

Strategies to Increase the Number of Minority Teachers in the Public Schools

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There can be very little argument that in recent years the teaching profession has become whiter and whiter as fewer minorities and people of color have entered and remained in the teaching profession, and as such, the percentage of white Americans in the field has continued to increase. Out of the approximately 2.3 million K-12 teachers in 1987, only 10.3 percent were minority group members. Current estimates report that by the mid 1990s this number will be further reduced to about five percent.¹ If this trend is not reversed, the teaching profession will be close to being entirely white by early in the twenty-first century. The fact that this is occurring at a time when minority populations of students in these same schools are dramatically increasing makes this situation even more confounding. Table 1 illustrates the relative populations by ethnicity of students and teachers in the public schools today.² As can be seen from this table, the relative population of the teaching force is not even close to being representative of the composition of the student body in terms of ethnicity.

TABLE 1

	BLACK	HISPANIC	ASIAN	WHITE
STUDENT POPULATION	16.2%	9.1%	2.5%	71.2%
TEACHING FORCE	6.9%	1.9%	0.9%	89.7%

There are some who might argue that these numbers are insignificant because all students have an equal opportunity to learn in any classroom which is staffed

by an able teacher, but as one looks at the disparate levels of achievement by students of the various ethnic groups, it seems no coincidence that majority students tend to reflect higher levels of achievement on almost every measurement device. It is, therefore, the opinion of this writer that the underrepresentation of people of color in the teaching force contributes at least in part to these disparate levels of achievement. While success is not impossible, its probability is somewhat dampened by the fact that the very image of academic success, the teaching force itself, appears to be dominated by white, middle-class Americans. This sentiment is perhaps best summed up by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education: "Black, Hispanic and other minority youngsters need role models in order to learn more effectively . . . [and to] enhance a child's impression of what he or she can be."³ A sea of white faces wearing the trappings of academic success while only a handful of people of color are so attired gives the not-so-subtle impression that only whites have the capability to succeed and, therefore, effort is at best fruitless.

This situation has another even more insidious effect, that of even further reducing the participation of ethnic and cultural minorities in education. Students who do break the odds and do achieve and succeed academically tend to feel that the field of education is the special enclave of white Americans and, therefore, tend to gravitate to other professions where they perceive themselves as being more welcome. Underrepresentation of minorities tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If ethnic and cultural minorities are to succeed in the public schools across the United States at rates equal to those of majority youngsters, the numbers and percentages of minority teachers must be increased. Students need the opportunity to relate to those who have had similar experiences in American society and who understand first-hand the problems and difficulties that they encounter. An increase in the numbers of minority teachers would have another, perhaps even stronger, benefit: that of educating their fellow professionals. A greater interaction of teachers from differing ethnic and cultural groups could help to foster greater understanding of the cultural differences and similarities between majority and minority youngsters and lead, in turn, to a better quality of education for all children, majority and minority alike, who reside in this multicultural world. Again, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education has summed up this sentiment most clearly: "Minority teachers bring with them an inherent understanding of the backgrounds, attitudes and experiences of students from certain groups and, therefore, can help inform majority teachers on effective ways and means to communicate with these youngsters."⁴

Nicklos and Brown postulate three basic reasons why there has been a decrease in the percentages of minority teachers in the past decade.⁵ The first of these is that there is a smaller percentage of minority students attending college today. This, in turn, has reduced the prospective pool from which potential teacher candidates can be recruited. The US Department of Education reported that between 1976 and 1986, while the number of black students enrolled in any college increased by only 48,000 students and the number of Hispanic students

increased by only 240,000 students, the number of white students increased by 898,000 students.⁶ This disparate enrollment trend only confounds the difficulty of minority recruitment into schools, departments, and colleges of teacher education.

A second factor postulated by Nicklos and Brown is that many states, California and Texas among them, have instituted standardized testing programs as a basis for admittance to teacher education programs. These tests have been found to serve as barriers to many potential minority teachers to teacher education programs, and at a rate considerably higher than for non-minority candidates. It is obvious that any arbitrary barrier to minority applicants can only confound an already difficult situation.

