



Ethnic Minorities and Teaching

An Examination of the Low Numbers in the Teaching Profession

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Introduction

In the State of California, an additional 100,000 teachers will be needed during the next 10 years to teach in K-12 schools (School Services of California, Inc., 2006), due both to population growth and the retirement of "Baby Boomers." This critical need to develop teachers in California will be mirrored in other states as well, and special attention must be given to assuring that these needs are met by an increase in ethnic minorities joining the teaching profession.

This growing problem has been examined in previous research both nationally and internationally (Carrington & Tomlin, 2000; Gillis, 1990; Mack, et. al, 2003; Summerhill, et. al., 1998; Tehmina, et.al., 2006). In this article, I suggest that we are in the midst of a professional epidemic which requires states, school districts, junior colleges, and all institutions where teacher credentials are recommended to take active measures to increase the number of ethnic minorities entering the teaching profession.

This study began with a question that stemmed from observations within a teacher education program in Southern California. Why was it that this Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) would not have many more ethnic minorities within the teacher credential program, especially when it is located near one of the largest

ethnic minority communities in the United States?

As this question was examined, it was observed that there are opportunities and programs within local high schools, junior colleges, and universities throughout the nation that encourage ethnic minority students to become teachers. However, the lack of ethnic minorities in teacher education continues to persist. Why did this particular HSI still lack any increase in ethnic minority pre-service teachers, and why was little effort made to recruit and retain ethnic minority students into the teacher education program?

The issue is not whether a non-ethnic minority teacher is as capable of teaching ethnic minority students, but rather that research indicates when ethnic minority teachers are present there are positive gains by minority students, there are less ethnic minority students in special education, there is a decrease in absenteeism, there is greater parental involvement, and ethnic minority students are more involved in school activities (NEA, 2002).

Some Nationwide Programs

There are programs throughout the United States that seek to create ways to recruit and retain ethnic minorities in teacher credential programs. To provide context for this study, several are cited here for the creative avenues they have undertaken.

At Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, a partnership between the university and one area high school resulted in a program

where faculty from Texas A&M-CC and preservice teachers visit the high schools and give demonstrations and speak on careers in education (Ward, Fernandez, Wells, 2001). Since many of the preservice teachers are ethnic minorities, it is seen as an appropriate model to attract other ethnic minorities to the teaching program.

Since faculty members from Texas A&M-CC were able to interact with students, a study was conducted with 189 students exploring their interest in becoming teachers. From the study, the faculty was able to ascertain that there were enough students to begin a future teachers program within the high school. As part of this future teacher's course, the high school students assisted in elementary and middle schools as well as taking their own courses. The future teachers were paid minimum wage at these schools for their time and their services, and university faculty help to recruit ethnic minorities into the field of education.

Another program established as a community partnership involves the University of Wisconsin-Parkside and Carthage College. This collaboration provides insight as to how neighboring colleges can gain community involvement and recruit underrepresented ethnic minorities into teaching (Show, Boe, Garner, & New, 1998). Since they recognized there was a need for ethnic minorities and males as elementary teachers, these two institutions partnered to create a program entitled Elementary Certification for Ethnic Colleagues for the Elementary School (EC3).

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To create a program for individuals, their objectives were:

1. Recruit and prepare the brightest males, particularly males of color, to work with youth at their crucial developmental levels,
2. Recruit and prepare the brightest females of color for the elementary school staff,
3. Design a program that could be used as a model to reform the teacher education programs at the two institutions of higher learning. (p. 264)

Most of the participants of this accelerated program were returning students having previously worked in business and industry. The preservice teachers were eager and excited about working with youth, and were motivated throughout the program. The results from this program showed that all the participants graduated and attained credentials, and were placed in area schools. District administrators hailed the program, for they were able to hire quality teachers from among the graduates. Researchers of EC3 found quality programs of higher learning can develop avenues for ethnic minority students to graduate with teaching credentials and to be hired in area districts.

