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Diversifying the Teaching Force: An Examination of Major Arguments

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Abstract Over the past two decades, the short supply of teachers of color in elementary and secondary public schools has drawn the attention of policymakers and educators alike. To address the widening cultural chasm between teachers and their students, a variety of initiatives that aim to recruit people of color into teaching have been launched. Little attention has been paid, however, to articulating a research-based rationale for increasing the diversity in the ranks of teachers. This gap in the professional literature renders ongoing teacher diversity efforts vulnerable given the emphasis placed these days on research-based evidence in making decisions regarding the proper use of limited public resources, including funding for education. The purpose of this article is to address the noted gap in the literature. From an extensive review of the literature, we identified three major arguments for diversifying the teaching force and assessed the extent to which they are validated by empirical research. The results are reported, and implications of the findings for research and practice are discussed.

Keywords Teacher diversity · Rationale · Research evidence

Introduction

Much has been written over the past two decades about the need to diversify the teaching force. It is not unusual these days for policymakers and educators to acknowledge that increasing the diversity in the ranks of teachers is a worthy goal. In fact, 36 states have adopted policies since the early 1990s that aim to recruit more

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people of color into teaching (Villegas and Davis 2008). Those policies build on lessons learned from teacher diversity programs launched in the late 1980s with support from private foundations, such as the Ford Foundation and the DeWitt Wallace-Readers' Digest Fund (Clewell and Villegas 1998).

While the lack of racial/ethnic diversity among teachers has drawn some empirical attention, most studies conducted to date on this topic focus on strategies for recruiting more people of color into teaching (Villegas and Lucas 2004). Interestingly, little consideration has been given to articulating a research-based rationale for increasing the supply of teachers of color. In other words, what value (if any) do teachers of color add to schools and classrooms? Without a clear answer to this question, continued efforts to diversify the teaching force are at risk given the weight empirically-based evidence currently commands in making decisions regarding the use of limited public resources, including funding for education.

This article addresses the noted gap in the literature. We approached the task by reviewing the teacher diversity literature looking for arguments made for diversifying the teaching force and research that tested the validity of those arguments. We included work that has been published in peer-review journals or books as well as a handful of reports that have undergone the peer review process. Several relevant papers presented at recent annual meetings of the American Education Research Association were also included. Below we present the findings of our review and discuss their implications for research and practice.

Arguments for Diversifying the Teaching Force

From our literature review we gleaned three major arguments for diversifying the teaching force: (1) teachers of color serve as role models for all students; (2) the potential of teachers of color to improve the academic outcomes and school experiences of students of color; and (3) the workforce rationale. A discussion of each argument follows.

Teachers of Color Serve as Role Models for All Students

The push to diversify the teaching force first received national attention in the early 1980s, when scholars, educational leaders, and professional organizations began to warn that the widening cultural gulf that existed then between students of color and their teachers was a serious problem with profound social and educational implications (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy 1986; Cole 1986; Graham 1987; Irvine 1988). Critics argued that without considerable intervention, the cultural split already obvious in many classrooms would become even more salient in the years ahead, with the result that students of color and White students alike would rarely be taught by a teacher of color.

Many early teacher diversity advocates maintained that school is not only a setting where academic knowledge is constructed and transmitted, but also a place where values are fashioned in subtle but powerful ways. Given the influence of schooling on the formation of children's values, they thought it unacceptable for a

pluralistic society to expose public school students to an overwhelmingly White teaching force (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy 1986; Graham 1987).

Mercer and Mercer (1986) articulated this concern clearly. These authors asserted that the racial and ethnic composition of the teaching force sends strong messages to students about the distribution of power in American society. As they explained, if students failed to see adults of color in professional roles in schools and instead saw them over-represented in non-professional positions, they implicitly learned that White people are better suited than people of color to hold positions of authority in society. In keeping with this argument, early teacher diversity advocates insisted that a democratic society committed to the principle of equality, such as the United States, could not condone exposing children to few people of color in authority positions in the schools (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy 1986; Matcznski and Joseph 1989).

