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THE ROLE OF TEACHER RACE ON THE ACADEMIC OUTCOMES OF K-12 BLACK
STUDENTS

A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY
MITCHELL OLSON

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FOR THE DEGREE
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BETHEL UNIVERSITY

THE ROLE OF TEACHER RACE ON THE ACADEMIC OUTCOMES OF K-12 BLACK
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Mitchell Olson

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Thesis Advisor: Angela Mansfield, M.Ed

Program Director: Molly Wickam, Ph.D

Abstract

Beginning with the inception of our educational system in the United States, there has been an academic disparity that has persisted between white and Black students. Initially this could be attributed to the racist laws that only allowed students of a certain race to even be educated. Even though our educational system has been integrated and students of all races and cultures have access to the same schools, this academic disparity still exists. The purpose of this literature review is to understand the role that teacher race plays in the academic outcomes of Black students. A review of the available literature indicates that a teacher's race plays a significant role in this continued disparity. This can be seen in the difference in academic outcomes when Black students are taught by Black teachers, compared to when they are taught by white teachers. It has also been found that white teachers hold both implicit and explicit racial biases that impact the academic outcomes of their Black students. Lastly, research indicates that zero-tolerance policies and classroom discipline methods have led to an overwhelming amount of Black students being removed from the classroom and being taken out of their learning environments. To address this inequality in educational opportunities, school administrators and teachers have to take time to identify and address their own biases, investigate their disciplinary procedures and how they impact their diverse students, and make efforts to increase the amount of Black and diverse voices that students hear and learn from during their academic experience.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“The white teachers just don’t get us.” This is a statement I heard multiple times throughout my first year teaching. At first, I would often scoff at this statement. I would tell myself that as a teacher, it wasn’t my job to “get” every student, it was my job to teach them. Although I wasn’t able to connect with every one of my students, I still felt equipped to teach them and prepare them with what they needed to learn. I cared for each and every one of my students and for a while, I thought that was enough. It wasn’t until I took time to stop and observe the other white teachers in my building that I started to understand what my students were saying. I started to notice little microaggressions, like how certain white teachers talked about individual students. There was a debate about belts and other dress code items. Certain slang words associated with Black culture were corrected while other grammar mistakes were not. Through these observations, I realized that the white teachers at my school, including myself, were not as prepared to teach Black students as we thought. As educators, we need to better understand the problem that we are in the middle of. How are the educational outcomes of Black students impacted by primarily white teachers that they will have throughout their academic journey?

I have chosen this topic of the effectiveness of white teachers in diverse populations because it is something I am currently experiencing. As a white teacher at a school with an almost 100% population of Black and Latinx students, I want to make sure I am providing the best and most effective experience for my students. The school I teach at has a high number of teachers of color, but this is not the case at many other schools across the city of Chicago. American suburbs are becoming increasingly diverse as well. Schools that have had primarily

white students for decades are now seeing more and more students of color, and they are not prepared for it.

Historical Background

For most of United States history, the concern of white teachers' impact on Black student achievement did not exist. It did not exist because until fairly recently in United States history, Black students were not even allowed to be taught by white teachers. Simply put, power in the United States is built on literacy, and people groups characterized by an oral tradition have been considered less than or even sub-human by white colonizers. On top of that, many states made it illegal for enslaved people to learn to read and write. To keep enslaved people from communicating and rebelling, anti-literacy laws were passed into legislation in seven of the eleven eventual states of the Confederacy (Angulo, 2016). Enslaved people faced the catch-22 of being seen as less than because they could not read and write, but were also punished and even killed for learning to do so.

Despite the failures of Reconstruction, schools were built for African American children where they were able to learn to read and write. While they did not have the resources and supplies that white students had, they still had caring teachers who shared in many of their experiences; Black teachers taught Black students (Barber, 2018). Although they were highly motivated and committed to their students, many of these Black teachers did not have adequate training or preparation for their job. Because the salary of Black teachers was 60% of what white teachers were paid, it was often difficult to find educated men or women who would be willing to work in these schools (Beezer, 1986). In 1931, it was found that a group of Black educators in Alabama scored a level below the average American ninth grader on the Stanford Achievement test (Irons, 2004). However, Black schools were still extremely successful given the situation

that they were in (Walker, 2000). Much of this success came in a time of political and economic oppression, in which Black communities could only rely on themselves to find success. By 1918, 65% of Black school buildings were privately owned by the Black community and mostly funded by the community as well (Fultz 1995). While resources may have been scarce, Black communities had an equity stake in their community schools, and because of this, teachers, parents, community members, and students worked together to make them successful environments.

The system of segregated schools changed starting in 1954 after the ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. The fact that students were no longer forced to go to a certain school based on their race was a step toward equality, but not all Black students were positively affected by it. Many Black schools where students felt at home closed and those students were forced to take long bus rides to schools outside of their neighborhood. This led to belief that Black schools simply were not good enough to stay open, and many Black students began to feel that their education was inferior to their white peers (Martin, 1972).

While many Black teachers lost their jobs, white educators now had to teach a group of students that they had almost no experience interacting with (Baxter, 2018). Black students were given educational expectations that were based on a system of colonization and cultural repression. The American system of public education is still rooted in the methods and practices of white Protestant Colonists (Schultz, 2003). Over 60 years after the first school began to integrate, white teachers are still ill equipped to teach students of different cultural backgrounds. Sadly, there are far less Black educators today than there were in 1964 (Will, 2020). While student populations are becoming increasingly diverse, teacher education programs are trending

in the opposite direction. This puts the United States in a situation where most Black students in this country are taught by white teachers (Will, 2020).

Rationale

Further study on the topic of student achievement and access to own-race teachers is needed for a variety of reasons. The primary reason for further study is that Black students score significantly lower than white students on almost all standardized tests (Reeves & Halikias, 2017). The second reason is that Black students are disciplined, suspended, and drop out of the school at significantly higher rates than their white peers (Gordan, 2018). The third reason is that white teachers themselves have admitted that they are not prepared to teach diverse students who are different from them in a variety of cultural ways (Henfield & Washington, 2012). The final reason is that while the student body of the United States is becoming increasingly diverse every year, the people who teach those students are remaining primarily white and female (Meckler & Rabinowitz, 2019). America's schools are more diverse than ever, yet teachers are still mostly white. If the differences between students and teachers continue to grow, it is critical to know the impact that these changes will have.

In a country that claims that every child has access to an equal education opportunity, regardless of their skin color or socioeconomic status, one finds significant disparities in the academic achievement between white and Black students. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 43% of white students scored at proficient level or above, while only 13% of African American students did (Hardy, 2015). One of the most important qualifications for getting into four-year colleges is the SAT. In 2015, white students on average scored 299 points higher than African American students (Hardy, 2015). Test scores that are used to measure student success continually show that our education system is failing Black children.

In a truly equitable system of education, these disparities would not exist. As educators, it is critical to identify why certain students are not succeeding in our educational system.

A great indicator of academic success or failure can be found through simply looking at the discipline records of a student. One of the greatest barriers to success for students is discipline. When students are disciplined, it may improve or reduce certain behaviors, but it can also inhibit relationship building, learning, and creativity. Discipline can also lead to students being removed from school, so that no formal learning takes place at all. In the United States, 18% of Black male students receive one or more out of school suspensions each year. The same study found that only 5% of white boys receive one or more out of school suspensions each year (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2018). Part of the gap in academic success between white and Black students can be attributed to the lack of opportunities Black students have due to discipline and time spent outside of the classroom. These reasons for discipline range from administration policies to the lack of relationship between student and teacher and will be explored in much more detail later on.