The partnership approach was also seen within a program that established a three-way involvement from the White Plains public schools, Westchester Community College, and Pace University in New York. This program focused efforts on college-bound high school students and non-traditional mid-career people who were looking for a change. What the researchers found through this program was the need to collaborate with community colleges. The researchers discovered that people wishing to go into teaching or returning students desiring a credential first entered a community college to find direction (ERIC Development Team, 1988).

However, to create an effective program the researchers reported that the most important items for a successful partnership were a supportive college environment, a dual admission program from the community college to the university, financial assistance, and a high quality of communication between the community college and the senior institution. Along with other factors, the program discovered that a career in teaching needs to be looked upon and advertised as a prestigious career option with opportunities for supportive interaction with other students and faculty.

This issue of a supportive college environment was also important when In-

diana University-Bloomington instituted a program to recruit ethnic minorities into teaching at a predominately White institution (PWI). "Project TEAM: Project Transformative Education Achievement Model" was established in 1996 as an "effort to prepare teachers of culturally diverse student populations. The primary purpose of Project TEAM was to offer a community within the School of Education at Indiana University-Bloomington that provided academic, social, personal, and financial support for students who wished to become teachers" (<http://site.educ.indiana.edu/proteam/ProgramOverview/tabid/4799/Default.aspx>). One of the main components of TEAM was the seminar for the pre-service students that established a community of learners within the teacher credential program.

The honors seminar focused on TEAM's mission of "strengthening social justice through education" by engaging ethnic minority students to examine questions of justice in education, multicultural teaching, mutual inquiry, leadership, and professional development. One of the items the students engaged in was the preparation for an overnight visit, sponsored by Project TEAM, of ethnic minority middle school students to the university (Bennett, et. al, 2000).

By engaging middle school students, the project's mission of social justice empowered the university students to support a future generation of university students. This honors seminar was in part designed to allow middle school students of color to participate with college students of color to discuss issues they may face at a PWI as they went forward in their education and to give them an avenue where such discussion could be held.

Research has shown that these kinds of forums contribute to successful academic achievement for ethnic minority students due to the students' sense of belonging and respect given in seminars such as the one for Project TEAM (Bennett & Harris, 1982). Project TEAM found that a majority of the students who went through the program enjoyed the seminar and became teachers. There were three themes that the students reported that were positive contributors to their participation in Project TEAM:

1. a sense of community with minority student peers,
2. developing a stronger sense of ethnic identity, and
3. working for social justice through multicultural education (Bennett, et. al. 2000)

Project TEAM enabled ethnic minority students to not only consider and become teachers at the high school, but also created a support system throughout their schooling at a PWI. This sense of community enabled students to have their voices heard and created a positive experience for the students who went through the program. Project TEAM is no longer running due to financial constraints.

As we can see from these descriptions, there have been and continue to be programs throughout the country that address the issue of recruiting ethnic minorities into the teaching profession. A question then to ask is, if there are such programs, why is there still a problem of ethnic minorities not choosing to enter the teacher profession? The questions may be answered within our high schools.

Methodology

The high school students that participated in this study came from two distinct populations. The first group was from a predominately Latino, low socioeconomic (SES), urban high school in Southern California (for this report we will call this school Lewis High School). A group of students within this population were also part of a *future teachers program* that originated from a university approximately 10 miles from the high schools' campus. The other high school (we will call this school Mueller High School) is located approximately 25 miles from the urban school, in a middle class, ethnically mixed suburban community.

The research instrument employed with the high school students was a Likert scale survey that I developed with my research associates (see Appendix). Permission to survey the students within Lewis High School proved successful after three months of writing and phone calls, whereas Mueller High School proved less stressful and amounted to one phone call and a meeting with the principal.

Parental permission slips were given to each student, with only those students who returned the slips able to participate in the study. Due to the number of students from Lewis and Mueller, brief interviews were conducted with students wishing to participate. Some of the students from Lewis didn't complete the entire survey, so concluding data for each question in the results does not always add up to the total number of participants. The students from Mueller completed each question.