A third factor brought forth is that many minority students who have graduated from colleges and universities have chosen careers other than teaching. Not too many years back, one of the only professional career choices available to minority college graduates was teaching. This has changed. Now that opportunities exist for minority college graduates in better paying fields than education, many have chosen these more lucrative routes. This is one of those rare cases where a gain in the opportunity of minority members has, in turn, hurt the teaching profession in any efforts that have been made to recruit more minority teaching candidates.

In light of these situations, it becomes increasingly imperative that schools, departments, and colleges of education work cooperatively with other agencies to recruit and retain quality minority teachers. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education posited that there are “four Cs of recruitment” that must be undertaken to rectify the disparate rate of underrepresentation of minorities in the field of education.⁷ The first of these “Cs” is “Concern.” Educational agencies must first realize that there is, indeed, a problem of underrepresentation of minorities in the field and they, in turn, must be willing to confront and attack the problem.

Next, there must be a “Commitment” to solving the problem. Agencies must commit themselves to using responsible leadership to spearhead efforts to recruit minority teachers into the profession. A commitment must also be there to follow through with sufficient resources to serve as incentives for the support and participation of staff members to assist in the goals of recruiting more minority group members into the profession.

The third “C” is “Collaboration.” Schools, colleges, and departments of education must work cooperatively with state agencies as well as with public schools to help rectify this situation. These groups must be willing to share information, resources, and responsibility in order to develop meaningful programs that can be successful at bringing about changes in the numbers of minority teachers brought into the profession.

The final “C” is “Creativity.” Those who are involved with the recruitment process must be aware of successful approaches that have been employed in other states and locales and then must be flexible enough to adopt and adapt these approaches to their own particular situation, and to develop new approaches to

either supplement or change current restrictions to the recruitment process. Successful means must be developed to remove any barriers which prevent minority group members from entering the teaching profession. The impact of standardized testing, as an example of only one barrier for non-white students, has significantly exacerbated the shortage of minority teachers, as reported by Garibaldi,⁸ yet:

there is not factual evidence that any of the tests used or any presently available to measure preservice or inservice teachers have predictive validity or that they can differentiate between competent and incompetent teachers or teaching candidates.⁹

Barriers such as these that seem to serve no useful purpose must be eliminated.

A good place to start is to recognize the different pools from which potential minority teachers can be attracted. Research shows that there are three main pools from which these candidates can be drawn, only one of which—those students who are already enrolled in colleges and universities—has been seriously utilized historically by schools of education. The other two pools are the pre-college students and the non-traditional students.

Research shows that students typically decide by their junior high school years whether they plan to attend college or not. It seems appropriate, then, to begin the recruitment process when students are in those formative years. Schools, departments, and colleges of education can begin to disseminate information about teacher education programs, internships, and financial aid programs to students at this time. Direct mail campaigns can be undertaken to impart this information to potential minority candidates. Information hotlines can be set up to answer student questions about programs that are available. Faculty and students from the various schools of education can come to the public school campuses to speak to the students about the college, a specific program, or about the career in general. Interested students can then be taken to the university campus for tours and further information sessions.

For efforts of this type to be successful, parents should be involved. For this reason both information booths and sessions can be held on parent nights at the local schools where parents can also be informed about the availability of higher education and the financial aid programs available.

In some cases college courses can even be offered, with tuition waived, for qualified minority high school students at the local public school site. These courses can count for credit either at the high school or college level. As was mentioned earlier, one of the key words is “creativity.”

