potential teacher candidates of color from the beginning of their college experience. With additional new opportunities from a state level grant focused on increasing the recruitment and

retention of teacher candidates of color, the college has been able to provide scholarships at various stages of program completion for over 50 teacher candidates of color.

Academic program changes. In addition to the college level support services, the preparation programs have been consciously reflecting on necessary changes in instruction, curriculum, and experiences. While there remains much in need of change, programs have added seminars, have made curricular changes, and have reframed field experiences to focus on strengthening teacher candidates' awareness, knowledge, and skill in teaching in a culturally relevant, equity-minded manner. Faculty and staff have also explored opportunities to introduce and acclimate students to racial consciousness and social justice in semesters leading up to acceptance into professional education. For instance, a new campus-wide general education course in critical race theory was developed and approved and a first year experience class was reframed to introduce the use of the Courageous Conversation protocol as well as to introduce the common definitions document used by the college.

At the graduate level, the Department of Educational Leadership has embraced the importance of preparing school leaders to address racial equity at the system level. The department redesigned its school administration preparation program to embed research and practices that impact the disparaging and racially predictable gap in student achievement. Acknowledging the existence of the achievement gap is cited as one of the most important steps leaders can take to address equity work in their buildings (Kafele, 2014; Haycock & Jerald, 2002; Wooleyhand, 2013). More progress towards closing the achievement gap has been noted in schools that are intentional about addressing the existence of and need to close the gap than in schools who did not make such clear and intentional decisions. The redesigned program, along with the department's close work with school districts, has improved school leader preparation around racial equity and has resulted in a steady increase enrollment of aspiring school leaders of color.

The Department of Educational Leadership also supports the Center for Engaged Leadership. The purpose of the center is to provide professional development for practicing school leaders. A professional development program that demonstrates a commitment to racial equity and that has maintained active participation is the Institute for Courageous Principal Leadership. The institute's mission is to develop principals who lead with fearlessness, skill, self-knowledge and racial competence to eliminate achievement, teaching and participation gaps and whose leadership is driven by results and a moral imperative to create schools that fully engage, educate and include every child. The purpose of the Institute for Courageous Principal Leadership is to build the cultural agility of principals to provide effective leadership in their increasingly diverse school communities. The institute provides a two-year instructional leadership development program with the following goals: (a) to increase principals' ability to advance educational equity and eliminate gaps in racially predictable achievement, teaching, and participation; and (b) to build principals' leadership capacity to facilitate, create and sustain technical and adaptive change that significantly improves achievement for all students. Since 2012, the Institute for Courageous Principal Leadership has had over 400 racially conscious school leaders complete the program.

As another intentional effort to increase awareness and engagement around the importance and impact of racial equity, the department has established an annual "Leading Courageously for Racial Equity" conference. The conference features a keynote speaker, supported by a donor contribution, and breakout sessions that involve university and K-12 presenters who share research and practices focused on addressing racial equity. The conference has proven to be a place where practitioners

and aspiring educator leaders can interact, blend research into practice, and be re-energized in their ongoing efforts to address racial disparities in education. In addition, the conference has garnered enough participation that its registration fees are used not only to cover conference expenses but also support five scholarships per year for aspiring educational leaders enrolled in one of the department's programs.

Partnerships. As the college increases the number of teacher candidates of color and the awareness of racial equity with white teacher candidates, the ability for them to be coached and mentored by educators who know and demonstrate equity-mindedness is important. P-12 partnering school districts collaborate with the college with the purpose to enhance teacher preparation, provide professional development and advocate for improvements in the education system in Minnesota, from kindergarten through college. Within that framework, they have readily joined in the work to prepare racially conscious, equity-minded educators. A significant component to the professional development involves the joint commitment to preparing university supervisors, district teachers on special assignment, and district mentor teacher to not only effectively coach teacher candidates but to also demonstrate effective, racially conscious teaching. The college has contracted with the New Teacher Center (NTC), a nonprofit dedicated to guiding educator to improve student learning, to provide quality training for those who supervise and mentor teacher candidates. The contract also provides access to NTC tools for use with teacher candidate field experiences and student teaching. The training and tools, along with professional development on racial equity, have provided the college and its partnering school districts with opportunities to expand the capacity to impact racial equity understanding and aptitude in the teacher preparation programs and in the partnering school districts.