For the sake of exploring how high school students from a university *future teachers program* reacted to the research, students from this program were inter-

viewed during a field trip to the local university where their program was being funded. These 25 male and female students came from the urban district where other students were surveyed for this study.

The first portion of the findings will focus on the interviewed future teacher students, whereas the second half of the findings focus on the surveyed students from Lewis High School and Mueller High School.

Findings

One university teacher preparation institution in Southern California has a program working with high schools that encourages youth to participate in a process designed to prepare them to become teachers. The program is designed to give high school teachers additional financial grants and college units students who take the course. The university department in return receives the grant money to continue the project and gives faculty full time equivalent credits since these high school students are part of the university sponsored program.

It is said that without the *future teachers program*, the university department would lose money since there are many high school students who wish to be part of the course. The major outing involving the district students is a bi-annual trip to the sponsoring university, which enables students to hear motivational speakers regarding college and a career in teaching. It was during one of these gatherings that students were asked to participate in this study.

While the students seemed motivated to listen to people speaking about the field of education, many of the students were indifferent to become teachers. When asked what profession they would choose if they did not wish to teach, students from this *future teachers program* responded that they would be in fields unrelated to teaching or education. When asked why, one student stated, "Because I am afraid I will not have the patience (to teach)."

Further investigation revealed students from this program are aware of the issues teachers face daily with a handful of students who may not be cooperative, and see this as a hindrance to becoming a successful teacher. However, another student said that teaching is "boring" due to what he has seen as a student from his own teachers. What this student was referring to were the complaints their teachers were sharing regarding state mandates such as standardized testing and curriculum, which, in the teachers' minds, have

prevented them as professionals from undertaking activities that were more "fun" than "boring."

A minority of the students who were involved in the program were "pretty sure" they were going into teaching. These students wished to go into elementary education and not secondary teaching, which does not parallel what the university department wishes to advance, since the department's desire is to encourage more students to enter the secondary education teacher program.

The majority of the students who attended the outing were motivated to be part of the future teachers seminar because they wanted to be part of a group that was able to go on field trips. Further investigation of the district found that in general field trips were not encouraged due to budgetary cuts.

When asked if teaching impacts the lives of others and if they would want to be part of a career that provided this service, only one student acknowledged the belief that teaching would have a positive impact on the lives of others. One student stated, "I really do not know how I would impact other kids if I don't feel as if my teachers are impacting me."

One of the questionable revelations regarding this *future teachers program* were the number of students who did not know what they needed (academically) to become a teacher. Most of the students did not know the necessary details to achieve undergraduate majors, fifth year credential courses, and clearing their credential to become teachers. Yet the *future teachers program* is designed to assist high school students in the understanding of teaching so they may make an easier transition from high school to college and into teaching.

Further questioning revealed the students mainly took this class in their senior year of high school to have a "free" non-academic period. When this researcher went to the university department to find out more about their *future teachers program*, there were no records being kept as to the number of high school students enrolled in the future teachers course and whether they enrolled in college or actually became teachers. The leading faculty member of the *future teachers program* remembered hearing of one student who was part of the program who went on to become a secondary education teacher.

Asked if there were mentoring practices or opportunities within the department to bring these high school students together once they entered college, the leading faculty member answered "no." At the *future teachers programs* in one

of these high schools, a forward thinking teacher does involve the students in teaching practices and creates opportunities for the high school students to gain scholarships. However, this particular high school teacher prepares her students to attend a private university to pursue a teaching credential, and not the university where the *future teachers program* funding originates.

Lewis and Mueller High Schools

Students at the two high schools were asked to define their gender, ethnicity, school standing, and the highest level of education of their parent(s) or guardian. The resulting demographics for both of the schools involved in this project appear in Table 1.

As we can see from the demographics of these schools, there are differences regarding educational background of parents. For the students attending Lewis High School in the urban city, 18% of the parents have attended college whereas 89% of the parents within the Mueller High School community have a college background. Also, in terms of the diversity of the student body, Mueller is more ethnically diverse than Lewis, with more ethnicities represented within the Mueller High School population.