A successful pre-college program must be more, however, than merely providing information or a course or two. Qualified minority students must be sought out and given the support and assistance needed to help ensure academic success. Workshops can be sponsored to help students prepare for the various college entrance examinations with which they will be confronted, as well as other workshops on school study skills. At these workshops assistance can also be given which will help students select the proper and necessary courses to ensure themselves the prerequisites for college admittance.¹⁰

These efforts at recruitment cannot start and stop at the public school level. A key element for the successful recruitment of minority students into both graduate and undergraduate programs is the presence of minority faculty to serve as mentors and role models for the minority youngsters. For this reason minority faculty members must become involved in these efforts at the direct level.¹¹ University administrators must provide the initiative for this type of program to succeed. Aside from undertaking the effort to recruit more minority faculty members into their own schools, appropriate credit must be given in the RPT (Retention, Promotion, and Tenure) process to faculty members who participate in the recruitment efforts. This effort, as time consuming as it is, should carry at least as much weight in the RPT process as does any publication, in that in the long run, a significant increase in the number of minorities in the profession will far outweigh the potential benefit of virtually any one individual publication.

The public schools themselves must be a part of this process in that they must come to the realization that minority children are not “throw-aways.” The preparation of minority students in both elementary and secondary urban schools must be improved at least to a level of parity with that of non-minority children in suburban schools. Additional attention must also be paid to increasing the retention and graduation rates of minority students to ensure a larger pool of prospective education majors.¹²

The neglect that has been common in many urban, minority schools has had an even more insidious effect on educational equity, that of subtly discouraging individuals from entering the teaching profession. Studies have shown that individuals generally choose a profession based upon the interactions that they have had in the past with that profession; if these interactions have been positive, there is a greater likelihood that this profession will be chosen. Therefore, it can be said that there is a connection between the quality of schooling offered to minority youth and the recruitment of more minorities into teaching. Since in the urban schools (where a majority of black and Hispanic students can be found) there is often an aura of educational decay that has come about through a lack of funding as compared to the funding levels of suburban schools, it is unlikely that many successful minority students would have had sufficient positive interactions to want to subject themselves to a life of work in the schools that they have experienced.¹³ For this reason it is imperative that the quality of urban schools be improved to come to parity with suburban schools.

A second pool for potential teachers consists of students who are currently enrolled in colleges and universities. Since current figures indicated that forty-five percent of all black students enrolled in institutions of higher learning are enrolled at two-year schools, and that the highest percentage of all minority students who are enrolled in institutions of higher learning are found at the community colleges, it is only logical that the recruitment drive should start there.¹⁴ Schools, colleges, and departments of education can hold articulation sessions on the site of the community college where assistance in the transfer process to the four-year institution can be provided. At this same time information about both financial aid and education as a career can be disseminated. In this

way the potential students can receive accurate information not only on which courses they will be able to transfer, but also on which courses it would be advantageous to take to begin a career in teaching. Providing information, however, is not enough. The university can go as far as to offer education courses on the community college site through their office of extended education. This would help the student make a commitment to the profession before actually making a transfer to the four-year institution, and thus, would probably increase the likelihood of that transfer taking place. This outreach would help to convince the student that he or she is, indeed, viewed as a valuable commodity by the educational establishment.

For students who are already at the four-year institution, recruitment can start by means as simple as inviting potential students to a picnic sponsored by the school of education where they can be recruited by faculty and other students. Information can be provided in an informal setting as to how a teaching credential can be obtained. The effort cannot cease once the student has made a commitment to the school of education. That is when the real effort must begin. Faculty and student mentors should be assigned, and academic advising and tutoring centers should be established to maintain students both in the program as well as in the university.

Some schools of education, in conjunction with local boards of education, have established early teaching contract programs. In this type of program, promising minority teacher candidates are guaranteed a teaching position at a specific site upon completion of the credentialing program. Knowing that they have a position waiting for them provides a strong incentive to remain in the program.¹⁵ Other schools of education, in conjunction with state agencies, have developed forgivable loan programs. Under this plan educational loans taken out by the student will be forgiven after a specified period of service in the public schools. Again, this can provide a rather strong incentive to remain in the program.¹⁶

A third potential pool which has been relatively untapped consists of the non-traditional student. Teacher aides and paraprofessionals are excellent sources for potential teachers. Since these individuals are currently employed by the public schools, they already have some sort of a commitment to the field of education. One plan, called a Career Mobility Program, has shown itself to be particularly effective. Under this program, a paraprofessional is able to continue his or her employment in the schools, but is permitted to take a specified number of courses per year until the requirements for the teaching credential have been met. Traditionally, the expenses have been borne either by the university which waives the tuition, or by the local education agency, which picks up the tuition tab. There can also be some combination of the two. In this way the paraprofessional is able to continue to be employed while earning the required credential at no additional expense. When one considers the relatively low pay of the average paraprofessional in education, the benefits to the individual are quite evident.¹⁷

