Seeing Teachers at Work: A Review of the Teacher Workforce Diversity Literature

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Ways of Seeing Racially Diverse Teachers at Work: A Review of Teacher Workforce Diversity Literature

Qualifying Paper
Submitted by

Shauna Brown Leung
December 2016
Acknowledgements

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The contemporary teacher workforce diversity discourse offers an intriguing intersection of cross-disciplinary interests in education that positions teacher workforce diversity policy as a tool to leverage changes in educational outcomes. This body of scholarship from economists (e.g. Dee, 2004; Klopfenstein, 2005), political scientists (e.g. Pitts, 2007), sociologists (e.g. Lewis & Diamond, 2015) and anthropologists (Griffin, 2015) reflects a range of vantage points from which to consider teachers’ work in schools. Education policy advocates and reformers (Shanker Institute, 2015; USDOE, 2016b; Villegas & Lucas, 2004) take up this research in reports on teacher workforce diversity, which highlight the important contributions that teachers of color make to students in education systems across the nation. Within this discourse, both policymakers and researchers demonstrate a responsiveness to the call issued by Villegas and Lucas (2004) to contribute to the development of a more robust understanding of the nature of the contributions that teachers of color make to students, and to call attention to the need to preserve the use of cultural expertise in an education policy context defined by increased accountability and reliance on standardized assessments.

Notably, the current emphasis on the importance of teachers of color in schools is situated within a larger discussion that foregrounds the national struggle to effectively and reliably serve growing numbers of students of color. One commentator suggests that the projections of the 2014 demographic shift to a “majority-minority” student body (USDOE, 2016a) has heightened awareness of a need to “vastly improve the educational outcomes for this new and diverse majority of American students, whose success is inextricably linked to the well-being of the nation,” (Maxwell, 2014). Villegas, Strom and Lucas (2012) and the U.S. Department of Education (2016b) also position teachers of color as linchpins of effective equity-focused reform. Specifically, Villegas, Strom and Lucas (2012) suggest that: “Efforts to diversify the teaching force should be seen as only one component—albeit a critically important one—in a broad and comprehensive policy designed to ensure that children who historically have been marginalized in
schools receive the high quality education they deserve (p. 298). Similarly, the authors of a USDOE report entitled, “The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce,” assert that “teachers and leaders of color will play a critical role in ensuring equity in our education system” (USDOE, 2016b, p.9). Notably, though these claims presume a positive relationship between teacher workforce diversity and increased equity, the significance of schools as the context for these interactions is uninterrogated. Thus, we know very little about how, and under what conditions, the increased participation of teachers of color leads to systemic school-level reform.

Yet organization-level analyses of racial diversity among teachers at work have the potential to offer important insights to supplement the research that focuses on discerning the distinct contributions of teachers of color. For example, a school-level perspective regarding assertions that increases in the number of teachers of color in schools will lead to more equitable school systems requires consideration of the contributions of White teachers who comprise 82% of the teaching force (USDOE, 2016b). This perspective illuminates collegial, inter-racial interactions among teachers as a dimension of teachers’ work that is likely to influence the extent of systemic change in schools. Further, empirical analyses conducted by organization-focused scholars reveal that the effectiveness of improvement-focused reform is influenced by “how the organization of a school and its day-to-day operations, including its connections to parents and community, interact with work inside its classrooms to advance student learning” (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Eaton, 2010, p.48). These findings suggest that there is value in using a school-level lens to investigate the ways in which teachers in racially diverse professional communities influence educational outcomes over time.

Thus, in this review of the teacher workforce diversity literature, I interrogate the assumptions regarding teachers’ work and the implications of racial diversity on school-level practices that are embedded in the literature. Three research questions guide my analysis: How are teachers and their work conceptualized in the teacher workforce diversity literature? What implications for
practice emerge from this discourse? What future school-level research on racially diverse communities of teachers would help to strengthen understandings of the mechanisms that link racially diverse communities to increased educational equity? In answering these questions, I offer perspectives on teachers’ work and on conceptions of racial diversity in schools that refer to all teachers, not just teachers of color.