Implicit in this thinking is the assumption that teachers serve as role models for their students. According to Cole (1986), because many students of color are from economically impoverished backgrounds and tend to have few models in their communities of successful professionals who are racially/ethnically like themselves, they derive special benefits from exposure to teachers of color. As role models, teachers of color are believed to boost the self worth of students of color (Cole 1986; King 1993; Waters 1989), motivate this population of students to strive for social success (Smith 1989), and decrease the sense of alienation many students of color experience in schools and classrooms (Graham 1987).

White students were also said to benefit from exposure to a racially and ethnically diverse teaching force. According to Irvine (1988), seeing people of color in professional roles communicates to White students that adults of racial/ethnic minority backgrounds are successful and contributing members of society. Waters (1989) contends that ongoing interactions with teachers of color give White students opportunities to dispel myths of racial inferiority they might have internalized about people of color from their socialization outside schools.

The role model argument for diversifying the teaching force received renewed attention in 1998 when Richard Riley, the Secretary of Education under President Clinton, published an article in *Education in Urban Society* entitled “Our teachers should be excellent, and they should look like America.” In that piece, Secretary Riley repeated the role model rationale for increasing the diversity of the teaching force and emphatically insisted that “…children need to see themselves in the faces of their teachers.” (p. 19).

The appeal of the role model rationale is evident in several studies of pre-service and in-service teachers of color. In separate investigations, teacher candidates of color reported that serving as a role model for students of color was the primary reason for their wanting to teach (Guyton et al. 1996; Jones et al. 1999). More recently, Ochoa (2007) found that serving as a role model for Latino students was of central importance to Latino teachers. Similarly, Johnson (2008) reported that new teachers of color in her study believed they were “exemplars of possibility” for students of color. None of these works, however, examine directly the role modeling

effect of the participating teachers on their students. Nor do they illuminate the ways in which the assumed role model function works in real classrooms and schools.

Researchers who have looked at the effects of teachers of color on a variety of academic outcomes for students of color—a literature we discuss in the next section—often mention role modeling as a plausible explanation for the positive results they report (see Dee 2004; Evans 1992; Hess and Leal 1997; Pitts 2007; Stewart et al. 1989). But in none of those studies was the role model function attributed to teachers of color actually tested. Nor were we able to find any empirical research on this topic.

In brief, the role model argument for diversifying the teaching force is compelling. We suspect its appeal is a primary reason the role model rationale is cited with frequency in the teacher diversity literature. Yet, we were unable to locate any empirical studies that tested the claims inherent in the argument. Given the current emphasis on empirical-based decision-making in matters related to public policies, such lack of evidence dramatically limits the practical value of the role model argument.

The Potential of Teachers of Color to Improve the Academic Outcomes and School Experiences of Students of Color

A second major argument for diversifying the teaching profession is that teachers of color are particularly well suited to teaching students of color because they bring to their work a deep understanding of the cultural experiences of these learners. Such "cultural synchronicity" is said to give teachers of color an advantage over their White colleagues in advancing the academic outcomes of students of color and in improving their overall school experiences (Irvine 1988).

The importance of establishing cultural links between home and school for learners is supported by landmark studies in educational anthropology and cognitive science (see Heath 1983; Moll 1986; Tharp and Gallimore 1988; Vygotsky 1978). This line of research shows that, whether inside or outside school, learning occurs in a cultural context and involves an active construction of ideas. In their attempts to make sense of new learning input, students continuously strive to connect their prior knowledge and experiences—both individual and cultural—with the new ideas to which they are exposed. To be effective, teachers must therefore help students to build connections between what is already familiar to them, from their experiences inside and outside school, and the new content and skills to be learned. This view of learning and teaching provides a solid theoretical rationale for increasing the racial/ethnic diversity of the teaching force (Gollnick 2008; Villegas and Lucas 2002). Beyond this theoretical foundation, the notion that teachers of color are well positioned to facilitate learning for students of color receives support from a small but growing body of research.