The students were then given questions on teaching and asked how they felt regarding each question by placing a (1) if they strongly agreed with the statement, a

Table 1

	Lewis High		Mueller High	
Females	150	51%	32	52%
Males	144	49%	30	48%
Total	294	100%	62	100%
Freshman	1	> 1%	0	0
Sophomore	3	1%	0	0
Junior	287	98%	59	95%
Senior	3	1%	3	5%
Total	294	100%	62	100%
No formal education	21	7%	0	0
Pre-school-3	18	6%	0	0
4th-8th	100	34%	0	0
9th-12th	104	35%	7	11%
Some College	43	15%	33	53%
BA & above	8	3%	22	36%
Total	294	100%	62	100%
Asian	0		10	16%
Indian	1	> 1%	1	2%
Pacific Islander	1	> 1%	4	7%
Black	1	> 1%	4	7%
Latino	273	93%	7	11%
Multiethnic	13	4%	16	25%
Total	289	100%	42	100%

(2) if they agreed and a (3) if they disagreed and a (4) if they strongly disagreed. The results are displayed in Table 2.

The students from Lewis and Mueller indicate in this study that they have no desire to teach (3.0, or “disagreed,” average for both schools), and do not feel that teaching is the “best” career choice (3.1). However, many of these students do not know what education they would need to obtain a teaching position (2.7) nor do they know of the other career options they may have in teaching (2.9).

This appears to indicate that there have not been opportunities for the high school students to learn about teaching as a career from their schools. But, educating students about a career in teaching may prove difficult since many do not wish to know about being a teacher (2.8). Persuading students to teach and to come back to their city to teach would also prove to be difficult, since the students would not wish to teach in the district where they now live (3.0) nor would they if they knew they could do so (3.0).

As we can see from data in Table 2, there is minimal difference in how these students think. Most of the questions provide evidence that the high school stu-

dents, from two distinct locations, share common thoughts. The areas where differences appeared were that the students from Mueller were a little more passionate in saying that teachers do make a difference in the lives of students, and were more likely to know a person who was a teacher. Other than these two examples, the students at the two high schools were similar in their responses.

Some additional questions were used to give students a more visual way of examining teaching as a career. One question asked was “What do you think about being a teacher?” The students were then requested to mark the answer that they felt best represented their thoughts about teaching (see Table 3 for responses).

By examining this list, we can see that there are students who may consider teaching as a career should another option not develop. Still, as indicated by the chart, many of the high school students still would not consider teaching as a career.

Considering that the two high schools are located in different communities, questions about their academic achievement were asked. The statement given to the students was “My plans for my educational future include.” The results representing

the students’ academic goals are displayed in Table 4.

The students’ responses reveal that there are some differences in their thinking regarding achieving only a high school diploma. Not one of the students from Mueller stated that a high school diploma was their only academic goal, whereas 9% of the students from Lewis stated that it was. Many more students from Lewis than Mueller indicated that they would pursue some form of technical training after high school. In contrast, more students from Mueller are looking toward graduating from a university and going on to graduate school than students from Lewis. However, more Lewis students are interested in obtaining a teaching credential than those from Mueller.

Discussion

It is fascinating to see that the students from Lewis and Mueller share common ideas about teaching. Most students believe that teaching is a profession worth considering only if other career goals do not develop. One reason why students feel that teaching is not a worthy occupation is because of the low level of teachers’ salaries. What the students may be hearing regarding teacher salary are figures coming from national averages. The people from Pay Scale (www.payscale.com) report that in July of 2008 the national average salary for a beginning teacher was \$33,674.00. They also show that after 20 years in the field of education, the national average is \$55,816.00.