I structure my discussion of the literature around four conceptualizations of teachers and their work that serve as a useful, albeit imperfect, heuristic for engaging the discourse regarding teacher workforce diversity: teachers as essential human resources, teachers as mediators of student learning, teachers as influential bureaucrats, and teachers as organizational agents. The first three categories emerge from my review of the policy and research literature that is used to advocate for increasing the number of teachers of color in the workforce. I contend that because these categories share a singular focus on discerning the discrete contributions of individual teachers, they offer a limited view of teachers’ work in school. Thus, I introduce a fourth perspective, teachers as organizational agents, which calls attention to the ways that teachers’ work shapes and is shaped by their particular school communities. This view of racially diverse teachers is grounded in research by sociologists and anthropologists. I argue that expanding the teacher workforce diversity discourse to consider interactions between teachers and their organizational context is critical to understanding the connections and dissonance between teacher workforce diversity policy and school-level practice. Specifically, I suggest that this perspective is a useful lens through which to see the complexity of teachers’ roles in schools, the ambiguity that is embedded in the term diversity (Berrey, 2015), and opportunities for equity-focused future research.

I begin with a brief summary of each of these dimensions. Then, after discussing each of the policy focused perspectives in detail, I summarize the implications of these framings of teachers’ work on school based practice. Next, I present my conceptualization of teachers as
organizational agents and articulate connections between the school improvement-focused literature and the teacher diversity workforce literature. I conclude this review by advocating for future research that positions racial diversity as a characteristic of entire school communities. Specifically, I call for scholarship that attends more closely to organization-level practices within diverse communities (Berrey, 2015) and seeks to illuminate the actual work that members of racially diverse communities of educators do as they strive to create more equitable education systems.

An Overview of the Four Characterizations of Teachers at Work

The descriptions of teachers and their work as essential human resources and mediators of student learning reflect ideas that are central to the main arguments and empirical research offered in support of teacher workforce diversity. The view of teachers as essential human resources captures the essence of the argument that is known as “the workforce rationale” (Villegas and Irvine, 2010), which describes teachers of color as an important source of labor for school systems that serve large numbers of students of color. Villegas and Irvine report that this rationale is supported by research that suggests that “educators of color appear to be more committed to teaching students of color, more drawn to teaching in difficult-to-staff urban schools, and more apt to persist in those settings” (p.186). Evidence of this rationale in use is embedded in discussions of efforts related to the recruitment, preparation and retention of people of color. Arguments in support of these interventions often frame the persistence of the service of teachers of color to communities of color (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Shanker Institute, 2015; U.S. DOE, 2016b; Villegas & Irvine, 2010) as a distinct contribution that teachers of color have traditionally made in schools. This framing of teachers as staffing units plays an important role in directing resources to initiatives that get school systems to recognize teachers of color as valuable, and to motivate efforts to seek out and hire teachers of color in schools. It is consistently offered alongside more substantive discussions of teachers’ work.
The characterization of teachers as mediators of student learning has strong resonance with the view of teachers that is embedded in value added models (Chetty, Friedman, Rockoff, 2011). It reflects arguments that emphasize the distinct contributions that teachers of color make to students’ educational outcomes. Research findings that suggest that teachers of color are more likely than their White counterparts to use cultural, relational and pedagogical resources in ways that lead to measurable differences in the educational experiences and academic success of students of color (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Villegas & Irvine, 2010) fall into this category. More recently, advocates have called attention to scholarship that emphasizes distinct contributions that teachers of color make to the educational experiences of White students (Shanker, 2015; USDOE, 2016b). They cite evidence that exposure to racial difference can lead to implicit bias reduction among White students, acknowledge that teachers of color can also be role models for White students, and highlight evidence regarding White students’ perceptions of teachers of color (Cherng & Halpin, 2016).

In contrast to the classroom based focus of the first two characterizations of teachers, conceptualizations of teachers as influential bureaucrats and teachers as organizational agents refer to teachers’ work beyond the walls of their individual classrooms. These categories summarize the research contributions of political scientists who study bureaucratic representation (Grissom, Kern & Rodriguez, 2015; Lim, 2006) and education-focused sociologists who offer organization-level analyses of schools (e.g. Lewis & Diamond, 2015), respectively. The framing of teachers as influential bureaucrats foregrounds teachers’ work as street level bureaucrats (2010), defined by their use of powerful discretionary authority, which enables them to influence the distribution of educational resources in schools (Pitts, 2007). This depiction is central to the theories of representative bureaucracy, which undergird a robust body of scholarship that links the presence of teachers of color to improved access to educational opportunities for students of color. These studies find positive relationships between the presence of teachers of color and
school-level outcomes which include, but are not limited to the administration of punishment and access to rigorous academic opportunities in ways that benefit students of the same race (Grissom, Kern & Rodrigues, 2015). Though the mechanisms that undergird these relationships are unclear, the characterization of teachers as influential bureaucrats encourages attention to the connection between racial diversity among teachers and teachers’ impact on the distribution of school-level educational resources among students in their communities.