In a chapter published in the latest *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*, Villegas and Davis (2008) reviewed 11 studies that examined the effects of teachers of color on a variety of outcomes for students of color. Below we discuss those investigations along with four others studies we located through our literature search. Some of these works used students' scores on standardized tests as the

outcomes measure, while others used alternative performance indicators, including absenteeism, high school dropout rates, college going rates, and enrollment rates in advanced-level high school courses. A clear pattern emerges from these empirical works.

Dee (2004) reanalyzed test score data from the Tennessee Project STAR class-size experiment originally conducted in the late 1980s. In that study, students were randomly assigned to teachers in the participating schools. Dee found that racial pairing of teachers and students significantly increased the reading and math achievement scores of African American students by three to four percentage points. The race effects were especially strong among poor African American students in racially segregated schools.

Clewell et al. (2005) raised the question: Does exposure to a same-race teacher increase the reading and mathematics achievement scores of African American and Hispanic students in elementary schools? Their findings show that Hispanic fourth and sixth graders taught by Hispanic teachersa had significantly higher test score gains in math than those taught by racially-dissimilar teachers. The same effect was noted in reading, but only at the fourth grade level. The effects for Black students with Black teachers were somewhat weaker, although Black fourth graders had significantly higher score gains in mathematics when taught by a same-race teacher.

Hanushek (1992) examined the impact of teacher race on the performance of Black students in vocabulary and reading. Scores on standardized tests were used to measure both dependent variables. The results of this investigation showed that Black teachers were significantly more successful than White teachers in increasing the students' achievement in both areas. Similarly, Evans (1992) found that African American students taught by African American teachers scored significantly higher on a test of economic literacy than those taught by teachers of another race.

Of the five works that looked at the effects of racially-paired teachers and students in our review, only one reported no academic benefits for students of color. In this particular study, Ehrenberg et al. (1995) examined student score gains between eight and tenth grades on tests of reading comprehension, science, history/ social studies, and mathematics. These researchers found no significant impact for a same-race teacher in any of the subject areas examined.

Using a different tack, Ehrenberg and Brewer (1995) found that increasing the percentage of Black teachers in a school (not necessarily pairing teachers and students by race) produced score gains for Black high school students, even when controlling for the non-random nature of teacher assignment to the schools. Likewise, Pitts (2007) reported that students of color had a significantly higher passing rate for high school graduation exams in school districts where the racial/ ethnic distribution of the teaching population approximated that of the student population. Consistent with the results reported by Pitts, Meire (1993) found that school districts with greater representation of Latino teachers were significantly more successful at getting Latino students to pass the high school graduation exam.

Similar positive results are reported in studies that looked at the effects of teachers of color on student outcomes other than test scores. For instance, England and Meier (1986) set out to determine the impact of various district variables—including the proportion of Black teachers—on a summary variable they called

"second generation discrimination." Indicators for this variable included placements in special education, admission to gifted programs, admission to enriched classes, suspension from schools, high school dropout rates, and rates of matriculation in vocational schools and in college. These researchers found that as the proportion of Black teachers in school districts with high enrollments Black students rose, incidents of second generation discrimination decreased significantly among this student population. A follow-up study by Meier et al. (1989) confirmed the original findings.

Fraga et al. (1986) found that an increase in the proportion of Hispanic teachers in large urban high school systems with high Hispanic enrollments reduced the dropout rates and boosted the college-going rates of Hispanic students. In like manner, Meire (1993) reported that increasing Latino representation in a school district's teaching force reduced the assignment of Latino students to special education, increased their placement in classes for the gifted, and lowered their rates of suspension and of expulsions from school.

Likewise, Hess and Leal (1997) reported that after controlling for relevant factors, large urban school districts with a high concentration of teachers of color had significantly higher overall college matriculation rates. Also, Klopfenstein (2005) found that upon completion of a geometry course, enrollments of Black students in Algebra II rose significantly as the percentage of Black mathematics teachers in the school increased. Finally, Farkas et al. (1990) discovered that African American students taught by African American teachers displayed markedly lower rates of absenteeism.