Every year, American school districts are getting increasingly diverse, while teaching staff remain mostly stagnant. Diverse students make up about 45% of all students in America, while around 80% of teachers are white (NCES, 2020). Teacher training programs prove that American teachers will remain mostly white in the near future. As this trend continues, it needs to be considered whether or not a predominantly white teaching force can successfully educate an increasingly diverse population of students. If most white teachers do not have the cultural knowledge and experience to function effectively in multiracial schools, much must be done to create equitable learning environments for non-white students.

While most teachers go into their chosen field with great intentions, it is critical that teachers understand the biases that they bring with them. Many teachers genuinely feel that they are providing their best for all of their students, but studies show that teacher biases lead to higher outcomes for white students compared to Black students (Chin et al., 2020; Van den Bergh et al., 2010). Gifted and talented programs, which are partially based on teacher recommendations, are overwhelmingly made up of white students (Dreilenger, 2020). White students who typically already have an economic headstart, are now receiving an academic head start as well.

Statement of Guiding Question

While investigating the persistence gap of academic opportunity, achievement, and success, it became clear that teachers play a significant role in both the successes and failures of students. This thesis investigates the question: What role does teacher race play in the academic achievement of Black students?

Definitions

Achievement Gap

The achievement gap refers to significant and persistent disparity in academic attainment between two groups of students. For the purpose of this paper, the achievement gap will refer specifically to the disparity between white and Black Students (Ladsen-Billings, 2016).

Classroom Discipline

Classroom discipline refers to the strategies used by a teacher to manage a classroom and minimize disruptions during instructional time (Bossone, 1964).

Opportunity Gap

The opportunity gap is related to, and often incorrectly interchanged with the achievement gap. The opportunity gap refers to the circumstances in which a person is born that sets them ahead of or behind their peers. These circumstances include but are not limited to zip code, socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity (Milner, 2012).

Academic Achievement

In a general sense, academic achievement is the current level of a student's learning. More specifically, for the purposes of ESSA accountability, academic achievement refers to the percentage of students at a school whose learning currently meets or exceeds their grade-level standards. This achievement is measured using statewide tests in math and reading. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017).

Own-Race Teachers

An own-race teacher is a teacher who matches the race/ethnicity of the students they teach (Egalite et al., 2015).

Black Students

A Black student is a student whose ancestry can be traced back to Africa. Some Black students are descendants of enslaved people while other Black students may be recent immigrants from an African country or from the Caribbean. Black is an encompassing term that represents the ethnic and cultural practices from a wide ranging group of people (Laws, 2020).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 explained the historical background, rationale, and direction of this thesis. In Chapter 2, the literature on the opportunity gap and disparity in education between white and

Black Students is examined, and the impact that teacher race plays on the academic disparity between white and Black students. In Chapter 3 I provide my analysis of the literature review, limitations of research, implications for future research, and professional applications for myself and other teachers.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with a review of literature on the opportunity gap and the impact that teachers have on the academic achievement of all students. Next, a focus is placed on research that identifies the distinct ways in which white teachers contribute to the opportunity gap.

To locate the literature for this thesis, searches of Educator's Reference Complete, Academic Search Premier, ERIC, ProQuest Social Sciences, and Proquest Education Journals were conducted for publications from 1980 to 2020. This list was narrowed by only reviewing published empirical studies from peer-reviewed journals. The key words that were used in these searches were *white teachers*, *Black students*, *same race teachers*, *own-race teachers*, *opportunity gap*, *racial disparity*, and *teacher bias*. The structure of this chapter is to review the literature on the effect that white teachers have on students of color in three sections in this order: achievement and opportunity gap between white and Black students, teacher bias and expectations, and the use of discipline on Black students.

Achievement and Opportunity Gap

One of the major issues in the American education system is the disparity in achievement between whites students and students of certain minority groups. Historically, this has been called the "Achievement Gap." This term was coined in 1970 (Gwartney, 1970). This term was used to address the large disparity in educational outcomes between white and Black students. This gap can be seen in standardized test scores, graduation rates, patterns in gifted and talented programs, and a variety of other measurable academic outcomes (Milner, 2012). Initially, scholars believed that the reason for this gap was due to the lack of advanced and difficult courses that Blacks students had access to. Many believed a new standardized approach could address this achievement gap. For example, it was believed if Black students had access to more

advanced math and science classes like most white students did, the gap would quickly disappear (Jones, 1984). Even though standardized changes have been put in place, the achievement gap still exists today. By eighth grade, 91% of Black students are still not proficient in mathematics as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. At the same time, 53% of Asian-American students and 63% of white students are not proficient. (NAEP, 2020) Black and brown students are performing at a far lower rate than their peers. School districts have worked to homogenize learning so that all students have access to the same educational tools, but the gap in achievement has changed very little, if at all.

After years of studying and analysis, it became clear that there was more to this gap than what was initially assumed. A standardized approach disregards the diversity and different experiences of each student. It ignored the underlying problems that students faced and tried to fix it with one solution for everyone. This approach assumed that all students start from an even playing field. In reality, Black students suffer from generations of oppression and educational inequality. Black students start kindergarten with an educational debt that cannot be fixed with a simple standardized change (Ladsen-Billings, 2006). The generational debt needs to be addressed in order to truly fix this academic gap. In the past 20 years or so, the narrative around the achievement gap has begun to change. It has become clear that Black students need far more than just advanced science and math classes to truly succeed academically.

The problem of the achievement gap needs to be reframed as a gap in opportunity. The problem of academic disparity does not just exist in the classroom. This problem begins at birth. Upon entering kindergarten, Black students tend to already have lower reading scores than white students, and the gap only widens as students get older (Garcia, 2015). One could use socioeconomic status to explain the difference at the kindergarten level, but if that were the case,

the gaps in math and reading should not continue to grow as students get older. If students truly receive an equitable education once they get to school, the achievement gaps between white and Black students should not continue to grow.

Another component contributing to the opportunity gap is deficiency-driven education. Deficiency driven education focuses and identifies what a student cannot do. Instead of developing strengths, this practice consistently highlights what students are unable to do or accomplish. The student is then given remediation, intervention, or retention due to how many deficits they have (Davis & Museus, 2019). Students with the least amount of deficits are promoted to gifted and talented programs. As mentioned above, Black students are much more likely to enter school with far more deficits than their white peers (Garcia, 2015). As a result of this, Black students spend most of their time in school being told what they are not capable of while teachers try to “fix” them. Students are told that if they just work harder, they can catch up to their peers. This mindset can be debilitating for Black students who despite working hard, continue to experience a widening gap between themselves and their peers.

In recent years, there has been a push to avoid the term achievement gap and in its place to use the term opportunity gap. An opportunity gap refers to the inequalities that relate to a student's background and the school practices that reinforce and even add to the inequality that a student faces (Carter, 2009). This is an attempt to reframe the problem at hand. Instead of continuing to talk about how minority students as a whole score lower than white students on standardized tests, experts want to figure out why they are scoring lower.