The fourth view of teachers as organizational agents calls attention to negotiations with organizational culture, norms and routines as an aspect of teachers’ work that influences student outcomes. Notably, this view of teachers is not represented in the policy-focused teacher workforce diversity discourse. This perspective is grounded in qualitative scholarship that illuminates organizational dynamics and patterns of practice associated with persistent racial disparities in well-resourced school communities with racially diverse teachers and students (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Griffin, 2015). These scholars bring teachers’ interactions with aspects of organizational culture and participation in routines into sharp relief. In so doing, they expose the powerful roles that these almost invisible interactions play in facilitating the reproduction of inequality. This perspective stands in sharp contrast to the focus on positive outcomes that dominates the advocacy discourse. Yet, it illuminates a largely overlooked and consequential dimension of all teachers’ work that can be overshadowed by a singular focus on the presence of racial diversity (Berrey, 2015).

I. Teachers as Essential Human Resources

The policy-focused literature on teacher workforce diversity emphasizes the importance of taking action to increase the number of teachers of color in schools. This discussion of teachers is grounded in an organizational perspective that represents teachers as staffing units that are essential to the operation of schools. In this context, teachers of color are depicted as scarce human resources. For example, teacher workforce diversity advocates prioritize initiatives that
focus on the recruitment and retention of teachers of color (Boser, 2011, 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Shanker Institute, 2015; USDOE, 2016b) as they argue for redoubled efforts to achieve the numeric goals associated with teacher workforce diversity—parity in the racial demographics of the teacher workforce and the student body (Villegas, Strom & Lucas, 2012). Additionally, scholarly contributions that link policy to practice by depicting teacher workforce diversity from multiple vantage points illuminate gaps between the macro-level policy goals and the actual distribution of teachers in particular communities (Boser, 2011, 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Villegas, Strom & Lucas, 2012). Further, recent analyses have revealed disheartening trends regarding teacher retention and prompted school-level scrutiny. For example, Ingersoll (2015) reports that “While minority teachers entered teaching at higher rates than non-minorities over the two and half decades from 1982 to 2012, minority teachers also left schools at higher rates” (p. 19). Ingersoll & May (2011) suggest that this is an area of workforce diversity policy that has powerful implications for school-level practice because it “undermines efforts to address the minority teacher shortage” (Ingersoll, 2015, p.19). This framing of teachers and their work makes a necessary, though not sufficient, contribution to bridging the gap between teacher workforce diversity policy and changes in school-level practice.

Recruitment

Since the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy identified teacher workforce diversity as an issue worthy of national prominence (Villegas & Irvine, 2004), advocacy efforts have focused on strengthening efforts to recruit teachers of color. Economics-based metaphors embedded in the use of terms such as supply and investments in strengthening the pipeline connote references to measurable units and evoke images of resource acquisition as they frame teacher workforce diversity as a problem, and to suggest solutions. Further, they are central to a narrative that offers justification for initiatives designed to connect potential teachers of color to post-secondary education, teacher education programs, and sustained employment in the same
school (Shanker Institute, 2015; USDOE, 2016b). Today, national, state and philanthropic agencies sponsor recruitment-focused diversity initiatives in an effort to achieve the goal of demographic parity between the racial compositions of the teacher workforce and student body (Bireda & Chait, 2011; Shanker Institute, 2015). Notably, scholars who have noted the widening gap between the racial diversity of the student body and that of the teacher workforce have described this target as “elusive” (Villegas, Strom & Lucas, 2012). Yet, it offers an important reference point from which to assess the results of efforts to increase the presence of teachers of color in U.S. public schools, and to motivate additional action (e.g. Boser, 2011, 2014).

