

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

does teacher training, curriculum, and inequitable funding play in this complex web of interacting phenomena that contribute to why children fail or succeed in American education?¹ I wonder why Kraig chooses not to include some very important research examples of these other correlations. What does the research literature have to say about these connections? While there seem to be views on both sides of the issue, we can't simply assume that increasing the number of minority teachers in our schools would automatically have the net effect of increasing achievement levels if we don't begin to address the most fundamental inequities in American education.

Of course, a good deal of what Kraig advances is also based on the proposition that minority students increase their chances of developing a positive sense of self only by relating to teachers who "have had similar experiences in American society and who understand first-hand the problems and difficulties they encounter." And indeed, role-models are a critical part of any positive educational experience. This too is another one of those propositions that on the surface seems to make a good deal of sense, but if examined more closely for its long term implications, will begin to produce some pedagogical and social complexities.

Pflaum and Abramson, in their research on the hiring of minority teachers in New York City, raise a number of cautionary questions.² Among them, they suggest that "the education of any group of children is not the responsibility of any one ethnic group."³ They agree with Bank's concern, that the assumption that minority children are best taught by minority teachers is a "view that releases nonminority teachers from their responsibility."⁴ In Kraig's ideal world, will nonminority teachers be exempt from addressing what seems to be the most intractable social and pedagogical problems facing American schools today, or will they simply pass these on to the minority educator?

Continuing this line of reasoning, Kraig sees yet another benefit beyond that of modelling success. He suggests that as the number of minority teachers increases, they could take on the role of "Educating their fellow (nonminority) professionals." To underscore this notion, Kraig quotes the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education as follows: "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." What does having an "inherent understanding" really mean as far as the complexities of class, race, and ethnicity are concerned? Would the obverse be true? Can *majority* teachers help inform *minority* teachers on effective ways and means to communicate with *these* majority youngsters? Does this kind of proposition also suggest that majority teachers have a so-called "inherent understanding" of majority youngsters?

This is clearly a suggestion that has profound training and teacher placement implications. Can we really justify an in-service training model that simply asks minority educators (formally or informally) to teach nonminority teachers about race and ethnicity in American education? If this is the case, then why have we been struggling for so many years to make ethnic studies an essential and critical

part of the core in university education? And why are the proponents of a multicultural education currently waging a struggle to end generations of a monocultural education? Race and ethnic relations in our schools are as much an interactive and historically volatile phenomenon as they are in our society. It seems that the job of training should be assigned to those professionals—minority and nonminority alike—who are trained and skilled in specific areas of education. To assume that minority teachers have an “inherent understanding” of minority youngsters may inadvertently advance the misperception that distinct racial/ethnic communities exist as monolithic masses.

Kraig lists many interesting experimental projects that have been specifically designed to increase the numbers of minorities in the education pipeline. All of these efforts, Kraig suggests, must be supported if we are going to begin to encourage minorities to go into the teaching profession. He also points to a number of barriers that serve to block minority access: the gatekeeping function of entrance and qualifying exams (National Teacher Exams and other standardized testing programs); the recent move, on the part of minority graduates, to steer away from education as a career choice because of the higher salaries offered in other fields; the poor articulation that exists between our nation’s community colleges and the teacher training institutions; the desperate need for access to financial aid programs; and the discouragement of entering a profession that for so many minority students is associated with the worse aspects of the urban experience. Anecdotal information, however, would suggest that some minority educators were attracted to the teaching profession precisely because they felt a profound sense of obligation to go back into the community and contribute to fundamental educational change.

By listing an array of programs designed to enhance minority participation in teaching, Kraig begins to touch the outer boundaries of the major issues that plague American education. In his next exploration into this area of research, this reviewer would urge that he examine these major issues and why efforts to recruit more minority teachers must necessarily be placed within a larger educational and social context. The important task of increasing the number of minority teachers in our nation’s schools is inextricably linked to all aspects of education, and achieving that critical goal cannot be separated from the entire American educational enterprise.

— Jesse M. Vázquez
Queens College, City University of New York

Notes

¹For a detailed discussion of the issue of equity in school funding and segregation in American schools, see J. Kozol, *Savage Inequities: Children in America’s Schools* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991).

²S. W. Pflaum and T. Abramson, “Teacher Assignment, Hiring, and Preparation: Minority Teachers in New York City,” *The Urban Review* 22 (1990): 17-31.

³ Pflaum and Abramson, 29.

⁴ J. R. Banks, "Commentary," *Education Week* 8 (1989): 21.