What the students may not be aware of are the figures from their own school district. Given these numbers and where these students live in Southern California, where the cost of living is higher than many communities, students may feel hesitant to examine teaching as a career option. Therefore, I looked into the salary schedules of the two districts from this study and found that the beginning salary for Lewis High School teachers is \$48,800.00 and with a Masters degree the starting salary is \$50,159.00. After 20 years of service and a Masters degree, the teacher from Lewis High School can expect to have a salary of \$92,309.00.

The starting salary for teachers from Mueller High School is \$44,579.00 and with a Masters degree it is \$50,590.00. If a teacher in this district had taught for 20 years, that teacher could expect to have a salary of \$85,964.00. These figures do adjust based on the state budget for California and one of the districts decided to take a pay cut in favor of maintaining

Table 2

Questions	Lewis High	Mueller High	Average
I want to be a teacher	3.1	3.0	3.0
I already know what I want to do as a career choice	2.1	2.2	2.1
I believe teaching is the best career choice one can have	3.1	3.1	3.1
I know the education that I need to have to become a teacher	2.7	2.8	2.7
I can make a very good living with the money I would receive being a teacher	2.7	2.9	2.8
Teachers make a big difference in the lives of their students	2.1	1.7	1.9
I know the many career options I can have after becoming a teacher	2.8	2.9	2.9
I have a person in my family who is a teacher	2.9	2.5	2.7
I would like to learn more about being a teacher	2.8	2.9	2.8
I would want to teach in the district that I am presently going to school	2.9	3.2	3.0
I would teach if I knew I could come back to my school district and teach	2.8	3.2	3.0

Table 3

Statement	Lewis High		Mueller High	
It is the best job anyone can do	18	8%	1	2%
A job that is “ok” but something I would like to do	27	11%	12	19%
A job I would like to do if I can’t do something else	94	39%	25	40%
No way, I wouldn’t want to teach	99	42%	24	39%
Total	238	100%	62	100%

Table 4

Statement	Lewis High		Mueller High	
HS grad	26	9%	0	0
HS grad plus tech. training	71	26%	9	15%
University graduation	106	38%	35	56%
Univ. graduation and teaching credential	17	6%	2	3%
Graduate school	57	21%	16	26%
Total	277	100%	62	100%

smaller class sizes (20-1 in lower elementary grades and lower math courses in high school).

When asked about a career in teaching after the surveys were collected, many of the high school students continued to share negative attitudes, but revealed that they did not know about the diverse career opportunities in education. The students who were part of this study stated they were unaware of the variety of careers one could obtain within education. When told that one can work at the university level after working as a PreK-12 teacher, many looked confused. One student commented, "I thought all you could do was teach if you became a teacher."

After relaying information on careers in administration, specialists (e.g., reading specialist), college and university teaching/administration, research, consulting, and publishing, the students seemed to be more apt to listen to what the field of education could bring to them. However, the growing issue of not knowing the possibilities available in the field of education comes from the lack of information provided to students by counselors, career planners, and teachers themselves.

Students were in agreement that there was a lack of positive information coming from teachers, counselors, and career guidance counselors regarding teaching and education as a profession. One student exclaimed, "All my teacher tells us is how bad teaching is and wonders why anyone would want to be a teacher." Whereas another student said this about their career guidance counselor: "We are always being told to go to college to be a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. Not once have I been told about a career in education. After hearing about the other options I have in education, I may take a look at it (a career in teaching)."

Hearing these stories from students, I decided to visit the career guidance office to find any materials on the field of teaching. Even if many universities were represented with flags, flyers, and posters, and majors and careers a student can gather from attending said university, I found no materials on a career in teaching.