The college has also extended its effort to bringing racial equity to educator preparation by partnering with two other higher education institutions and a nonprofit human development organization who are as equally invested in the work. The collective focus of the group is to strengthen university-based teacher education through a shared commitment to racial equity. The partners seek to improve the quality of university-based teacher education and the delivery of public education—initially on their own campuses and within their partner districts and then expand to other universities that share their vision and commitment to racial equity.

EVALUATION OF COLLEGE EFFORT

The college has encountered its share of successes and challenges since actively embracing the responsibility to diversify the workforce and prepare racially conscious educators. Successes include the college's vigilance in its intent to uproot the whiteness of its systems and structures. This has occurred through such practices as the regular use of the college-wide working definitions around such terms as diversity, cultural competency and race; the use of Singleton's (2015) Courageous Conversation protocol; and the use of the college's vision, mission, and goals to guide our work. Once a solid foundation and commitment was established with faculty, staff, and administrators, we began to experience transformations such as an increase in the enrollment of students of color and racially conscious, equity minded students. We also experienced an increase in the number of potential applicants of color and racially conscious, equity minded applicants who applied and were hired in various positions throughout the college. And it was when faculty began to focus on program and field experience changes that heighten teacher candidates' preparation to be racially conscious educators.

A persistent challenge has been determining how to maintain an environment where teacher candidates, especially candidates of color, trust us enough to bring to our attention practices and actions that exacerbate race bias and racism. The practices and actions often reflect a lack of awareness or disregard for racial inequities encountered in the university or in the P-12 environment. We have been working to make it a habit to pause when we begin to engage in system planning or when we reflect on practices and procedures to ask ourselves if we have taken time to secure the student perspective on the issue.

IMPLICATIONS TO EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

As an educator who has worked in the profession for over 30 years, I am surprised how long it has taken to intentionally address racial disparities and to commit to establishing a system and an environment focused on preparing racially conscious educators. It has taken continuous diligence and awareness not only with everyday interactions, decisions, and practices but also with long term planning and strategizing. It has also taken a level of persistence by those who are committed to the work. More than once there has been a need (a) to deflect situations that were deterring our efforts to change practices and policies, (b) to redirect our attention and decision-making back to our vision, and (c) to re-approach by a different means our efforts to provide our teacher candidates with racially focused experiences. The changes described in this article occurred due to patience, steadfast commitment, and persistence followed by actions that were implemented through professional development, system changes, academic program changes, or partnerships. One ongoing and powerful approach that we will continue to use is engaging and using student voice to clarify and share what and why changes are needed.

CONCLUSION

Overall, it has taken a commitment and continuous planning and monitoring of professional development needs, system changes, academic program changes, and partnership engagement to see a transformation in how the college functions. The results have been the implementation of approaches, practices, and policies that, while not free of racism, has better equipped faculty, staff and administrators to support educator candidates of color and prepare all candidates to be racially conscious educators. Through careful scaffolding of professional development and systemic changes, the college is beginning to see outcomes from its efforts. Examples of changes include (a) the explicit incorporation of racial equity into the vision and core principles; (b) position postings and hiring decisions focused on racial equity and representation; and (c) the heightened ability and capacity to do racial equity work at various structural levels of the college and the university. Based on these changes and over the course of time from 2010 to 2019, the percentage of teacher candidates of color has increased from 2.9 percent to 8.7 percent; the percentage of aspiring school leaders of color has increased from 8.5 percent to 18 percent; and the percentage of faculty and staff of color has increased from 4 percent to 19.5 percent (Integrated Student Record System).

There remains a significant amount of work for the college to achieve its vision, to inspire lifelong learning and professional engagement through racial consciousness, social justice, and inclusion within a global context; and, specifically, to diversify the state's educator workforce and adequately prepare racially conscious educators to meet the changing student population. However, the plans, actions and outcomes that have occurred demonstrate it is within reach.

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