Though there is much work to do, evidence that efforts to increase the number of people of color who enter the profession have generated some success highlights the value of a narrow focus on teachers as human resources. Teachers of color now comprise 17% of the total workforce, which is up from 13% in 1986 (USDOE, 2016b). While causal studies have not been conducted, there are a range of interventions that likely contributed to these results. Scholars report that 31 states have participated in efforts to support minority recruitment by offering financial incentives, imposing mandates, and opening recruitment centers (Villegas, Strom & Lucas, 2012). Additionally, data regarding alternative routes for teacher certification in 2008 suggests that these routes are a pathway for teachers of color to enter the profession. In 2008, alternatively certified teachers constituted 27 percent of African American teachers, 25 percent of Hispanic teachers, and 11 percent of White teachers who received their professional credential that year (Boser, 2011). Additionally, the Shanker Institute (2015) highlights eight state and local programs that have generated some evidence of success in the recruitment, preparation and retention of minority teachers. The policy successes have important implications for school-level practice.

One result of the policy interventions that focus on racial diversity is an increase in the range of pre-service experiences among teachers in school communities among teachers of all races. While variation in teachers’ pre-service training is not a new phenomenon in the US, where a mix
of higher education institutions offer a range of approaches to teacher training (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011), the incorporation of teachers certified through alternate routes adds additional dimensions of difference among teachers within schools. Additionally, participants from school-based career development opportunities for paraprofessionals, such as Illinois’ Grow Your Own Teachers program (Rasher, & Gould, 2012) and programs like Today’s Student’s Tomorrow’s Teachers, which targets current students, (Cooper & Spielhagen, 2010) are likely to add new perspectives to school communities. Because pre-service experiences among entering teachers may exert strong influences on their professional practice (Lortie, 1977), this increase in professional perspectives likely adds complexity to interactions among all educators within a school community.

This range of professional training has powerful implications for professional learning needs of teachers in particular school communities. Darling-Hammond, Chung & Frelow (2002) note that the inclusion of teachers who obtained alternative certifications is likely to increase the range of competencies among teachers in a school community. Additionally, though researchers have highlighted positive benefits that differences in perspectives can yield in organizations (e.g. Page, 2007), the deployment of the significant skill and effort necessary to acknowledge, negotiate, and reconcile dissimilarities and disagreements, cannot be taken for granted, especially in racially diverse communities (Griffin, 2015). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983, 2003) offers rich descriptions of the complex work of negotiating racial differences in their depictions of educators in “good high schools” (1983), participants in parent-teacher conferences (2003). Thus, there is a need for more scholarly attention to the manifestation and engagement with difference in the context of teachers’ work in schools, with an emphasis on these processes in racially diverse communities of educators.

Representation

While the macro-level goal of demographic parity may seem self-evident, scholarly depictions of gaps between the racial composition of the teacher workforce and the student body from multiple
perspectives and in many contexts reveal important nuances. For example, Boser’s (2011, 2014) Teacher Diversity Index ranks states on the percentage-point difference between teachers of color and students of color. This data, which is designed to motivate action, can be understood as a list of racially disaggregated, state-by-state recruitment targets. Villegas, Strom and Lucas’s (2012) teacher-student parity index, which uses calculations that describe overrepresentation and underrepresentation of racial groups of students as greater than or less than one, respectively, offers an additional picture of meaningful variation. Their visual depictions of national and state-level trends create clear pictures of growing gaps between the racial representations of White and minority students within the teacher workforce. They reveal a declining trend in representation for both Black and Hispanic students between 1987 and 2007 that is exacerbated by differences in the pace of demographic change in the student and teacher communities (Villegas, Strom & Lucas, 2012). Boser (2014) offers district-level perspectives on the extent of representation in particular communities, which reflect finer grained differences in the amount and type of work to be done. His analysis of data from California, Florida and Massachusetts illuminates within-district gaps in rural, urban and suburban communities that are larger than those within states. Similarly, the Shanker Institute’s (2015) nine-city analysis captures the differences in the challenges of racial representation among urban communities. These more nuanced descriptions highlight the limited usefulness of macro-level patterns in determining local needs. Thus, future analyses that group communities with similar challenges may offer a view through which to consider new approaches to this very real challenge.