A system that creates such academic disparity between white and Black students is seen as a major issue to most people. In most cases, this problem is opportunity. Many minority

students do not receive the same opportunities as their white peers. While the reasons for this are abundant, it is clear that teachers play a significant role in the opportunity gap that exists today.

Teacher Impact on Learning

In order to figure out how to best address the educational opportunity gap, it is critical that one knows what factors most impact academic achievement. In 2003, a study was done to identify the factors that make the biggest impact on student learning. The findings can be found on Figure 1 (Hattie, 2003).

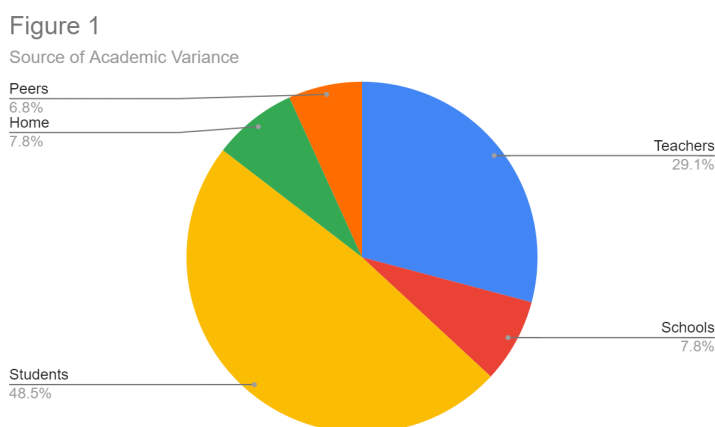


Figure 1 shows that students have the biggest impact on their own learning (50%). The second biggest factor in student achievement is the teacher. A teacher accounts for 30% of a student's academic variance. For example, students who are taught by highly qualified and trained teachers are far more likely to earn a four year degree than students taught by less qualified teachers (Lee, 2018). This information supports that the biggest changeable variable to academic achievement is the teacher. With this information, it is important to focus on the biggest sources of variance that can be controlled. It does not matter how much money is poured into a school or what curriculum is used, if the teacher is not effective, the student will most likely not succeed. If

the opportunity gap is going to be closed, teachers need to figure out what they can do to provide for their Black students.

Hattie's research found that most impactful teacher influences are feedback, instructional quality, direct instruction, remediation, and classroom environment. Influences that did not hold much weight or even have negative impact are retention, class size, instructional media, and programmed instruction (Hattie, 2003). With these influences in mind, Hattie then identified five major dimensions of an excellent teacher: can identify essential representations of their subject, can guide learning through classroom interactions, can monitor learning and provide feedback, can attend to affective attributes, and can influence student outcomes. With this information, it is clear that many of the issues that schools are trying to address such as classroom size, increased access to technology, and independent learning activities are not what should be focused on. A strong teacher with very little resources will most likely be much more impactful than a poor teacher who has all the resources in the world.

Unlike many other countries, the United States does not have a national system of support and incentives to ensure that all teachers are well prepared and ready to teach all students effectively when they enter the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2010). To this day, traditional measurements are used to measure teacher qualifications. These measurements consist of preparation courses, degrees, and number of years teaching. None of these measurements can actually show whether or not a teacher will be or has been successful in raising the academic achievement of their students. These measurements show qualification, but do not measure effectiveness. Also, there is a growing concern that most teacher preparation courses were designed with solely white students in mind. These programs do not reflect the realities and resource disparities that teachers of diverse students will be facing (Rodgers-Ald et al., 2019). If

the teacher truly is the second biggest factor in student achievement, there really should be more checks and balances in place to make sure they are truly providing their students what they need.

In most situations, teachers are considered novices or experts. New teachers without experience are seen as novices, but as they continue to teach and take more college courses, their pay increases and they begin to be considered experts. Hattie (2003) conducted a study to better classify teachers, as novices, experienced, or experts. Just because someone has been teaching for a long time does not make them an expert. Once one can identify what an expert teacher does, they can then incorporate those skills and practices into teacher training programs and professional development courses.

The study that Hattie conducted used physical evidence from classroom observations and review of student work and engagement to truly measure what impact expert teachers have on their students compared to experienced teachers. The study followed 65 New Zealand educators who were classified as either experienced or expert. These classifications were obtained through data from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The NBPTS used teacher portfolios and teacher assessments to categorize each teacher. Each teacher was interviewed and observed while teaching. The students of each teacher were also interviewed and their classwork was assessed and measured by the observers. That data was then compiled to measure the impact variance that expert and experienced teachers had on their students.

With the data collected, it was found that 74% of students of expert teachers were judged to reflect a level of understanding that logically related to the answer or demonstrated an abstract and deep understanding through unexpected extension while only 29% of students of experienced teachers had similar levels of understanding (Hattie, 2003). The study also found

that 80% of expert teachers can be classified correctly through the measurement of only 3 dimensions of teaching. These three dimensions are:

1. Does a teacher challenge their students?
2. Does a teacher have deeper representations about teaching and learning?
3. Does a teacher practice monitoring and feedback with all of their students?

With the data that Hattie collected, one can identify expert teachers, and incorporate the characteristics of an expert teaching into teacher education and training programs. One area that the study did not shed light on is the impact these expert teaching methods have on students of color and other diverse backgrounds. It is important to know if Black students benefit from these methods as much as their white classmates. Because race is left out of this study, more research is needed to understand if these methods will help to close the opportunity gap that exists for Black students.

It is clear that the teacher plays a critical role in a student's education. If a student is not succeeding, a change in teaching methods or approaches could be what is needed to improve the students academic achievement. Now that it has been established that a majority of teachers are white, and that teachers play the biggest role in a student's academic success or failure, it is critical to understand what role the race of the teacher plays in the success of their students as well.

Effect of Own-Race Teachers

Many consider the Supreme Court ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) to be the most influential change to the American educational system. This 1954 Supreme Court ruling declared that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional. Prior to this ruling, it was legal for public schools to segregate their students, as long as the facilities provided

for both Black and white students were equal. While schools and other public facilities were often segregated in the southern states, rarely were the facilities actually equal. Many Black students struggled in these segregated schools, not because they were being taught by Black teachers, but because they were in a system that defined them and their schools as inferior (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

Since *Brown v. Board of Education*, integration in schools has been considered by most as a positive change in the nation's history. This change brought on many opportunities for students that they may not have had before. It is important for students to learn next to and beside students with different backgrounds and experiences than themselves (Hawley, 2004). As a result of integration, Black students often ended up going to schools with more funding and resources while both white and Black students gained from the experiences and differences of the students next to them. On the surface, this looks like a very positive change and a strong moral step in the right direction from our country. If one takes a deeper look though, they will see that there were far wider and unexpected impacts from *Brown vs. Board of Education* than had been expected, the greatest being that when Black students transferred to integrated schools, they often left the possibility of being taught by a Black teacher behind.

Through this ruling, Black students benefited by having access to schools with more funding and more resources, but the rights given to students through the ruling often did not expand to Black teachers. In 1965, a full ten years after integration began, only 1.8% of Black educators in the South now taught in a desegregated faculty (Ladson-Billings, 2004). While Black students were bussed out of their neighborhoods to desegregated schools, their former teachers were left behind. Black students who were previously being taught by people who looked like them and shared cultural knowledge and experiences were now being taught by white

teachers. Experienced and credentialed teachers at all Black schools were often dismissed or forced to retire. As a result of integration, tens of thousands of Black educators and administrators lost their jobs as communities did not want Black teachers teaching their white students (Will, 2020). Today, Black students make up 17% of the student population but only 6% of teachers are Black (Fay, 2018). With this change that occurred as a result of integration, it is critical to better understand what kind of trade off is made when Black students are able to receive education from better funded schools, but lose the ability to be taught by teachers of their own race.