In sum, the empirical works discussed above suggests that students of color accrue academic benefits when taught by a same-race teacher or when exposed to a teaching force (at the school or district level) that is racially/ethnically representative of the student population. These works, however, give little insight into what teachers of color actually do to produce positive results for students of color. To address this topic, we turned to a substantial body of research—mostly qualitative in nature—that depicts the practices of successful teachers of color. From our review of this second set of investigations, we identified five practices: (a) having high expectations of students; (b) using culturally relevant teaching; (c) developing caring and trusting relationships with students; (d) confronting issues of racism through teaching; and (e) serving as advocates and cultural brokers. We discuss these practices next.

Having high expectations of students. The power of teacher expectations on student behavior is well documented in the literature (Irvine 1990; Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968). The phenomenon of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" is explained as follows. In making judgments about the academic potential of individual students in the class, the teacher develops different expectations for each student. Once formed, these expectations influence the interactions between teacher and students, resulting in positive or negative student performance, aspirations, and self-concept, which correspond to the teacher's original expectations.

In her 1990 publication, *Black Students and School Failure*, Irvine summarized 36 studies conducted from 1960 through 1985 on teacher and student race as related to teacher expectations. Three categories of works were included in her review:

experimental (non-classroom studies), teacher perceptions and attitude studies, and naturalistic classroom studies. In brief, Irvine found that teacher expectations are powerful contributors to the underachievement of African American students. While acknowledging the methodological limitations of some of the studies reviewed, she nevertheless concluded that White teachers tend to expect less of Black students than Black teachers do.

More recently, Oates (2003) found that the teachers she studied had significantly less favorable perceptions of Black students than of White students, even when controlling for relevant student variables (e.g., prior GPA, prior scores on standardized tests, and current grade track placement). She concluded that the pairing of Black students with Black teachers "shielded" those students from the anti-Black perceptions of White teachers.

Dee (2005) analyzed NELS 1988 data to determine the effect of racial pairing of teachers and students on teachers' subjective assessments of student behavior and performance. He found that both African American and Hispanic students were more likely to be viewed unfavorably by a teacher who was not of their same race/ethnicity. These teacher effects were most striking for students from economically poor families. Also using NELS data, Ehrenberg et al. (1995) found that teachers of color gave higher subjective evaluations to students of color than did White teachers.

Uhlenberg and Brown (2002) studied teachers' perceptions of possible causes and potential solutions to the Black-White test score gap. The researchers surveyed 54 teachers, an equal number of Black and White, who taught a variety of subjects in both primary and secondary schools. They found that White teachers tended to see the major determinants of the achievement gap as misbehavior and lack of effort on the part of Black children, uncooperative Black parents, and problems in the Black home environment. By contrast, Black teachers tended to believe that low teacher expectations were the primary contributor to the Black-White achievement gap.

Figlio (2005) investigated whether teachers treat students differently based on their "unusual names" and, if so, whether such differential treatment has an impact on the students' performance on standardized tests. Specifically, the researcher asked if a child's name signaled low teacher expectations. (The researcher argued that Black women with little formal education often give their children names that begin with certain prefixes, such as "lo," "ta" and "qua," and that end with certain suffixes, such as "isha" and "ious"). This researcher analyzed the records of 55,046 children in 24,294 families with two or more children from a large school district in Florida to see how those with Black-identifiable names fared in school compared to their brothers and sisters who had less unusual names. Interestingly, he found that teachers tended to treat children differently, depending on their names. A boy named Damarcus, for example, was less likely than his brother Dwayne to be referred to a gifted program, even with identical test scores. Black teachers, however, were less apt to form low expectations for students based on the children's ethnic or unusual names than their White colleagues.

The findings summarized above suggest that compared to White teachers, teachers of color have more favorable views of students of color, including more

positive perceptions regarding their academic potential. We believe this difference in expectations, and the interactions those expectations trigger in classrooms and schools, help explain the overall academic benefits students of color derive from a same-race teacher discussed above.