Since many of the students mentioning that they have not heard of the benefits of teaching, college counselors in these schools are missing an opportunity to assist in recruiting new teachers. In an online article from *Job Journal* dated November, 2000 (http://jobjournal.com/article_full_text.asp?artid=65), the average age of teachers in California at the time was 45 years old, making the possibility that 1 in 6 teachers would retire by the

end of 2010, leaving a great demand for teachers. Unfortunately, we may not see an adequate supply of future teachers within teacher education programs.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Given the information gathered from students in these two distinctly different communities in Southern California, distinct specifically in terms of socioeconomics, we as educators need to begin to examine the need for developing programs that will target ethnic minority students and aim them towards the fields of teaching and education. State governments need to pay attention to trends in education and population growth, while also taking into consideration retirement, to better develop opportunities for people to enter the teaching workforce and to return to their communities to become teachers and educators. By enabling people from diverse backgrounds to enter teaching, we can assure that a new generation of students will be taught by an ethnically diverse population of teachers.

Recommendations from this study include:

1. Teacher education programs need to recruit within middle schools and high schools.
2. Teacher education programs need to develop partnerships with neighboring school districts and community colleges to recruit and retain people in teacher education.
3. State agencies need to fund enterprising teacher education programs in order to increase the numbers of ethnic minorities in teaching.
4. Teacher education programs need to develop support groups for ethnic minorities wishing to become teachers.
5. Financial assistance from the state needs to be in place for people willing to go into teaching.
6. Housing subsidies need to be in place for people willing to teach in their home communities.
7. Teacher education programs needs to partner with school superintendents by having the district promise they will look at candidates who have gone through their schools and who wish to return for a career in education.
8. Have the state pay student teachers as teacher's assistants, for often

the student teacher is responsible for the same items that teachers are responsible for.

9. Recruit and retain ethnic minority faculty in teacher education at HSI's and PWI's.

10. Have teacher education faculty visit with high school counselors and give them materials on education career options.

11. Established special groupings within teacher education programs for ethnic minorities, including seminars to encourage communal dialogue.

These are just some recommendations that teacher education institutions and state governments can implement regarding ethnic minorities and teaching. One question that we must ask comes from a student who was interviewed for this study who did want to go into teaching, "Can we envision a time where our PreK-12 students will have more than one ethnically diverse teacher within their learning career?" Let's hope so.

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Appendix

Survey Questions for High School Future Teacher Students

Please fill out this survey as best you can. Be honest, for your answers will serve a good purpose for the field of teaching. Also, your answers will be kept secret, so please do not place your name on this paper.

I am a (check one): Female Male

I am a (check one): Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

My parents/caregiver has this much education (think of the caregiver with the most education):

No education Pre-School-3rd Grade 4th Grade-8th Grade 9th-12th Grade Some College-Associates Degree
 BA/BS or above

My ethnicity is: Asian Indian Pacific Islander Black Latino Euro-American (White)
 Multiethnic

Directions: For each questions, please give a rating of: 1 if you Strongly Agree; 2 if you Agree; 3 if you Disagree; or 4 if you Strongly Disagree

- (1) _____ I want to be a teacher.
- (2) _____ I already know what I want to do as a career choice.
- (3) _____ I believe teaching is the best career choice one can have.
- (4) _____ I know the education that I need to have to become a teacher.
- (5) _____ I can make a very good living with the money I would receive being a teacher.
- (6) _____ Teachers make a big difference in the lives of their students.
- (7) _____ I know the many career options I can have after becoming a teacher.
- (8) _____ I have a person in my family (include aunts, uncles, cousins, etc) who is a teacher.
- (9) _____ I would like to learn more about becoming a teacher.
- (10) _____ I would want to teach in the district that I am presently going to school.
- (11) _____ I would teach if I knew I could come back to my school district and teach.

What do you think about being a teacher?

- It is the best job anyone can do
- A job that is "ok" but something I would like to do
- A job I would like to do if I can't do something else
- No way, I wouldn't want to teach

My plan for my educational future includes:

- Graduating from high school but not receiving more formal education.
- Graduating from high school and receiving technical training outside of a university.
- Going to a university and graduating.
- Graduating from a university and getting a teaching credential
- Graduating from a university and going on to graduate school.

If you don't want to teach, what profession would you wish to do (please clearly write so I can read your writing)?
 If you do not wish to become a teacher, please write why you would not want to teach.
 Please include anything else you would wish to write about teaching.