For many Black students, the result of *Brown vs. Board of Education* was that they lost a sense of community and home. Before integration, Black schools served a wide variety of uses and functions in their communities (Henry & Jones, 2020). At these schools, students were motivated to learn because their education was connected to the community and the space that they lived in. Families held a large stake in their community schools and worked tirelessly to make sure that they succeeded, one way or another. When Black students started bussing out of their own communities to attend integrated schools, many lost their sense of belonging and purpose.

While schools began to integrate and Black students received education from better funded schools, the educational opportunity gap did not narrow at the rate that was expected but expanded in many cases (Ferguson & Mehta, 2002). One of the main reasons for this continued opportunity gap is assumed to be because of the lack of Black teachers that students now learned from. It is assumed that a Black teacher would be better positioned to address the holistic needs of a Black student than a teacher of another race would be (Pitts, 2007). In recent research, this

assumption has been measured to clearly define the impact that Black teachers have on the academic outcomes of Black students.

In 2015, a study by Egalite, Kisida, and Winters was done to measure what impact own-race teachers had on students that they taught. In this study, data was used from students in Florida from 2001-2009 to track the academic achievement students had when taught by own-race teachers. In this study 2.9 million students who were linked to 92,000 teachers were tracked in the study. The study used standardized state tests to measure students' academic growth in both reading and math.

The study found that there is a significant positive impact on students who are taught by own-race teachers, especially at the elementary level. The impact is even greater for students who are lower performing in both math and reading. The results from the study came from only one year of being assigned to an own-race teacher. If students were constantly taught by a teacher that they identified with, the results could possibly be even more significant.

Standardized testing can often be seen as a poor measurement of a student's actual understanding of a topic. Many argue that standardized tests only measure a teacher's ability to teach to a test, but ignores other indicators of learning and success (Popham, 1999). Learning truly is a process that cannot always be measured in just one final product or test. To account for this, studies have also been done to measure how a student's course grade is impacted by the race of their teacher. Harbatkin (2021) used data of North Carolina middle school and high school students to measure the impact that race matching has on the assessment of student knowledge measured by course grades.

The biggest complication to this study is the fact that most situations in which a Black student is taught by a Black teacher occurs at schools with much less funding and at schools that

are considered lower performing (Harbatkin, 2021). To account for this factor, a vector was added to each model to account for school specific effects that would create biases in the results due to the segregation as described above.

The results of the study showed that students who are taught by a teacher of their own race are assessed more positively than if they were assessed by a teacher of a different race. For example, a student taught by a teacher of their own race had a .24-.46 percentile increase on their 100 point course grade (Harbatkin, 2021). While this percentile may be small, it was more significant for Black students than it was for white students. Black students who were taught by Black teachers had a 1.5% higher standard deviation than white students who were taught by white teachers. This study shows that even if it is only a minimal amount, Black students receive higher grades when they are taught by Black teachers. The reason Black students receive higher grades from Black teachers could be a result of multiple different reasons. It is unclear if Black teachers are giving their Black students higher grades, or if white teachers are giving their Black students lower grades. Regardless of the reasoning, the study adds to the mounting evidence that Black students benefit when they are taught by Black teachers.

Most studies that have been done to better understand the impact that teachers have on students of their same race have not been comprehensive enough to draw wide ranging conclusions (Cherng & Halprin, 2016; Dee, 2004). The previous studies (Egalite, et al., 2015) (Harbatkin, 2021) focussed on students at a local or state level. While these studies can be helpful for understanding the ways in which teachers can impact students of their own race, they are not comprehensive enough to use as generalizable guidelines.

To add to the current research, and account for any local factors that may exist, researchers used data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading

scores to better understand the relationship between teacher race and student academic achievement (Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018). Scores from students in the fourth grade were used because this is the stage in which the reading gap between white and Black students starts to widen (Reardon, 2008). Researchers chose the NAEP because it is the largest national representative sample that shows what students know and are able to do in a variety of subjects.

The researchers found that Black students who were taught by Black teachers achieved higher than Black students taught by white teachers. The results were most significant for Black male students (Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018). Black males who were taught by Black teachers showed a significant positive correlation with a beta coefficient of 6.23. This can be compared to a beta coefficient of -7.81 when a Black student is taught by a white teacher (Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018). This data showed that the academic achievement of Black students, and specifically males, is extremely sensitive to the race of their teacher.

This study adds to the growing research that concludes that Black students show higher levels of academic achievement when they are taught by Black teachers. The parameters of the study does not provide the reason why Black teachers are more effective in teaching Black students. It could be that they have experiences that white teachers do not have that allow them to better understand Black students. It is possible that Black students are more willing to listen to and learn from Black teachers. Or it could be white teachers hold certain negative implicit and explicit biases that negatively impact their Black students.

Teacher Bias

While the mounting evidence shows that there is a positive impact on students from learning from own-race teachers, there is also evidence that it can be harmful for minority students to be taught by a white teacher. Racial bias is something that all people hold, whether

they acknowledge it or not (Morin, 2015). There are two main types of bias in which people hold, they are implicit and explicit. With explicit bias, a person is very clear about their feelings and attitudes. This type of bias occurs when a person has specific views and beliefs about a person because of a group that they belong to or have been categorized in. These beliefs are explicitly communicated through words, writing, or actions. Sometimes this type of bias is expressed through physical and verbal harassment, or through more subtle means like exclusion (Clark, 2018). Implicit bias happens when, despite one's best intentions and without their awareness, racial stereotypes and assumptions creep into one's minds and affect their actions (Desmond-Harris, 2016). While a teacher might have positive intentions, their explicit or implicit biases can and often do negatively affect and harm their Black students. What may seem implicit to many teachers, can significantly impact Black students in several ways.

The fact that all people hold biases has been clear for some time (Cochran-Smith, 2000, but the extent to which those biases actually impact students is becoming more clear as recent studies have been conducted to measure the effect that teacher biases have on students across the country. As indicated previously, the biggest variable that can be changed when it comes to student learning outcomes is the teacher (Hattie, 2004). The teacher, good or bad, will be one of the biggest influences on a student's education. Teachers spend years training and preparing to educate students. According to a recent survey, 93% of teachers go into the profession because they desire to make a positive difference in the lives of their students (McNeil, 2016). Many programs, such as Teach for America find white teachers with good intentions and place them in schools with very diverse students. These programs often recruit high achieving college graduates who want to help end educational inequality. While the intentions of these programs and teachers are good, teaching candidates often have a "white savior" mentality, and often see

their commitment to teaching to be a short term project before they move on to more prestigious careers (Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2016).

Teachers can do a lot of good for a student, but problems arise when the person with the greatest influence on a student's education can also hold long seeded and hidden bias and prejudices. In recent years, there has been a growing body of research to pinpoint the biases that teachers hold and to better understand how those biases are impacting Black students (Chin et al., 2020; Gershenson & Papageorge, 2018; Grissom & Redding, 2015; van den Berg et al., 2010). While schools were integrated, the generations of prejudice and racism in many Americans did not simply go away. When Black students finally got the opportunity to go to better funded schools, they were mostly taught by White teachers who were not prepared or equipped to teach them. While it is hard to know what role the biases of teachers played in the 1960s, one can find out if students today, over 60 years after integration, are being negatively impacted by teacher bias.