Using culturally relevant teaching. Establishing cultural congruence between the experiences students have at home and in school was another practice used by many of the teachers of color in the works we examined. The teaching of Marva Collins, an acclaimed African American teacher, as described by Hollins (1982), exemplifies this culturally relevant teaching approach in the context of teaching Black children. Collins' use of language in the classroom is a good example of this. According to the researcher, Collins occasionally corrected the students' grammar to signal to them the importance of mastering Standard English. However, she also encouraged the use of community language pattern in the classroom. For example, analogical comparisons often used in traditional African American speech were recurrent in her teaching. Jive talking, based on improvisations with language, was accepted as a viable means of communication in her classroom. According to Hollins, by capitalizing on the students' language resources, Collins was able to engage the students in tasks they might have otherwise rejected. Equally important, by using the language of the students, she let them know that their ways were valued and respected in school, thereby supporting the development of positive cultural identities. Still another cultural link between home and school was Collins' classroom use of interaction patterns commonly found in the African American church. These patterns included the use of analogies, audience participation, choral and responsive reading, and the identification of a moral or personal message from the passage read. (For other examples of culturally relevant classroom practices used by Black teachers, see the works of Foster 1989, 1993; Henry 1994; Ladson-Billings and Henry 1991).

Au (1980) described how one Hawaiian teacher created cultural congruence for Native Hawaiian students in her class. The teacher designed reading lessons in which the allocation of speaking turns resembled the rules of participation in the "talk story," a recurrent speech even in Hawaiian culture. Specifically, students were allowed to build joint responses during story time, either among themselves or together with the teacher. This strategy of collective turn-taking parallels the joint narration of a story by two or more individuals, which is typical of the talk story. The teacher also consistently accepted answers given by students in Hawaiian Creole English, as long as their content was accurate.

The interaction style of Native American teachers has also received a fair amount of attention in the research literature. For example, Mohatt and Erickson (1981) found the Indian teacher in their study taught her students in a slow and deliberate manner. She tended to interact with the class as a whole, without putting the spotlight on any single student. Instead, she preferred to deal with individuals in private situations. She also encouraged students to respond by pausing for relatively long periods of time before beginning to speak again. According to Mohatt and Erickson, this teacher's interaction style paralleled that used in Odawa homes. Other studies have characterized the communication processes preferred by Native American teachers in North America as giving importance to individual autonomy,

self-determination, and non-hierarchical leadership (see Philips 1983; Van Ness 1981; Barnhardt 1982).

In brief, by drawing on their knowledge of the students' cultural backgrounds, the teachers of color featured in the studies reviewed above successfully establish helpful bridges to learning for students who might have otherwise remained disengaged from school work. Such culturally-relevant practices, if used widely in schools, hold potential for reversing the persistent racial/ethnic achievement gap.

Developing caring and trusting relationships with students. The studies discussed next show that for teachers of color, teaching is about relationships. For example, in an 18-month ethnographic study of four multiethnic schools, researchers from the Institute for Education in Transformation concluded that caring was the most consistent and powerful finding related to school achievement for diverse students (Institute for Education in Transformation 1992). The research especially noted that caring is an important characteristic of teachers of color.

In an ethnographic study, Foster (1993) interviewed 17 experienced African American teachers about their perspectives on teaching. The teachers, whose ages ranged from 45 to 85 years, had 17 to 66 years of teaching experience. Their philosophies and pedagogies were rooted in their childhood experiences in the African American schools they had attended and the communities where they lived. According to the interviewees, their former teachers in segregated schools were caring individuals who treated pupils respectfully and had the highest academic expectations of them. One teacher in this study thought that relating to students as relatives allowed her to establish a special and intimate bond that helped decrease disciplinary and classroom management problems. She explained her caring approach to students of color as follows: "The first thing I do is try to become a mother to all of them. I tell them, as long as you are here with me, I'm your mama until you go back home, and when you go back home, you go to your other mother." (p.31). Studies by Ware (2006) and Dixson and Dingus (2008) have also documented this type of "other mothering." Similarly, Lynn (2006) found that African American male teachers saw themselves as "other fathers" who used tough love, discipline, and caring to bolster their students' academic success.

