

Valuing the practices of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers

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Scholarship on the pedagogical and leadership practices of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers during the last decade of the 20th century and early part of the 21st century was often generated by Scholars of Color (Bristol, 2014; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Core themes centered on commitments to educational and social liberation (Gist, 2014), as well as on curriculum and pedagogical practices that advance the intellectual prowess of children routinely marginalized in schools (Dilworth & Brown, 2008).

Some researchers have compared the cultures of teaching and pedagogies of Black educators before and after *Brown v. Board of Education* (Anderson, 1988; Foster, 1998; Siddle-Walker, 2005). Others have examined native educators' struggles against deculturalization and assimilation through culturally responsive and Indigenous practices (Grande, 2015; Marin & Bang, 2015; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). And still others have highlighted the advocacy and pedagogical work of Latinx educators (Colomer, 2019; Valenzuela, 2016) and Asian American educators (Chow, 2019; Lei, 2006; Naseem Rodríguez, 2019; Nguyen, 2008). This is in addition to research into the important instructional contributions of Teachers of Color and within and across ethnoracial groups (Gordon, 2000).

A number of recent studies build on previous scholarship, analyzing pedagogical and leadership practices across a diverse set of educators. Six studies highlighted in the *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers* (Gist & Bristol, forthcoming, 2022) expand the research base in this area.

What the recent research shows

Lasana D. Kazembe analyzes the impact of culturally responsive instruction, tracing its effectiveness to six common characteristics of the teachers who practice it, including those teachers' own awareness and depth of understanding of sociocultural dynamics. Related findings indicate that the

culturally affirming pedagogical and leadership practices of Educators of Color have a prosocial impact on the educational and cultural lives of Students of Color.

Focusing on Asian American teachers — who have been largely overlooked in previous research — Noreen Naseem Rodríguez describes the critically conscious pedagogical practices a set of teachers used to teach Asian American history in a highly political context in Texas. The three Asian American teachers in her study described feeling disconnected and misunderstood as students, never learning histories that reflected their Asian American identities and cultures. Those experiences resulted in their determination to assert their Asian American identities as teachers and work to decenter whiteness in the curriculum and foster racial solidarity through teaching Asian American histories and experiences (e.g., exploring the experiences of Japanese Americans during World War II).

In another study, Tanji Reed Marshall examines the experiences of three Black female educators to learn how they understand their identity as Black educators of primarily Black students. Findings show these educators see themselves as responsible for ensuring the academic success and identity formation of their Black students.

Taking a different approach, a study by Rosa M. Jimenez looks at how Latinx educators engage in critical care and identity formation practices to foster equity in their work with students. This classroom study provides practical examples of how teachers can leverage students' migration experiences as a catalyst for autoethnographic writing. Findings demonstrate that, through their classroom practices, educators countered negative stereotypes about immigration and made tangible the array of cultural knowledge of Latinx migrant communities. They supported students' lived experiences, identities, and literacies through a lens of cultural pride.

Also, investigating the pedagogical practices of Latinx teachers, Ramona Alcalá and colleagues share a study of how teachers' *testimonios* challenge deficit discourse in their

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work in majority Latinx schools in Chicago. Most of the teachers in the study spoke of returning to or “reclaiming” Latinx *barrios* — the Spanish-speaking quarters in which many of the students live — as positive spaces where strong cultural and linguistic identities are forged. Latinx bilingualism was an assumed and unrecognized professional and pedagogical asset to their work. Finally, most of the teachers in the study leveraged expressions of *cariño* (i.e. affection) to connect with their students.

Finally, a case study by Nimo M. Abdi and colleagues focuses on the culturally responsive and decolonial leadership practices of a Black immigrant teacher in her work with immigrant students. The teacher drew on Somali familial forms of care to foster student-centered leadership. Six months of ethnographic data reveal that she helped other teachers care for students as well, thereby becoming an educational leader and significantly contributing to culturally responsive school leadership practices in her school. The teacher affirmed and celebrated her students’ academic identities and used community-based ways of knowing to

work against schoolwide policing and disciplinary policies. Her leadership improved school/community engagement and trust between parents and teachers.

Although these six studies vary in size, scale, location, and participant group, their observations of Teachers of Color share a common finding: The voices and experiences of these teachers reflect a commitment to affirming and sustaining the cultural and ethnoracial backgrounds of their students, as well as challenging the status quo in curriculum and pedagogy in ways that are affirming and work toward educational equity.

What we don't know yet

As educational impact studies continue to draw relationships between student success and the presence of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers, research on the pedagogical and leadership practices of these teachers is necessary to understand how they cultivate student engagement and learning. There is a significant need for research that offers more nuanced descriptions of how these teachers’ specific

Research topics to explore

- The ways in which the specific pedagogical and leadership practices that are common among Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers influence student outcomes.
- The outcomes associated with Indigenous and decolonial pedagogical and leadership practices, particularly those that aim to challenge Eurocentric ideologies, discourses, and methodologies.
- The extent to which Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers tend to be grounded in specific cultural and political practices and the ways in which their culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies are differently enacted based on social and demographic contexts.
- Whether certain kinds of leadership practices, supports, and professional development tend to be particularly beneficial for Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers.
- The extent to which the pedagogical and leadership practices of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers are integrated in teacher preparation programs and the associated outcomes for future teachers' pedagogical effectiveness.

practices shape teaching and learning by, for example, advancing humanizing pedagogy in schools across the United States (Carter Andrews et al., 2019).

Implications for policy and practice

- Provide learning opportunities for Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers to deepen their critical orientations to teaching and learning and strengthen effective practices with their students.
- Create support structures that nurture the critical leadership practices of these teachers in ways that equip them to challenge educational inequity in unsupportive or challenging school contexts. ■

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Research studies to conduct

- **Interpretive studies:** Through ethnographies, autoethnographies, field-based observations, and case studies, researchers can look at the pedagogical and leadership practices of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers. They can use theoretical or conceptual frameworks to document, analyze, and expand the evidence base on critical, decolonial, and responsive pedagogy and leadership practices. Availing themselves of decolonial research methodologies (such as *testimonios* and counter-story narrative) and asset-based epistemologies, they can examine the complex and nuanced ways in which Teachers of Color use a range of pedagogical and leadership practices to foster transformative and liberating learning experiences.
- **Design-based studies:** Researchers can examine how Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers use a range of critical, responsive, and decolonial pedagogical and leadership approaches to better understand the relationship of such approaches to student engagement and learning.
- **Effect studies:** Researchers can look at the practices of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers in terms of racial justice and decolonial pedagogies, curricular content, dispositional stance, and leadership practices. They can compare these with student learning outcomes (such as grades and achievement exams); nonacademic measures (such as absenteeism and participation in after-school and extracurricular activities); parent engagement within schools and across districts, and the types of schools involved (in terms of demographic, geographic, and performance outcomes; grade levels, and disciplinary backgrounds).

Example: If the problem of practice for a school district is the persistent underperformance of Latinx students in grades 4-8 on mathematics exams, then research-practice partners may consider developing an intervention study by first examining the ethnoracial composition of the mathematics teachers working with these students; the presence of school leaders committed to critical, racial justice, or culturally relevant and decolonial pedagogies; and the types of pedagogies and curricula delivered in grades 4-8 mathematics classrooms. Informed by these findings, a series of design-based and effect studies may be implemented to reverse the underperformance of Latinx students in grades 4-8 on mathematics exams.