One way that bias shows up is in recommendation for advanced classes. Data shows that there is a large underrepresentation of students of color when it comes to high achieving students (Wynn, 2016). Most high achieving students get their start in gifted and talented programs while still in elementary school. If students do not get this early head start, they are far less likely to overachieve once they get to higher grade levels. As of 2009, Black students only made up 9.8 percent of gifted and talented classrooms, while 16.7% of the total student population is Black (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). One reason for this disparity may be due to teacher bias. According to the National Association for Gifted Children (n.d.), most students are placed in Gifted and Talented Programs because they have been nominated by a teacher. Not only is this disparity unfair to students of color, but it leads to segregation within schools themselves. Many

schools with diverse student populations still have Advancement Placement (AP) and Honors classes that are primarily white. For example, in North Carolina, the distribution of students taking AP classes are as follows

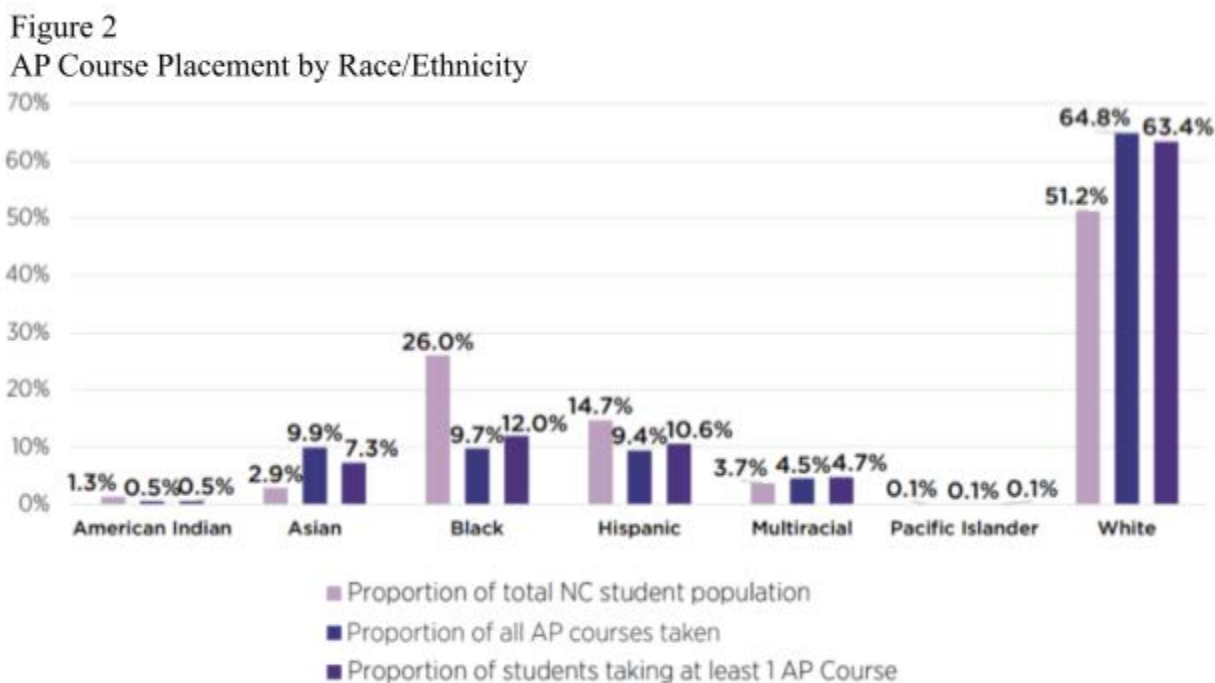


Figure 2 shows that white and Asian students make up a much larger proportion of AP students while Black students make up a much smaller proportion than they represent state-wide (Triplet & Ford, 2019).

Recently, studies have been conducted to try to pinpoint the reason for this underrepresentation in gifted and talented classes. A study by Grissom and Redding (2015) sampled 10,640 students from Kindergarten to 8th grade, starting in the 1998-1999 school year. The study tracked student enrollment in gifted and talented classes along with the races of students and their teachers. The study also tracked the experience level and amount of years working in their current school for teachers of the Black and white students.

It is true that Black students often have lower socio-economic status than white students (Garcia & Weiss, 2017). When students live in underserved communities, it is commonly assumed that they will also have lower academic achievement. When basic needs are not met, children enter kindergarten with lower reading levels and other academic levels. Due to this, many people simply conclude that there are fewer Black gifted and talented students because they have lower test scores, due to situations beyond their control. While this is a debated topic, the study still made sure to account for this and researchers added a control for student test scores in English and Math. Based on the model, the probability that a Black student would be assigned to a gifted and talented class is 50% less than white students (Grissom & Redding, 2016).

The study also found that teachers of white students have been at their current school far longer than teachers of Black students and Black students are also much more likely to be taught by a non-certified teacher than their white counterparts (Grissom & Redding, 2016). This shows us that regardless of teacher race, Black students are already at a disadvantage because they are more likely to have less experienced and qualified teachers. Teacher bias is just another factor that adds to the opportunity gap that exists for Black students. This data showed that there are factors beyond student background characteristics that are needed to explain the gap in gifted and talented classes. Even the highest achieving Black students are less likely to be recommended for gifted and talented classes when they are taught by white teachers. Whether it is implicit or explicit, teacher bias is a major factor in the lack of representation in gifted and talented programs in elementary schools.

Sometimes teacher bias shows up in more subtle forms than gifted and talented class recommendations. Implicit bias greatly impacts the future academic achievement of Black and

white high schoolers. One major form of implicit bias is teacher expectations. When a teacher expects a student to go to and succeed in college, they will devote much more attention and feedback to that student. To the students in which they have low expectations, they will often leave that student on their own, or fail to provide constructive feedback and support (Callum, 2020). When teachers have higher expectations for certain students, they begin to expect more from them and challenge them more than they do other students. To better understand the impact of teacher expectations, a 2018 study by Gershenson & Papageorge was done to measure the academic achievement of students compared to the expectations that their white and Black teachers had of them. In this study, a nationally representative cohort of about 6,000 10th grade students were followed for a decade. Math and English teachers were asked if they believed their student would finish high school, start college, and receive a four year degree, and then each student was tracked for the next 10 years to measure their academic achievement. With this data, researchers hoped to answer two questions: Are teachers racially biased? And what is the effect of teacher expectations on student outcomes?

The study concluded that teacher expectations do result in higher attainment for students and that teachers hold racial biases in who they expect more and less from. In the study, white teachers were found to be less optimistic in their expectations for Black students compared to Black teachers (Gershenson & Papageorge, 2018). This can be seen as a self fulfilling prophecy. When teachers are less optimistic about Black students, those Black students tend to attain less than white students. When teachers see the low level of attainment, they continue to expect less for their future Black students.