Collins (1991) provides a historical and cultural context for the term, "other-mothers." Women in West Africa, she explains, cared for the children of other women who were unable to provide for their own children. These "other mothers" were critical in African families and communities because no child was neglected or unsupervised. More recently, works by Dingus (2006), Hughes (2006), Morris and Morris (2002), and Walker (1996) describe how African American teachers in the pre-Brown South cared for their students in spite of the obstacles and challenges imposed by segregation.

The sense of caring also inspires the pedagogy of Latino teachers. The term *cariňo* reported by Rueda et al. (2004) literally means caring. Examples of *cariňo* in their work include instances where Latino paraprofessionals referred to their Latino students with kinship terms like mijo/mija (my son/my daughter) or *mi amor* (my love). The Latino teachers in this particular study believed that it was important to establish and foster a sense of *confianza* (trust), which includes sharing cultural experiences with students, and listening and relating to them as culturally connected

relatives. In addition to this interactive scaffolding, the educators provided the Latino students with language scaffolding, helped the non-Latino teachers connect with the Latino community, and assisted the teachers in contextualizing the students' lives. Similarly, Nieto (1994) contends that Hispanic teachers work to create a family atmosphere in the classroom in which the teacher is perceived by the students as a mother or godmother. In her view, the sense of trust these relationships inspire enables the students to feel at ease in the learning environment.

Confronting issues of racism through teaching. Some teachers of color see themselves engaged in "politically relevant teaching" (Beauboeuf-Lafont 1999). Such teachers, for example, feel responsible for helping their students confront issues of racism in society. They engage students in "colortalk" (Thompson 2004) that promotes racial socialization and racial consciousness. A teacher described by Perry et al. (2003) selected works of literature that "documented the truth about African people" and used instructional materials that "confronted racism and White supremacy behavior head on." (p. 153) Similarly, King (1991) concluded that African American teachers in her study embraced an "emancipatory pedagogy" aimed at advancing the interests of students when those interests were threatened by institutional concerns of their school systems.

Delpit (1988) underscores the importance of addressing issues of power in the classroom. She believes that to achieve academically, students of color must be assisted in understanding the distribution of power in American society. She argues that those who do not belong to the power group should be explicitly taught the means of access to power, including the ways of speaking, writing, and interaction used by the powerful. Specifically, students of color need to be taught to value racial and ethnic distinctions and to understand that the culture of the group of power, while instrumental in society, is not intrinsically superior to the culture of the less powerful minority groups.

Serving as advocates and cultural /brokers. According to Irvine (1990), teachers of color serve as advocates and mentors for students of color, helping them navigate the culture of the school, which is often contradictory and antithetical to their own cultures. They serve as a voice for these students when communicating with fellow teachers and administrators; when providing information about opportunities for advancement and enrichment; and when acting as counselors, advisors, and parent figures. She asserts that teachers of color often advocate for their students of color by questioning and defying rules and regulations that are not in the students' best interest.

Some teachers of color have been shown to serve as cultural brokers for students of color (Erickson 1986; Gentemann and Whitehead 1983). Such 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 and transitions into mainstream culture. Similarly, Darder (1993) reported that Latino teachers are the key to establishing and maintaining positive relationships with Latino parents because they "utilize a very personal and direct approach in their communication with them" (p. 211).

Nieto (1999) found that teachers of color have often experienced inequality and alienation in their own schooling and can relate to students of color in ways that White teachers cannot. Teachers of color, she contends, understand linguistic and cultural student codes, and often share the hopes, dreams, and expectations of their families. In a study that compared teachers of Latino and non-Latino backgrounds, Garcia-Nevarez et al. (2005) found Latino teachers were more positive and accepting of Latino students' use of their native language than non-Latino teachers. One Latino teacher who identified with the struggles of her students noted: "For me my first language was Spanish, and I was put in a class that was all English, as I was always behind, no matter what. I had a similar background to what these kids have (p. 310)."

