



Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color

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by Dr. Rosemarie Allen

Aliyah Cook, a third grade student in a suburban Denver school district, wondered why there were no Black teachers at her school. She had never had a Black teacher, in spite of living in an upper middle class environment with highly visible African American role models. Community role models included lawyers, doctors, engineers and even judges. Aliyah wrote a letter to the school's principal asking why the school had no black teachers. Later, she expressed the same sentiment during a speech saying, "It all started when I realized I was a proud black girl," I wondered, "Will I ever have a black teacher while I am in Cherry Creek schools? "I know, that most of the students are white, but there are many black students. Has a black person ever walked into this school and asked for a job as a teacher? If so, why didn't they get hired?"

Black teachers currently comprise 8% of the workforce. Black males are less than 2% of all teachers. Similarly, less than 7% of teachers are Hispanic and male Hispanic teachers comprise 2% of the teacher workforce (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton &

Freitas, 2010). How do we address the shortage of teachers of color in our schools? The problem is multifaceted and very complex. It must be addressed at various levels that include (a) teacher preparation programs, (b) the hiring processes, and (c) throughout the teacher's tenure.

I spoke to a friend who'd dropped out of the teacher education program at a University in Southern California. She said she felt isolated and often ignored. During the year she was a student, she was the victim of many microaggressions. Her instructors rarely interacted with her yet asked her to speak on nearly every issue regarding African American students. When her opinion differed from that of the majority, she was frequently challenged and her views dismissed. At one point a classmate told her that by constantly bringing up racial inequities, she was 'fueling the flames of racism'. With no response from the instructor she felt unprotected and unsupported. By the end of the first year she became very frustrated and left the program. The book, *The SAGE Guide to Curriculum in*

Education (2015) documents the isolation African American students' experience in teacher education programs. African American teacher education students frequently report experiences of invisibility, voicelessness, and inequities. Furthermore, the curriculum of many teacher education programs tend to be Eurocentric and often fails to address issues of diversity, privilege, bias, and power He, Schultz & Shubert, 2015).



Another issue teachers of color face in teacher education programs is difficulty passing standardized tests such as the Praxis and other State specific tests. The new federal regulations for teacher preparation programs may pose another hurdle for teachers of color but may also provide opportunities for ensuring teachers are prepared for addressing the needs of diverse populations. The federal government's statement shows promise for recruiting and retaining teachers of color:

Recruiting, preparing, developing and supporting great teachers has a direct impact

on the learning and success of America's students. Research confirms that the most important in school factor in a student's success is a strong teacher, and excellent teachers are especially important for our neediest students. And strong teacher preparation programs lead to better learning for students (United States Department of Education, 2015).

Another strategy for engaging teachers of color and enhancing the overall curriculum is to expose students to successful teachers of the same race and background working in diverse settings. In the article, *We Were There Too* (2014), two African American male teachers share how their strategies, educational beliefs, and pedagogical practices led to being recognized for successfully teaching Black children over several decades (Hayes, Juarez, & Escoffrey-Runnels (2014). This article, as well as Gloria Ladson-Billings' book, *Dreamkeepers* (2009), can be used as a foundation for exposing students to exemplary teachers of color. By providing resources such as these, students of color in teacher preparation programs, will not only have examples as a source of inspiration, but may become more visible and engaged in the teacher education program.

Recruiting and Hiring Teachers of Color



In the Foreword to the *AISNE Guide to Hiring and Retaining Teachers of Color* (n.d.), Steve Clem challenges schools to examine their practices when recruiting and hiring teachers of color: "Why would teachers of Color want to come to our schools and stay? If you don't have substantive, concrete answers to that question, you need to get to work on transforming your school into a place where everyone will feel included." The guide encourages hiring officials to examine why they'd like to hire teachers of color. This is a fundamental question that must be considered prior to the recruitment process. Other questions include, (a) What is the value added by hiring teachers of color? (b) What

accommodations are you willing to make in order for them to succeed? and (c) What other equity work is the school engaged in? It is important to ask these questions in order to avoid tokenism. When people of color suspect they are being used to fill a quota or a need, without being fully accepted or respected, they are unlikely to remain with an organization. It is important to understand why you are recruiting teachers of color and how you will use their unique experience and expertise (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton & Freitas, 2010). In the AISNE guide, Bronson (n.d.) offers these tips for hiring teachers of color:

Connect the need to hire more teachers of color with the school's mission

- Get clarity on the climate and culture in the school
- Outline strategic issues related to hiring more teachers of color for the coming year(s)
- Seek out candidates of color at job fairs
- Offer incentives to others to find candidates of color
- Make the school attractive to teachers of color in as many ways as possible
- Consider the visual impact of your campus (your hidden curriculum)

Retaining Teachers of Color

Once hired, there must be a concerted effort to support teachers of color. It is important that teachers of color are not expected to abandon their culture, values, dress, language, etc. in order to 'fit in'. The values, customs, and practices of organization must be accepting of who each teacher is and accepting of the values they bring to the school. One teacher explained the cultural disconnects she experienced as one of only a few Black teachers recruited to a predominately White school:



"I was asked by a principal if I would ever consider straightening my hair. I was put in

charge of Black History and told I was an obvious fit. If I didn't do it, no one would. Told I should steer away from too much Black history in classroom as Black history is not important when no black students present. And so on.... (Turner Consulting Group, 2015 p. 28)

In order to support teachers of color, the school must, (a) scrutinize their cultural environment, (b) make efforts to know new teachers on a personal level, (c) ensure professional development activities that promote an awareness of implicit bias, power and privilege for ALL staff members, and (d) develop a system of accountability for achieving the goal of hiring and retaining teachers of color (Bronson, n.d.).

Hiring and retaining teachers of color can be challenging, but can be achieved if the school is clear about its goals, creates an inclusive environment, and develops a systematic approach to ensure teachers of color are supported. The work is hard, but the reward is great, especially for children of color who benefit from seeing those who look like them. If done well, these students will aspire to become teachers themselves and there will be no future need to recruit and retain teachers of color.

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