

Committing to racial justice and equity in teacher preparation

By **Conra D. Gist, Travis J. Bristol, Felicia Moore Mensah, & Thomas M. Philip**

Over the last two decades, researchers have identified a number of best practices in the design of teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005); mapped out the various areas of inquiry that have shaped the field of teacher education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2008), and identified specific gaps in the knowledge base (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). Much less attention, however, has focused on the particulars of program design for Teachers of Color (Dillard, 2019; Gist, 2014; Sleeter & Milner, 2011; Whitinui, de France, & McIvor, 2017). Teacher education has only tangentially addressed these issues through the study of culturally responsive pedagogy in teacher education (Irvine, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and the importance of preparing critically conscious educators (Brown, 2014; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

More recently, studies have emerged that focus more specifically on the preparation of Teachers of Color (Bristol et al., 2020; Valenzuela, 2017) and Indigenous teachers (Lees et al., 2016). Moreover, growing demands for efforts to diversify the educator workforce have prompted the creation of a range of new program models that are explicitly committed to this goal (Waite, Mentor, & Bristol, 2018). These include alternative certification programs (Rogers-Ard et al., 2013); grow-your-own and community-engaged programs (Gist, 2019; Skinner, Garretton, & Schultz, 2011); teacher residencies (Guha, Hylar, & Darling-Hammond, 2016); Indigenous teacher education (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009), and investments in teacher education programs at a range of minority-serving institutions (Petchauer & Mawhinney, 2017) that have a long and successful track record of preparing Teachers of Color. However, even as these models have begun to proliferate, it remains a priority to identify the specific barriers to racial equity in the traditional educator preparation programs that dominate the field. Four recent 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.

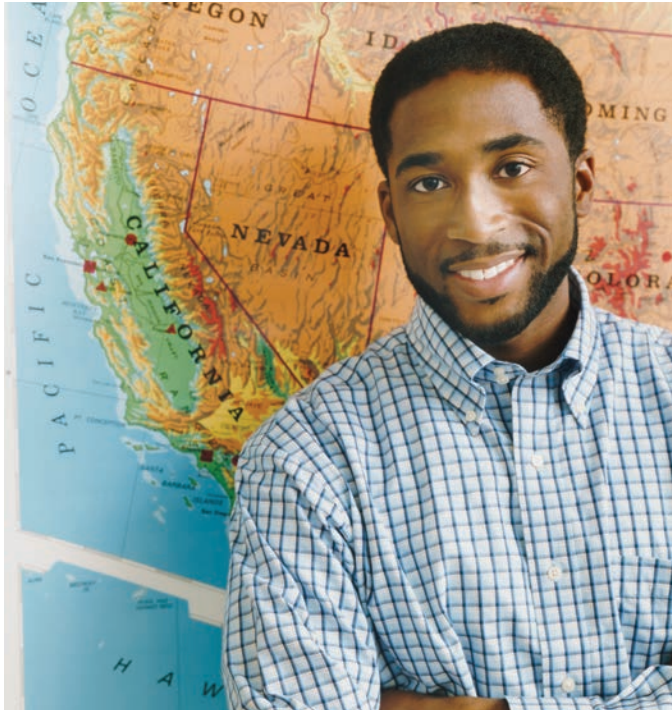
What the recent research shows

In one study, Laura C. Chávez-Moreno and colleagues review the literature on the preparation and experiences of Teacher Candidates of Color and offer strategies for both program redesign and teacher preparation that respond to their needs. One recommended strategy from this chapter is that teacher educators and programs practice a pedagogy that is culturally responsive to their candidates' needs. However, most programs, they conclude, have yet to take significant steps to acknowledge that teacher education is an overwhelmingly white field, or to recognize the ways in which racism and racial exclusion affect Teacher Candidates of Color.

In another study, featuring interview-based research into teachers' lived experiences, researchers Marcelle Haddix and Kim Williams Brown identify specific factors that have impeded the learning of Teacher Candidates of Color. They find that these aspiring educators are clamoring for critical learning experiences, such as classes that address pressing social and political controversies in public schooling, as well as opportunities to study and decenter the role of whiteness in the K-12 curriculum and to provide input on the design of the teacher education program itself.

Offering a way to begin addressing the challenges described by Haddix and Brown, Darlene Lee and Josephine Pham describe research that provides a picture of what reform can look like in partnership with an ethnic studies program. When an urban school district instituted a high school ethnic studies requirement, the increased need for qualified teachers prompted one teacher education program to create a pathway for English and social studies teacher candidates that was grounded in ethnic studies. Coursework and field placements built on the unique experiences and

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expertise of the Teacher Candidates of Color and prepared them to do the same for their Students of Color. This study provides insight into the tensions inherent in such a process and the strategies needed for reimagining mechanisms, systems, and practices that center and elevate the experiences of Teachers of Color.