To summarize, the studies reviewed above lend solid support to the validity of the second rationale mentioned in the literature for diversifying the teaching force—that teachers of color use their insider knowledge about the language, culture, and life experiences of students of color to improve their academic outcomes and school experiences. Specifically, we reviewed two distinct sets of research related to this second argument. The first included mostly large-scale quantitative investigations of the effects of teachers of color on a variety of academic outcomes for students of color. In general, the findings from those works suggest that students of color benefit from exposure to teachers of color. Such benefits are evident in test scores, high school completion rates, college matriculation rates, school attendance, and enrollment in academically rigorous classes. To gain insight into what teachers of color actually do to make a difference in the school outcomes and school experiences of students of color, we reviewed a second set of investigations. These used mostly qualitative methodologies to describe the beliefs and practices of selected teachers of color. From our review, we identified five specific practices that might help explain the favorable effects of teachers of color reported in the literature—holding high expectations, using culturally relevant teaching, developing caring and trusting relationships, confronting issues of racism in teaching, and serving as advocates and cultural brokers for students. Such culturally-inspired expertise is a unique resource that teachers of color bring to the teaching profession.

The Workforce Rationale

Beyond the role model function and the culturally-inspired practices discussed above, teachers of color have also been shown to contribute to the education of students of color by reducing the acute shortage of educators for high-minority urban schools. In so doing, they help address a pressing workforce problem (Elfers et al. 2006; Horng 2005; Jonsson 2003; Kirby et al. 1999; Murnane et al. 1991; Scafidia et al. 2007; Willett et al. 1991). This is the third major argument mentioned in the literature for recruiting more people of color into teaching—particularly for school systems that serve large numbers of students of color.

In a study that looked across high-poverty school districts, Scafidia et al. (2007) found that as the enrollment of African American students rose, retention was

significantly higher for African American teachers than White teachers. They also reported that the departure of White teachers from those districts was influenced much more so by the students' race than by their poverty status. Consistent with this finding, Jonsson (2003) reported that White teachers in Georgia tended to leave schools that enrolled large numbers of African American students, whether they were of middle class or low-income backgrounds.

Using data from two states—North Carolina and Michigan—Murnane et al. (1991) found that teachers of color in their sample stayed longer in teaching than White teachers, even after controlling for district-level fixed effects. Similarly, Elfers et al. (2006) discovered that teachers of color in the state of Washington were more apt to remain teaching in high-minority schools compared to White teachers. In Texas, Kirby et al. (1999) found that among cohorts of teachers who had entered the profession between 1987 and 1996, Hispanics showed the lowest early attrition rates. Likewise, in a study of 541 teachers in one California elementary school district, Horng (2005) reported that Latino teachers were more likely than White teachers to remain in low-performing, high-minority schools.

Differences in motivation for entering teaching could explain, at least in part, both the concentration of teachers of color in urban schools and their high retention rates in these settings. Studies of pre-service teachers consistently reveal that working with students of color and improving their educational outcomes and personal lives is the primary reason teacher candidates of color give for entering the teaching profession (Belcher 2001; Kauchak and Burback 2003; Horng 2005; Rios and Montecinos 1999; Su 1997; Wilder 1999).

Research suggests that people of color make their decision to enter teaching in a deliberate and thoughtful manner. For instance, Irvine (2002) reported that African American teachers in her study tended to see teaching as a "calling," reminiscent of the historic "lifting as we climb" philosophy. She also found that study participants saw their work as having a religious and spiritual purpose. Along the same lines, Casey (1993) reported that to Black teachers, teaching meant "raising the race," a type of work that involves accepting personal responsibility for the well-being and education of Black students. Similarly, Dixson and Dingus (2008) showed that African American teachers in their investigation purposefully entered teaching to "give back" to the community. Given this community-oriented perspective, it is not surprising that many teachers of color return to teach in their community of origin (Lynn 2006; Su 1997), and if they live in poor urban communities—as do many paraeducators of color who eventually become teachers—they tend to stay teaching at those sites (Villegas and Clewell 1998).

In summary, the evidence suggests that compared to White teachers, educators of color appear to be more committed to teaching students of color, more drawn to teaching in difficult-to-staff urban schools, and more apt to persist in those settings. Thus, recruiting and preparing more people of color for the teaching profession has the potential to not only expand the overall supply of teachers for the most demanding and difficult-to-staff schools, but also alleviate the high rate of attrition in those settings.