Ingersoll and May (2011) and Ingersoll (2015) offer a perspective on the distribution of teachers of color that complements the regional analyses described above. Specifically they operationalize their concern for representation by categorizing schools according to community characteristics (e.g. urban/suburban, high/low poverty, high/low minority) and use these categories to frame their organization-level analyses of the national School and Staffing Survey data from 2003-2004.
Ingersoll and May describe these trends as an unanticipated shift in human resources. They explain, “while minority teacher migration does not result in a net loss to the system, it does result in a large annual asymmetric loss of minority teachers from some of the same types of schools—urban and poor—in which minority teacher recruitment efforts have long sought to place minority candidates” (p. 28). Additionally, their discussion of the implications of minority teacher migration highlight a framing of teacher workforce diversity as a human resource intervention that targets urban schools. Yet the actual findings seem to call for a more nuanced understanding of the trends related to teacher workforce diversity in a range of school contexts.

Scholarly attention to the relationships between teachers’ responses to teacher-level demographic changes and teachers’ participation in school-wide efforts to generate more equitable educational outcomes would help to strengthen the limited knowledge of the mechanisms through which diverse communities of educators influence educational outcomes (Grissom, Kern & Rodriguez, 2015; Lewis & Diamond, 2015). In particular, teachers’ perspectives have the potential to offer rich insights regarding the implications of racial diversity within their ranks on the enactment of school-level practices that shape student outcomes. For example, teachers’ voices are critical to understanding links between changes in the racial composition and school-level social resources.
such as relational trust among colleagues and community members, which Bryk & Schneider (2002) describe as a key ingredient in school improvement efforts. Similarly, there are rich opportunities to consider the perspectives of teachers of all races in communities and school systems where teachers of color make up less than 10% of the staff. Thus, scholarly research that examines how teachers in these communities describe the relationship between the increasing participation of teachers of color and local school improvement efforts could offer important practical insights. Further, this perspective from schools with small and growing populations of teachers of color is critical to informing a policy agenda that has largely targeted urban systems (Ingersoll & May, 2011). At the same time, research that documents teachers’ perspectives on school improvement practices in schools where increasing numbers of White teachers are offsetting the loss of teachers of color would also capture an overlooked view of diversity among teachers in schools.

Scale is another dimension of meaningful nuance that emerges from analyses of differences between the macro-level descriptions of the distribution of teachers across particular communities and discussions of the racial demographics of local communities. For example, while the norms of this discourse support reliance on macro-level racial categories, it is important to note that these analytic categories mask considerable ambiguity. For example, Ingersoll & May (2011) use a White/minority dichotomy that depicts White teachers and teachers of color as monolithic blocks. This framing offers very little precision to inform practical application. Boser’s (2014) description of trends offers a bit more precision as it disaggregates Hispanic and African American students. Yet the combining students and teachers of Asian, Indigenous and Mixed race heritage into a category called “other” raises questions about the extent to which the representation of students in these communities is important.

In contrast, the Shanker Institute report’s nine-city analysis (2015) illuminates trends that are masked by selective disaggregation of macro-level data. Specifically the data show that Asian
students are proportionally over-represented among the teacher workforces in Chicago, Cleveland, and Los Angeles, where they comprise 3.4%, 0.8%, and 6.2% of the student body, respectively. They are underrepresented in the six other cities. Additionally, there is evidence that Los Angeles is the site of an exception to the trend of underrepresentation of Black students. Black students comprise 10.2% of the population and teachers are 10.5% of the population. These anomalous situations capture a level of complexity in the trends regarding representation at the district-levels. Thus more research regarding teacher workforce diversity that focuses on demographic trends that are salient in particular localities, but may seem insignificant from a macro-level perspective, is necessary to make the discourse more representative of the nation’s school communities and more relevant to practitioners.

Finally, the practical implications of this body of scholarship would be much more accessible if scholars created racially disaggregated analyses that aligned with educationally salient categories (e.g. level of schooling; geographic location; racial breakdown of the student body). This framing could be used in conjunction with analytic dichotomies such as high/low minority, high/low poverty, and urban/suburban schools to illuminate some of significant variability within each category. These analyses would give school-based practitioners the benefit of greater precision as they identify schools with which to make meaningful comparisons. As it stands the mismatch between the current emphasis on urban communities in the discourse and the reality of increasing racial diversity among teachers in suburban communities limits the application of research in the context of practice.