And in another study, Felicia Moore Mensah describes research on educating Women of Color in doctoral programs as teacher educators and preparing them to discuss race and racism. The women in the study repeatedly expressed the need for educational spaces and multiple opportunities to write about, discuss, and reflect on race, racism, and inequity in teacher education because neither their schools nor their teacher education programs offered such opportunities. Findings suggest that teacher education programs need to consider the experiences of Women of Color in doctoral programs who eventually become teacher educators and to develop curricular and pedagogical support for the development of the teachers' racial literacy and racial consciousness in their current and future K-12 and university classrooms.

What we don't know yet

We see a need for research that shows how teacher education programs can integrate theories of racial justice and educational equity into their program design, address the mechanisms and impediments that stymie institutional and systemic change, and develop interventions and practices to fix them.

We need to know how Teachers of Color experience

various program models — for example, grow-your-own programs, alternative certification, residency, and traditional educator preparation — in terms of program responsiveness and effectiveness. For example, what program features, policies, structures, and practices account for different teachers' observations about and reactions to their experiences? Most crucial would be to learn how these differences among teachers' experiences relate to differences in graduation rates, retention rates, and effectiveness outcomes for the teachers involved.

We also need more research into how we might reform traditional teacher education by using preparation models that are committed to racial justice and educational equity in K-12 education. We need to understand the challenges of this approach and the institutional and contextual requirements needed to meet these challenges.

Finally, we need to prepare critically conscious teacher education faculty, directors, and researchers who advance commitments to racial justice and educational equity as part and parcel of their roles, and we need to understand how to go about doing this most effectively. We also need to get a handle on the kinds of program structures and levels of representation required to effectively initiate reform.

Research topics to explore

- The differences in how program types (Guha, Hyler, & Darling-Hammond, 2016) are tailored for Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers (Milner, 2020), including interdisciplinary and intersectional understandings of program design.
- How to promote community-centered teacher development, articulate theories of racial justice that undergird program design, and implement and actualize theories of change.
- The impact of venture philanthropy and market-driven school reform on teacher education programs and teacher diversification.
- Race, language, and class disparities related to recruits' student debt (Scott-Clayton, 2018) and licensure exam scores (Goldhaber, Cowan, & Theobald, 2017; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010) in teacher education programs.
- The impact of teacher diversity program intervention strategies — for example, course articulation agreements and scholarships (Carver-Thomas, 2018) — on candidates' enrollment and graduation from teacher education programs.

Implications for policy and practice

- The U.S. Congress should pass and President Joe Biden should sign the American Families Plan, which proposes \$2.8 billion in grow-your-own programs and yearlong teacher residency programs. Both of these alternative certification programs enroll a larger percentage of preservice Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers when compared to traditional preparation programs.
- Design and implement courses that prepare Teachers of Color for the teaching profession, from preK-12 to higher education. These courses should focus on identity development, ethnic studies, racial literacy, and teacher activism to support Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers.
- Provide opportunities for teaching candidates to form affinity groups where Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers can talk about their experiences, offer mutual support, and affirm the assets and values they bring to the profession. ■

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Research studies to conduct

- *Interpretive studies:* Researchers and their partners can use critical teacher development frameworks (for example, Gist, 2017) to investigate the experiences of preservice Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers at different stages of the program: semester by semester, at critical developmental junctures, or annually. They can explore the role of race and racism in the teachers' experiences and how teacher educators, program directors, and peers mediate or complicate the teachers' learning and growth.
- *Design-based studies:* Researchers can develop a variety of program design interventions. Some interventions may be informed by theories of racial justice that are embedded in program structures, systems, and pedagogy. Some may investigate the influence of specific program interventions, such as scholarships, mentorships, affinity groups, and curriculum, on the academic and professional development of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers. Others can examine differences within and across groups of Teachers of Color related to persistence, learning and engagement, certification exam scores, graduation, and school placement.
- *Effect studies:* Researchers can look at the number of preservice Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers in different pathways and explore how these numbers correlate with certification exam scores, student debt, curriculum and pedagogy supports, and attrition rates. They can also examine the number of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers graduating from different pathways and explore correlations with school placement and working conditions, retention, and the impact on academic and nonacademic factors for learning. Large data sets collected at the district, state, and national organizational levels are recommended for these studies.

Example: If the goal of research-practice partnership is to identify ways to decenter whiteness in the educator preparation program design, then researchers may conduct a series of interpretive and design-based studies to center equity and antiracist practices in teacher education. Research partners for this type of project may include university ethnic studies program leaders; local cultural institutions (such as the Mexican Alliance for Culture); scholars of racial climate and equity; local Teachers of Color affinity groups (such as the Black Educators Association); scholars at minority-serving teacher education institutions, and local and state affiliates of the National Association of Multicultural Education.

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