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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to answer the following question: How does network improvement science (NIS) impact the recruitment and retention of Black and Latino male teachers? Using multiple sources of data such as *Plan-Do-Study-Act* (PDSA) documents, video recordings of focus group interviews, self-reflections, informal and formal meetings notes and minutes, our preliminary results revealed that recruitment and retention of Black and Latino male teachers is a complex process that requires cross campus collaboration of all stakeholders, the challenging of structures of power, and overcoming institutional and professional barriers. This study is situated within the broader context of the national debate on diversifying the teaching force.

Keywords: Black and Latino, male teachers, recruitment and retention, teaching work force, diversifying

Purpose of Study

In 2014, the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) launched an initiative called Network Improvement Community (NIC): Changing the Demographic Makeup of the Teaching Workforce. The purpose of the NIC was to identify and select a group of universities that shared similar interest in diversifying their teacher preparation programs, and have them plan and implements activities using the methodology of network improvement science. William Paterson University (WPU) was one of the founding members of the NIC along with nine other universities. As a NIC member, we formed a university-wide

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group consisting of faculty, staff and senior administrators and participated in a two-year long activity to learn and pilot the NIC concept at our home institution. During this period, we created the Teach, Inspire and Educate (TIE) program, a support group that paired Black and Latino male faculty with Black and Latino teacher candidates in the College of Education (COE).

In response to the call for diversifying the teaching workforce, the Albert Shanker Institute (ASI) (2015) released a report, *The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education* and echoed similar findings as the USDOE. The took an in-depth examination of the problem and urged state and the federal governments to take concrete action to increase the number of Black and Latinos into the teaching profession. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE, 2016) released its own report titled *The State of Racial Diversity in the Education Workforce*, and in that report, the Department noted the following: "82 percent of elementary and secondary schools teachers are White, only 20 percent of public principals are individuals of color, a large majority of education majors and, more specifically, students enrolled in teacher preparation programs, are white and teacher retention rates are higher among white teachers than for Black and Hispanic teachers" (p. 4). The report presented staggering statistics on the state of racial diversity at every level of the education workforce. In its conclusion, the report cited some examples of best practices and proposed some actions that the government would take to address the problem. It noted "If we are to meaningfully increase the diversity of the teacher workforce, more must be done, starting with preparation and completion, to recruitment and selection, and then placement and retention" (p. 31).

The purpose of this study was to answer the following question: How do network improvement science (NIS) impact the recruitment and retention of Black and Latino male

teachers into the teaching profession? We are interested in understanding how and in what ways NIS contribute to the increase in the numbers of Black and Latino teacher candidates, their relationships with faculty of color partners, impacts on institutional culture, academic policies, programs, missions and values of our COE and institution at large. This study is situated within the broader context of the national efforts to diversify the teaching workforce.

Theoretical Framework

Network improvement science or NIS emerged out of operations research in the 1930 and then migrating into the healthcare, management, social work, economic and more recently education (Lemire, Christie and Inkelas (2017). The work of Langley et al. (2009) is cited in the literature as being the earliest and laying the foundation for improvement science. According to Bryk, Gomez and Grunow (2011), NIS is about answering three fundamental questions "First, what problem(s) are we trying to solve? Second, whose expertise is needed to solve these problems? And third, what are the social arrangements that will enable this work? While these questions appear to be simple, in the last decades our field's responses to them have been confused. When the answers to these questions are disorganized, the natural result is a cacophony of questions and innovations that fail to accumulate into real progress on core concerns" (p. 4). Different researchers have discussed different approaches, principles and examples of NIS (Langley el al., 2009; Bryk, Gomez & Grunow, 2011; Lewis, 2015; Bryk, Gomez, Grunow & LeMahieu, 2015; Lemire, Christie & Inkelas, 2017; Brown, Kahn & Goyal, 2017). However, the basic methodology is Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle (PDSA). The *Plan* refers to planning about how to solve a problem and including all stakeholders in the process. *Do* refers to piloting a solution to the problem on a small scale. *Study* refers to measurement, data

collection, studying and reflecting on the process during the pilot period to identify what works and what didn't work, and *Act* means taking action to scale up the solution or go back to the drawing board.

Methodology

In this study, we used the NIS methodology with particular emphasis on the PDSA cycle. Our primary data source came from PDSA documents, interviews with our Black and Latino teacher candidates, our own self-reflections on lived experiences, subjectivities and structural relationships with our institutions as faculty of color, informal and formal meetings notes and minutes, presentations at university events and national conferences and video recordings of meetings. To analyze our data, we employed a variety of qualitative data analysis strategies. For instance, we engaged in macro interpretation and micro interpretation (Stake, 2010) aimed at understanding the PDSA cycle. In addition, we used phenomenology (van Manen, 1982) in order to understand the essence of the phenomena of "Black and Latino males in the teacher education workforce." We pause briefly to ask: in what ways do our subjectivities, lived experiences, and other perceptions of the structural relationships between individuals, schools and society impact our perceptions of the problem and proposed solutions? This study represents our systematic reflection and exploration of the structures of consciousness that we bring to the table as we investigate and put into action an initiative aimed at addressing, understanding, and changing the problem. Thus, we are particularly interested in both the phenomena and our understanding of it, as well as our experiences that may impact our perception and understanding of the problem, and solutions.