Another potential source of non-traditional students is the military. In some cases schools of education have collaborated with military bases, and either

through direct mailings or through career workshops held on the base, contact has been made with retiring personnel. Information can thus be presented to these individuals on how to obtain teaching credentials. Some universities have even developed a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) Program whereby an individual is able to get both a master's degree and a teaching credential simultaneously. As was mentioned previously, all it takes to succeed is commitment to the ideals of minority recruitment and the creativity to develop a means to implement that creativity.

Some states now have programs that are proving to be quite successful in the recruitment of minority teachers. North Carolina's "Project Teach" is one such example.¹⁸ The program starts at the secondary school level. Community based teams go into the public schools and work with minority youngsters on how to get into and stay in school. Test taking skills and academic counseling are among the concepts treated. For those students who wish to enter a teaching program, teaching fellowships are established. Teaching fellowships consist of a loan forgiveness program wherein the black or Native American student may receive up to five thousand dollars per year for up to four years while pursuing a degree and a teaching credential. This loan is forgiven if the person teaches in the North Carolina public schools for a period of four years.

The State of Virginia has developed its own program called the "Teacher Cadet Program."¹⁹ This program is targeted at middle school students. Potential academically capable minority students are selected to study and learn the skills of teaching. These students who have also entered into a mentor relationship with a successful teacher then assist in tutoring other, younger students. It has been found that this program has been very successful in elevating the academic self-esteem of the participating students as well as the academic abilities of both the tutored and the tutoring students. It will take a few more years to determine, however, if this program will be successful at bringing more minorities into the teaching profession. The initial results, however, look so promising that three other states, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Georgia, are planning to implement similar programs.

The University of Rochester has come up with its own program to bring minorities into teaching. That university started a program called "Fifth Year for Teaching," in which students earn a master's degree in education and provisional certification. In this program black and Hispanic students receive loans to cover the cost of tuition, room, and board which are forgivable if the student teaches for one year in an urban school. Thus far twelve students have completed the three-semester program, which began in fall 1988, and eight have already taught for a year. Five new students began their studies in September 1990. The university currently intends to expand its program to include guidance counselors as well as teachers.²⁰

The School of Education at California State University has examined the programs that have been initiated at these and other institutions and has created its own program to increase the percentage of underrepresented minorities in education. This program is called "Excellence and Equity in Teaching: Building

for the Future Today.” There are two major directions to this project. This first direction is to identify and recruit minority classroom aides to enroll either in community colleges in their service areas or California State University, San Bernardino in a degree program leading to a teaching credential. The goals and activities of this direction are to:

1. Identify and recruit minority classroom aides employed in school districts of the service area of the respective community college or university.
2. Assess the candidates in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics at the respective community college.
3. Assign the student to a specific counselor for academic and personal advisement.
4. Advise students in the appropriate transferable courses to CSUSB and provide them with a transfer contract.
5. Provide information on requirements for admittance to CSUSB credential programs in the areas of GPA, CBEST, and general information.
6. Provide information on financial aid, intern, and student teacher placement.

The second direction is aimed at younger potential students, and this is the initiation of a “Career in Education Club” for minority students interested in a career in education at one of the local junior high schools. With continued and increased funding, it is anticipated that this direction will be enlarged to more campuses in the coming years. The club goals and activities are as follows:

1. Establishment of a teacher club on campus, with special emphasis on the recruitment of LEP students.
2. Students are taught various techniques in peer tutoring, cross-age tutoring, and presentation of a lesson.
3. Peer tutoring sessions are conducted after school.
4. Students during their interim break are assigned to one of the feeder elementary schools as cross-aged tutors or as teachers.
5. Students attend workshops on careers in education, financial aid, and general information on attending a two-year or a four-year college.