Gershenson and Papageorge (2018) also sought to address if teacher expectations are really based on an individual understanding of each student, or racial bias plays a role in

expectations of students. The study found that white high school teachers expect 58% of white high school students to obtain four year degrees, but only expect 37% of Black high schoolers to do so. The disparity shown here is also found in the actual numbers of college attainment. In reality, 49% of white high schoolers reached this goal while only 29% of Black high schoolers did so. With just these numbers, it would be very difficult to draw any conclusions as to the role of bias in teacher expectations and its impact on future success. To address this concern, the study used data from two teachers for each student. If the two teachers did not share the same prediction for a student, one of them would end up being wrong. The study was able to find students who had both a white and Black teacher, and use that data to draw conclusions. With this more narrow range of data, it was found that white teachers were 9% less likely to expect a Black student to complete a four year degree than their Black colleagues when they were evaluating the same student. In addition, 33% of Black teachers expected their Black student to finish college while just 24% of white teachers did so (Gershenson & Papageorge, 2018).

Implicit bias can also be manifested in day to day interactions between students and teachers. Having a negative implicit bias toward a different racial group will influence the way one talks to and interacts with certain students and their families. Biased teachers can often display a negative or distant attitude that they do not detect, but students and their families experience explicitly (Dovidio et al., 2002). To better understand implicit bias, Harvard University developed a test called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). Numerous studies have been conducted to confirm that the IAT performance does correlate with racially biased behaviors (Greenwald et al., 2009). A 2020 study (Chin et al., 2020) used data from the IAT and merged these results with test score data from the *Stanford Education Data Archive* and

enrollment and discipline records from the *Civil Rights Data Collection* to better understand how implicit bias impacts test scores and discipline of Black students.

This study aimed to answer two questions. Researchers wanted to know if implicit racial bias varies across geographic locations and if regional implicit bias correlates with the racial disparities in test scores and disciplinary outcomes (Chin et al., 2020). While theory suggests that Black students are negatively impacted by racial bias, this study was able to correlate implicit bias to the academic achievement and discipline of Black students. The results of this study confirmed what has already been assumed in theory. In counties that had higher levels of pro-white or anti-Black implicit bias, white students had slightly higher adjusted test scores. More significantly, in these counties that had higher rates of implicit bias, Black students were far more likely to face in and out of school suspensions at much higher rates. In counties that had lower rates of bias, the discipline gap between students narrowed further and further. The study suggests that if there were a county that had absolutely zero bias, the discipline rates would extrapolate to almost zero (Chin et al., 2020).

The Discipline Gap

For students to learn and show academic achievement, it is crucial that they are at school and in class with their teachers. For Black students, being in class isn't always an option. One of the largest contributors to the opportunity gap that exists for Black students is due to an inequality of discipline. School discipline relates to the actions taken by teachers or the administration towards a student when their behavior disrupts the academic setting they are in or when they break a school rule. Black students find themselves suspended or expelled from school at rates far higher than white students or any other race of students.

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, nearly 24% of Black K-12 students in the United States have been suspended at least once, while only 8% of white students have been suspended (2018). One of the greatest indicators of future academic failure is school suspensions (Mendez, 2003). The amount of time that Black students are forced to be out of the classroom sets them behind at academic levels that often persist for the remainder of their academic career. If Black students continue to face higher rates of suspension and expulsion, they will also continue to achieve academically at the same unequal rates that have been apparent throughout United States history.

There are other implications that also exist for students who are suspended or expelled from the classroom. A recent study shows that suspension or expulsion from school more than doubles the likelihood that a student will be arrested (Monohan et al., 2014). For this study, researchers conducted interviews with 1,354 serious juvenile offenders between the ages of 14 and 17. Researchers found that in months when a student was suspended or expelled from school, they were 2.1 times more likely to be arrested during that month compared to the months in which they were not suspended or expelled from school. In further detail, the study found that the students most at risk of arrest during a suspension are students who do not normally associate with other delinquent peers (Monohan et al., 2014). Even students with the best records or criminal history have a significantly increased likelihood of arrest when they are forcibly removed from school.

The academic opportunity gap exists due to numerous factors, with school discipline being very high on that list. To address the role of school discipline in the opportunity gap, the school system needs to make sure that Black students actually have the opportunity to learn by being present in the classroom. While they are in the classroom, they need to be presented with a

welcoming and understanding environment that values community over procedure and rules. In most schools, the discipline climate is set and established by the administration, but is shaped by the teachers who confront the student behavior (Cheng, 2019). The following subsections will explore the role that both administration and teachers play in the school discipline disparities that exist and explore what classroom discipline looks like when it is framed around community, rather than procedures.

Administrative Policies

The unequal representation in student discipline is not a new issue. The issue was brought to national attention by the Children's Defense Fund (1975) when it was shared that Black students were two to three times more likely to be represented in school suspensions. Since that initial study, the problem has only been exacerbated for Black students. Much of this is due to the zero tolerance policies that began to be put in place in the late 1990s.

Zero tolerance can be defined as "a school or district policy that mandates predetermined consequence/s or punishments for specific offenses." (Heaveside et al., 1998, pg. 18) These policies began with the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, which directed states to pass legislation that would result in immediate expulsion for students possessing a weapon (Sughrue, 2003). These strict zero tolerance policies quickly expanded to a number of other offenses as well, including alcohol and drug possession, physical assault and fighting, damage to property, and committing multiple violations within the same school year (Hoffman, 2014). Zero tolerance policies are often seen as subjective and fair, yet they tend to impact Black students at much higher rates than white students (Aud et al., 2011). This may be because these colorblind discipline policies fail to recognize that they negatively affect students who are already negatively affected by racism, prejudice, and academic failure. As the student population

continues to become more diverse, school systems can only anticipate this problem of school suspensions for Black students to get worse or continue on its current trajectory (Kamenetz, 2018).

Along with zero tolerance policies, starting around 2000, schools have seen a significant increase in security guards or police officers, cameras, identification cards for staff members and students, and school uniforms (Addington, 2009). These monitoring policies have only increased since 2000, while nationwide juvenile crime has significantly decreased during this same time period (Smith, 2015). As a result of these strict zero tolerance and monitoring policies, trouble at school can lead to a student's first interaction with the criminal justice system. This is often called the "School to Prison Pipeline" (Cole, 2020). This theory claims that certain school policies increase the likelihood that a student will end up spending time in prison. Since the time that these policies were put in place, the rates of suspension for Black students have raised 12% while the rates for white students actually slightly decreased (Aud et al., 2011). Instead of trying to understand and provide what all students need, these policies eliminate the students who create distractions and disruptions for the students around them.

To better understand the impact that "Zero Tolerance" policies have on students, a study was completed to measure the changes in student behaviors and in the racial discipline gap as a result of these policies (Curran, 2016). The study uses reported suspensions and expulsions from the Department of Education before and after zero tolerance policies were put in place. Each state is unique in their policies for school discipline. While zero tolerance policies began to be put in place in the early 1900s, each state began implementing these policies at different times. The researcher was able to measure the rate of suspensions and expulsions before and after each state put these policies in place. In addition to suspension rates, data was also collected from

teachers and principals through the School and Staffing Survey (SASS). This data was used to understand how teachers and principals perceived school climate. In the survey, principals reported what they perceived to be the biggest behavioral issues at their school. That data was then compared to the actual data of suspension numbers to better understand how zero tolerance policies impact school climate and the discipline gap that exists between white and Black students.

As states began to incorporate zero tolerance policies, the study found that suspension rates for all students increased from 6% to 8%. In an average sized school district containing 7,177 students, this would result in approximately 35 more students being suspended (Curran, 2016). The study also found that state mandated zero tolerance policies predict larger increases in the proportion of Black students suspended than white students (Curran, 2016).