Summary and Conclusion

We set out to identify the major arguments cited in the literature for diversifying the teaching force and assess their validity. Our review uncovered three such arguments—the role modeling effects of teachers of color, the potential of teachers of color to build cultural bridges to learning for students of color, and the workforce rationale. Of the three arguments we reviewed, the role modeling assertion is the least well developed. According to this explanation, the mere presence of teachers of color in schools and classrooms is believed to motivate students of color to become successful adults. Lamentably, we were unable to locate research that tested the validity of this claim. The absence of empirical work on this topic does not necessarily mean that teachers of color do not function as role models for their students. However, without empirical evidence to support it, the role model rationale for diversifying the teaching force is not defensible in today's context of evidence-driven decision-making. The continued use of this rationale demands research designed specifically to examine the presumed role model effects of teachers of color.

The assertion that teachers of color have the potential to build bridges to learning for students of color is supported by a broad body of empirical works, some of which examines the effects of exposing students of color to racially/ethnically-like teachers. This research provides evidence that students of color benefit directly when paired with a teacher of their same race/ethnicity, and indirectly when attending a school system where teachers of racial/ethnic minority groups are equitably represented. We also reviewed studies that shine light on the practices of teachers of color that seem to account for their positive effects on students of color. A word of clarification is in order, however. It would be simplistic to assume that all racial/ethnic minority teachers are effective with minority students merely by virtue of their race/ethnicity. Without question, the insight into the lives of racial/ethnic minority students and the experience of living in a racist and ethnocentric society that people of color bring to the profession give them an advantage over their White colleagues in teaching students of color. But to act on this potential, teachers of color must also possess in-depth knowledge of the subject matter they teach and substantial pedagogical preparation. Without these professional tools, the promise of a diverse teaching force will most likely remain unfulfilled.

The argument that people of color can help alleviate the severe shortage of teachers in high-minority schools is also bolstered by empirical evidence. The research we reviewed paints a clear picture. People of color are more drawn to teaching in high-minority schools and are more likely to remain in these settings than their White colleagues. Thus, increasing the supply of teachers of color for high-minority schools promises to lend continuity to the learning experiences of students enrolled in those schools by maintaining a more stable teaching force.

Our review suggests that increasing the diversity of the teaching force is a crucial component of a comprehensive strategy for addressing the achievement gap that historically has existed between students of color and their White counterparts. As we discussed above, well prepared teachers of color could play a powerful role in improving the educational outcomes of students of color. While many states

currently have minority teacher recruitment policies, no such policy exists at the national level. The federal government should assume a leadership role on matters related to teacher diversity, sponsoring programs that aim to prepare qualified teachers of color and supporting partnerships between and among different organizations/agencies (e.g., school districts, four-year colleges, two-year colleges, teachers' unions) specifically intended for this purpose.

Another implication that flows from this review is that high-minority school districts should actively recruit more teachers of color. The research demonstrates that increasing the diversity among teachers within a school system has both direct and indirect payoff for students of color. To maximize their supply of teachers of color, high-minority districts might consider collaborating with other agencies to develop both short-term and long-term programs that pursue nontraditional recruits—including paraprofessionals, community college students, retired military personnel, and career-switchers—in addition to more traditional sources of new hires.

More research is needed as well. Additional studies that link the representation of teachers of color to student performance outcomes are essential. Such investigations should include interviews with teachers and students to illuminate the mechanisms at work that explain the quantitative results. We also need a more nuanced understanding of factors that might account for the retention of teachers of color, particularly in high-minority school districts. Equally important, we need to learn more about how best to prepare teacher candidates of color to use their cultural expertise to support student learning.

Having reviewed the conceptual and empirical literature, we are convinced that teacher race and ethnicity do matter in the education of students of color. The evidence confirms that well prepared teachers of color add value to schools and classrooms. They have the potential for improving the educational experiences and academic outcomes of students of color, thereby helping address the pernicious racial/ethnic achievement gap, a major problem with profound implications for the health of this country. Thus, efforts to increase the diversity of the teacher force must be a central component of any policy initiative intended to provide a high-quality education to all students, not just some.

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