The co-directors of this project are Drs. Juan Gutierrez and Esteban Diaz.

If the schools of the twenty-first century are to do a better job of educating ethnic and cultural minority students than they have in the twentieth, the doors to the profession must be opened to minority teachers. While opening these doors will not be an easy task, it is a very necessary one, and one that will only be achieved if all of the educational levels are willing to work together to help bring it about. It will take time, it will take money, and it will take a concerted effort, but the children of this and the generations to come deserve it. The work must be started now.

Notes

¹American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), "Recruiting Minority Teachers: A Practical Guide," US Resources in Education, ERIC Document ED 315 416, 1989.

²*Ibid.*, 1.

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵ L.B. Nicklos and W.S. Brown, "Recruiting Minorities into the Teaching Profession; An Educational Imperative," *Educational Horizons* 67, 4 (Summer 1989): 145-49.

⁶US Department of Education. "College Enrollment by Racial and Ethnic Group, Selected Years," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 36, 1 (September 6, 1989): 17.

⁷AACTE, 1.

⁸A.M. Garibaldi, "The Impact of School and College Reforms on the Recruitment of More Minority Teachers," in *Teacher Recruitment and Retention with a Special Focus on Minority Teachers*, ed. A.M. Garibaldi, U.S. Resources in Education, ERIC Document ED 314 3182, 1989.

⁹S. Spellman, "Recruitment of Minority Teachers: Issues, Problems, Facts, Possible Solutions," *Journal of Teacher Education* 39, 4 (July/August 1988): 58-62.

¹⁰M.M. Waters, "An Agenda for Educating Black Teachers," *The Educational Forum* 53, 3 (Spring 1989): 267-79.

¹¹J.R. Wittstruck, R.J. Hess, and R. Stein, "Challenges and Opportunities: Minorities in Missouri Higher Education," U.S. Resources in Education, ERIC Document ED 310 821, 1988.

¹²D. Alston, N. Jackson, and H. Pressman, "State Action to Increase the Supply of Minority Teachers," in *Teacher Recruitment and Retention with a Special Focus on Minority Teachers*, ed. by A.M. Garibaldi, U.S. Resources in Education, ERIC Document ED 314 3182, 1989.

¹³M. Haberman, "More Minority Teachers," *Phi Delta Kappan* 70, 10 (June 1989): 771-79.

¹⁴M. Haberman.

¹⁵AACTE.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸Alston, et. al.

¹⁹AACTE.

²⁰"Teacher Education Update," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 37, 2 (September 12, 1990): A21.

Critique

In the course of his article, Kraig reviews a number of important ways to assure the recruitment and increase of minority teachers in the public school system. He also discusses specific programs which could stand as exemplary efforts directed at the daunting task of increasing the number of minorities in the educational pipeline, and ultimately, in the public school setting. Before examining these model programs and strategies, Kraig reviews the current and future demographic trends which suggest that the "relative population of the teaching force is not even close to being representative of the composition of the student body in terms of ethnicity." This statistical revelation enables Kraig to advance his first reason for increasing the number of minorities in education—namely, that the ethnic representation of the student population should in some way be matched by a comparable percentage in the ethnicity of those hired to teach in the public schools.

What seems to be missing from this statistical rationale, which is widely supported, and from the subsequent reasons advanced for increasing minority teachers and education majors, is a critical analysis of the current ideas supporting what seems to be a most laudable social and educational objective. While few can argue with the nation-wide need to increase the number of minority teachers in our schools and faculty in our universities, others might challenge some of the basic ideas advanced by Kraig and others as to what precisely we hope will change once the ideal numbers of minority teachers are in place in our schools and universities. This reviewer suggests that some of the connections that Kraig assumes to be true may have alternative explanations, and may indeed be linked to *how* we train our nation's teachers (minority or not) and how we fund our schools.

Kraig suggests, for example, that lower levels of achievement ("on almost every measurement") of minority children and "underrepresentation of people of color in the teaching force contributes at least in part to [these] disparate levels of achievement." Is this connection so unidirectional, and if it isn't, what part