The study also aims to understand if the deterrence theory effectively reduces negative behaviors. Deterrence theory is based on the idea that the threat of legal sanction will deter crime or bad behaviors. Using this theory, one would conclude that the threat of increased punishment for certain actions, and an increase in police or security guards, would cause students to weigh the consequences of their actions and conclude that the risk of punishment is too severe (Wright, 2010). Using the data reported by principals in the SASS, the study concluded that an increase of zero tolerance policies did not decrease, but increased the perceptions of weapons, robbery, and violence in schools (Curran, 2016). To conclude what the study found, when schools use zero tolerance policies to address student discipline, the amount of students that are suspended increases, the proportion of Black students suspended increases, and principals report no change or even an increase of negative behaviors in their schools as a result of these policies.

Teacher Role in Student Discipline

As established previously, the teacher is the most significant dependent variable in a student's education. A knowledgeable teacher is important, but a teacher needs to be far more than just a bank of knowledge. For all students to have an opportunity for success, teachers also need to develop relationships with their students. Building and maintaining a relationship with one's students will increase school engagement and increase academic success (Murray, 2009). Recent studies have revealed that strong relationships and cultural understanding between teachers and students will greatly reduce student suspensions and expulsions.

Teachers who are able to build relationships with their students and create classroom communities often do so with an empathetic mindset. An empathetic teacher can understand what their students are feeling and adjusts the classroom in response to those students' needs. An empathetic teacher will take the time to try to understand why the student disruption happened in the first place instead of immediately rushing to discipline the action. For example, the teacher will work with their students to understand the source of the issue, and find a solution to make sure the disruption doesn't have to happen again. To better understand how empathy can impact school wide discipline issues, Okonofua, Paunesku, and Walton (2016) put teachers through a short empathy training course and measured the rates of suspension their students faced throughout the rest of the school year.

In the study, 31 math teachers and 1,682 students in sixth through eighth grade were used to measure the long term effects of empathetic discipline. The study began with teachers going through a 45 minute session that suggested nonpunitive, empathetic methods of classroom management. Teachers took another 25 minute class two months later. At the end of the year, the researchers found that the students of teachers who took the empathy training classes had a 50%

decrease in suspensions from 9.8% to 4.6% and students with prior suspensions saw a drop from 51.2% to 29.4% (Okonofua et al., 2016).

The empathetic mindset is described as a mindset where teachers prioritize valuing the students' perspective and understating what might have triggered their misbehavior, sustaining positive relationships with students and working with them in the context of a trusting relationship to improve their behavior (Okonofua et al., 2016). Students who have a relationship with their teacher will be much more willing to listen and voice their concerns in a constructive way, and teachers who have relationships with their students will be much more likely to hold an empathetic mindset when managing their classroom. It could be suggested that race plays a role in the amount of empathy that a teacher shows toward their Black students.

Research has also been done to better understand the role that a teacher's race may play in the suspension and discipline of students. Researchers wanted to know if the probability of a student being suspended could be impacted by the race of their teacher. To do this, Lindsey and Hart (2017) used five years of student and teacher data from North Carolina schools. In their study, the researchers tracked students from year to year to see if they were more or less likely to face suspension when taught by an own-race teacher. Their hypothesis was that students would be less likely to face suspension when taught by a teacher of their same race.

The researchers decided to limit their study to elementary students and teachers because students at this age typically spend their entire day with the same teacher. The study found that Black male students were 15% less likely to face suspension in years that they were taught by a Black teacher (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). On the other hand, the discipline that white students faced was not significantly impacted by the race of their teacher. The reason for these rates of discipline are unclear. It could be that Black teachers have more of an empathetic mindset when

teaching Black students. On the other hand, it could simply be that Black teachers are more lenient toward students of their same race. Regardless, it is clear through this study that Black students are removed from class less often and have more opportunity to learn in the classroom when they are taught by a teacher of their same race.

Studies have found that most classroom discipline issues that a student faces can be directly linked to the relationship that the student has with their teacher. This can be found in the results of Chiu and Chow's comprehensive study on school discipline across 41 different countries (2011). In each of the 41 countries, students who were 15 years old from 150 different schools were surveyed to ask about classroom culture and their relationship with their teachers. That data was then cross referenced with student achievement and school discipline numbers. The study found that in schools with the least amount of discipline incidents, students report that their teacher had better control of classroom discipline. This means the teacher was able to address issues in the classroom without having to send a student out of the room or to the office. It was also found that the teachers in the classes with the best self reported classroom discipline, were also found to have the strongest relationships with their students according to their students (Chiu & Chow, 2011).

Student-teacher relationships are critical for classrooms to be successful and for discipline issues to be reduced, yet white teachers often struggle to build relationships with their Black students. A recent study of four successful Black teachers can highlight ways in which teachers can build successful relationships that result in reduced disciplinary measures. In the study, four successful Black teachers were observed and interviewed with their Black students for three years. It was found that these teachers were successful because they envisioned education as a means to racial justice, and they viewed their school and classroom as a site of

resistance (De Royston et al., 2017). Every day, these teachers took on many roles to identify and work against the oppression and racism that their Black students were exposed to. The teachers in the study held high expectations for their students, but were also quick to offer grace to students when they did not meet those expectations. The students recognized their teachers as more than just people with information, but they saw their teachers as advocates and adults who cared for them. Results also showed that these successful teachers directly impacted their students' willingness to be physically present in school, their attitudes towards school, and their interactional behaviors in engaging in school (De Royston et al., 2017). Researchers concluded that although they only observed Black teachers, white teachers are also able to take these same steps and build relationships beyond the typical teacher-student dynamic with their Black students to increase achievement and decrease discipline issues. White teachers need to be willing to fight for their students every single day to counteract the constant forces working against them.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In study after study, it was found that the main reason people decide to go into the teaching profession is the desire to make a social contribution (McNeil, 2016; Marsh, 2015; Ni & Rorrer,). Teachers want to provide positive learning experiences for their students that will result in a more successful future. While most teachers teach for good reasons, it has been established that they struggle to actually do so for their Black students. Changes in mindset, framework, and understanding need to be made at both the administrative and individual level for Black students to finally have the same opportunities that their white classmates hold.

For too long, the educational success and opportunities for Black students have not been a top priority in the education system. One size fits all and homogenous policies and practices have been put in place that only make the opportunity gap that already exists wider and more apparent. Research makes it clear that there are two ways for teachers and schools to better provide for their Black students.

The first way is for schools to increase the amount of Black teachers that they employ. Black students test better when they are taught by Black teachers (Egalite et al., 2015). Black students face fewer suspensions and discipline issues when they are taught by Black teachers (Lindsey & Hart, 2017). And Black students tend to achieve higher levels of education when they are taught by Black teachers (Gershenson & Papageorge, 2018). It is clear that Black students show stronger signs of growth and engagement when they share certain cultural anchors and understandings with their teacher. While schools can do a better job diversifying their teachers and administrators, white teachers can do much to close the opportunity gaps that exist when Black students are taught by white teachers. In order for white teachers to provide realistic opportunities for their Black students, they need to acknowledge their own biases and blindspots,

gain a better understanding of the cultural backgrounds of their students, and reframe their mindset to allow for a more empathic approach to classroom discipline and management.