Results

As our study is ongoing, the results presented in this paper are preliminary. From our analysis of available data, we have arrived at the following results: We have successfully planned and established a faculty-candidate mentoring group, TIE Scholars Group. This Group was modeled after the *Call Me Mister* initiative established by Clemson University, College of Education (https://www.clemson.edu/education/callmemister/index.html). The main purpose of the TIE Scholars Group is to support current and future Black and Latino male teacher candidates in a variety of ways. The Group reached out to all of our current student population that matched the demographic (86 students) and identified a core group of students who are successful in our initial teacher certification programs, and are interested in serving as mentors to other fellow education students. We believe that those students who have been able to navigate through our system of teacher preparation and become successful could serve as role models and better mentors to other students. Nine TIE scholars expressed interest to become mentors and were invited to an inaugural meeting. Following the inaugural meeting a follow-up meeting was held in which the purpose, goals/objectives and activities of TIE were discussed. Since its inception, the TIE Scholars Group has held several check-in and planning meetings and graduates its first cohort. One of the interesting results from our study regarding Black and Latino teacher candidates was that lack of access to funding or financial support was a major reason why they are not persisting in their studies. The next step for the Group is to address its growing pains and sustainability issues.

Working with the TIE Scholars Group made us realize that we share a lot in common with our students and gave birth to our own Black and Latino male faculty group. The purpose

of the group is to investigate our own lived experiences in academia and how this could be leveraged to increase the number of Black and Latino males into the profession. During the Fall 2015, WPU, COE hosted the New Jersey Future Teachers Association annual conference and two of our group members conducted a workshop for middle and high school students from all over New Jersey who attended the conference.

We have successfully established a partnership with one of the largest urban schools in the state, which has an academy geared towards producing future teachers and whose population is comprised almost entirely of Black and Latino students. This partnership featured our offering of our initial licensure certification course to high school seniors who receive three college credits. The course is being taught by one of Latino male faculty and is designed to create a pipeline between the school and the COE. All students enrolled in the course have passed the Praxis CORE.

One of our NIC Committee members is leading WPU's piloting of a new partnership between the COE and the Holmes Scholars Program. The program is the first of its kind nationally, and offers great potential in expanding our recruitment pool and identifying and matriculating students from a broader geographic range that meet the demographic. Along with the already well-established Holmes network for doctoral students, the newest conception of Holmes hosted at WPU will recruit Master's students and will connect with AACTE to offer incentives and connections that could lead to further Holmes opportunities. Two of our current faculty and NIC committee members are Holmes Scholar graduates from their doctoral program at Teachers College and Penn State, respectively.

Through our participation in university-wide events and activities, we have created a university wide "consciousness" about the problem and were even invited to present our work to

an All Unit COE Meeting and to the WPU Board of Trustees. Our group has a permanent

presence in the COE building, a dedicated room for Black and Latino teacher candidates to meet

and share experiences in a safe and welcoming environment. Our data also showed that the COE

and the University authorities are interested in what we are doing and willing to support our

efforts. However, despite these positive outcomes, we still faced some challenges. Our second

cohort of Black and Latino teacher candidates have to deal with new state requirements for

teacher preparation, such as passing the PRAXIS Core Exam prior to entry into a teacher

preparation program, achieving a 3.0 GPA and undergoing two semesters of clinical practice,

which imposes serious educational and financial burden for our candidates. To respond to these

challenges, our COE have instituted boot camps and workshops for PRAXIS preparation and

provided financial support to those candidates who could not afford to pay for the PRAXIS. As

faculty of color mentors, the TIE Scholars Group is very important to us, however, it has become

increasingly clear to us that for our work to be sustainable, our White colleagues from our

college and across the university must be involved. Competing demands for our time and our

responsibilities as faculty to teach full loads, conduct research and service, and implement the

TIE Scholars Group has become overwhelming. It is important to note that our work is in

progress. In future, our task is to continue to collect and analyze our data from different sources,

and through triangulation, we hope to answer our original research questions in fully.

Educational Implications

Increased awareness or consciousness of the problem means that we need to increase our

connection with our TIE Scholars Group and other stakeholders. We need to engage other White

faculty as well as other faculty of color across the university to scale up our work. We need to

questions and challenge institutional power structures that though will intentioned, are counter productive and impede the recruitment and retention of Black and Latino males into the teaching profession. We need to reach out to the K-12 community, parents and alumni for support and partnerships. Our current partnership with an urban school is a good model to follow. For our work to be sustainable, we need not only increase participation, but also funding sources to run workshops, study groups, special events, invite guest speakers and conduct field trips. Recruitment and retention of Black and Latino students is a complex process. We need to identify all the components in the process and those responsible, and work with them to realize our purpose. Finally, it is important to recognize that working to diversify any teacher preparation programs require leadership support from the top. We are fortunate to have a COE Dean who provided not only leadership, but also financial support.

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