Professional Application

The first step that can be made in schools across the country is to narrow and eliminate the opportunity gap that exists for Black students and commit to hiring more Black teachers. By simply recruiting, hiring, and retaining Black teachers, schools can create a more diverse and inclusive learning experience for all students. This may seem like a difficult task, but there are several ways in which schools can diversify the teaching work forces across the country.

In many schools, the primary teachers tend to be white while the paraprofessional and teaching aides are typically people of color. Schools can take the step to train and support teaching aids to get their own teaching license. Elevating the staff members that are already working in current schools would increase the amount of Black teachers in schools. Some school districts are already implementing this action. For example, the city of Milwaukee has a teaching workforce that is made up of only 16% Black teachers, while 56% of their paraprofessionals and teaching aides are Black (Files, 2018). The school district has partnered with local universities to provide grants and financial support for teaching aids and paraprofessionals to earn their teaching license while continuing to work full time. While it is still too early to tell if this strategy will truly impact the diversity of teachers in Milwaukee, it is a strong first step in providing more opportunities for skilled and dedicated Black educators to be the primary teachers and additional support for Black students.

While increasing the amount of Black teachers in schools is an important step in closing the opportunity gap, white teachers also have a lot to contribute in the process as well. White teachers need to take time to reflect on their own teaching methods and practices to identify the

ways that Black students are being negatively impacted by those practices. This can be a very difficult process, and sadly, one that not all teachers are willing to do. If white teachers are unable to identify their own blindspots and weaknesses, Black students will continue to suffer and fall further behind their white classmates and peers. In many schools, there are white teachers who are already doing this work. That work needs to be praised and highlighted, so that other teachers around the country can find ways to follow those same steps.

Strong white teachers work to create solidarity with their diverse students. Solidarity can be found when teachers, “defend, support, coach, mentor, and provide for their students in ways that put the students' needs first as well as see themselves as part of communities beyond the school” (Boucher, 2016, pg.90). A study was completed to highlight five white teachers who are already working to create solidarity with their diverse students, and have found success where many other white teachers have not (Boucher, 2016). These teachers provide a counternarrative in which a white teacher is able to meet their Black students in relationships that empower, nurture, and respect students. While these white teachers are a minority in the border teaching workforce, they provide hope that other white teachers can also do the same if they are willing to put in the work and identify their own deficiencies and blind spots.

According to the author of the study, there are two themes that emerged from the successful white teachers that he observed. The first theme is interrogating one’s whiteness (Boucher, 2016). A teacher needs to understand how their experiences in life have been shaped by their race. There are certain privileges that one receives by simply being white. If a teacher cannot recognize how their life has been shaped by their whiteness, they will never succeed in understanding how their students’ lives have been shaped by their race.

The second theme is solidarity with one's students (Boucher, 2016). In a classroom of solidarity, the teacher has an individual connection with each student, even if it is just small or a silly inside joke. The classroom is a safe space where students feel comfortable to speak their mind and to ask questions. A successful white teacher builds time in their lessons to have individual conversations with students, so that each student in the class feels recognized and valued. These practices take time and effort. They do not happen overnight, but are built through consistent actions that continue throughout the school year. Teachers can also take the immediate steps to diversify the sources and materials that they provide to their students. Finding ways to celebrate and highlight different cultures throughout daily activities and exercises are simple steps to build solidarity between students and teachers.

For white teachers to become successful teachers of Black students, they need to be committed to doing the work of identifying their own whiteness and creating a classroom of solidarity. While teachers are doing this work on their own, school districts can also commit to creating classrooms with an empathetic view of discipline. In the United States, teachers spend on average 19 days a year on professional development (Layton, 2015). This is a significant amount of time and should amount to serious improvement for teachers every year, but that is not the case. The current model of professional development that schools use is confusing and not beneficial to most teachers or their students. A recent study by TNTP (formerly known as The New Teacher Project) of 10,000 teachers found that schools spend on average \$18,000 a year on professional development, yet there was little to no evidence that there were any signs of improvement that came from that professional development (2015).

Surveys show that most teachers share that the time spent on professional development is not effective or helpful. If school districts committed to using that professional development time

to expose their teachers to models of empathic teaching, it would drastically reduce the amount of suspensions and time out of class for Black students. As the study by TNTP showed, there is plenty of money and resources for teacher development, but it needs to be directed toward methods and practices that have already proved to be successful and effective for both teachers and their students (2015).

For my own teaching, the first step that I am going to take to become a better teacher for the Black students that I teach is to try to use more of an empathetic mindset when viewing discipline and conflict. The first step in doing so is to break down the misconceptions of what a classroom should look and sound like. When it comes to classroom management with an empathetic context, it is important to remember that it does not mean that discipline simply disappears. Instead, intervention should result in a discipline that results in a mutual understanding and trust (Okonofua et al., 2016).

Limitations of Research

There are several limitations to the research linking teacher race to student academics, such as Black teachers are more likely to teach at underfunded schools (Harbatkin, 2021) and most Black students are only taught by Black teachers when they go to an underfunded school. This will most likely skew any data that is recorded from these students and teachers. Most studies made an effort to eliminate the variation caused by these situations, but it made it much more difficult to truly understand the impact that Black teachers had on Black students in those situations.

Another limit to the research was that most middle school and high school students are taught by both Black and white teachers. It was hard to attribute the academic outcomes of a student to a specific teacher. Because of this, a majority of the available research has been done

at the elementary level. Also, when data from an older student is recorded, there are far more past teachers that can also play an impact in the students academic outcomes. A kindergarten or first grade teacher can have a far lasting impact, while a high school teacher only impacts a student for a shorter amount of recordable time.

Implications for Future Research

Future research needs to be done on what characteristics Black teachers have that white teachers seem to still struggle with. While there are many white teachers who are passionate about their profession and want to be better teachers, it is clear that there are significant signs of racial bias and an inability to relate to Black students on the part of white teachers that have yet to be addressed. Also, as previously established, some teacher skills are harder to measure than others. Better measurement tools are needed to quantify the effects that Black and white teachers have on their students.

While some research does exist (Dorcus & Wadescango, 2020) more data is needed to understand the relationship between teacher professional development and the impact that it has on students. In the past decade, schools continued to spend more and more on social/emotional learning and inclusive teaching methods (Mader, 2015), while little impact is seen in the classroom. Further research is needed to successful professional development techniques that have long lasting impacts.

Lastly, further research is required on the relationships between Black students with their white and Black teachers. Is there a correlation between lasting relationships between students and teachers, and the future success of those students? As more and more emphasis is put on testing numbers, there is less and less room for teachers to develop relationships with their students.

Conclusion

It is clear that there is an opportunity gap that exists between white and Black students. The purpose of this literature review was to better understand the role that teachers and teacher race play in the opportunity gap. Research shows that white teachers negatively impact their Black students through implicit and explicit bias and through discipline and removal from class of their Black students (Grissom & Redding, 2015; Cheng, 2019). It also shows that Black students have better academic outcomes across a wide scope of measurements when they are taught by Black teachers. In order to narrow and close the opportunity gap, school districts need to work to diversify their teaching workforce, and white teachers need to identify and address their own biases. Teachers also need to gain a better understanding of how their discipline procedures impact their Black students, and shift to a more empathetic model of classroom management. Many teachers have a passion for justice in education, and with the proper framework and supports in place, this passion can be reflected in every school.

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