Retention

The scholarly emphasis on issues of teacher retention highlights trends have the most direct school level implications related to the experiences of teachers of all races. Ingersoll & May (2011) problematize decreases in the retention of teachers of color by describing the extent to which they offset recruitment gains. Additionally, scholars acknowledge retention challenges as a
deviation from a reliance on teachers of color to work in urban schools (Boser, 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ingersoll, 2015, Villegas & Lucas, 2004) that creates school-level staffing challenges, particularly in urban schools (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Ingersoll’s investigations of the relationship between retention and working conditions offer insight into this phenomenon. Notably, there is an understated finding of a meaningful overlap between the perceptions of White and minority teachers in this study. Both groups of teachers linked their leaving to a lack of shared decision making and limited individual autonomy. Regarding the 2012-2013 data, Ingersoll writes, “The data also show that nonminority teachers report similar reasons behind their turnover” (p.20). These findings implicate school-level practices and illuminate cross-race similarities that are evidence of a school-wide problem. Notably these analyses also revealed racial differences. For example, in the 2003-04 data, lack of school leadership support and increases in minority enrollment were uniquely associated with White teachers’ departure, while lack of shared decision making and limited individual autonomy were the only factors that were significant for minority teachers. These findings highlight the importance of also attending to similarities across race.

Notably the findings of cross-race similarities and differences have implications for research and practice. Specifically, it highlights a normative emphasis on racial differences that has the potential to be limiting. In particular, the fact that teachers of all races identified similar working conditions that motivated their departure point raises questions about the pervasiveness of teachers’ experiences with limited autonomy and lack of decision making influence in schools. Notably, Sparks and Malkus (2015) conducted a longitudinal analysis of SASS data that included teachers of all races. They found both a positive association between teacher autonomy and teacher retention and a trend in which increasing numbers of teachers are reporting decreases in autonomy over time. This suggests that district and state-level leaders who are concerned about diversity would be wise to take action in response to accountability policies that seem to have
adverse effect on teacher retention in general, and in particular on efforts to develop and sustain racially diverse communities of teachers. This level of advocacy and activism is particularly important for leaders that serve communities who are most impacted by policy frameworks that lead to working conditions that are defined by accountability, standardization, and prescriptive classroom practices. At the school level, Ingersoll’s findings regarding working conditions suggest a need to link questions about teacher workforce diversity to research that highlights different approaches to school management, and the extent to which teachers are subject to micro-managing leadership. In short, these findings highlight the need for a more robust equity-focused human resource structure to create working conditions that enable teachers of all races in all communities to make meaningful decisions in their school communities.

II. Teachers as Mediators of Student Learning

Reports written by the Center for American Progress (Boser, 2011, 2014), The Albert Shanker Institute (2015), the University of Washington (2015), and the US Department of Education (2016) rely heavily on evidence from a robust body of quantitative research that informs a racially disaggregated view of teachers’ contributions to student outcomes. For example, a number of empirical studies suggest that, compared to their White peers, teachers of color make distinct and positive contributions to classroom based outcomes for students. These arguments complement a tradition of rich qualitative research that describes African American teachers’ contributions to the education of students (e.g. Foster, 1998), the characteristics of teachers who are successful with students of color (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 2009), and the experiences of teachers of color in schools (Bristol, 2014; Kelly, 2007). Yet references to qualitative research are infrequent in advocacy and policy documents, which reflect a bias toward quantitative analyses.

The literature that focuses on the relationship between policy interventions and improvements in student achievement has strong links to the broader accountability era education reform and policy discourse (Villegas & Lucas, 2004). Specifically, the research that is cited by policy
advocates to emphasize teachers’ role as mediators of student learning consists largely of quantitative analyses of large-scale data sets. The design and scale of the most frequently cited studies approximate the standards for research that are most likely to influence policy (Slavin, 2002). Thus, this body of research implicitly positions the policy goal of increasing in the number of teachers of color as an educational intervention whose educational benefits can be empirically verified. Notably, contributions to this body of literature maintain a laser-like focus on the aspects of students experiences that are located in the instructional core—interactions among and between teachers, student and content (Cohen & Ball, 1999). Thus, scholars focus on outcomes such as the selection of teacher expectations, student satisfaction, and measures of student achievement. In this research, scholars test hypotheses regarding relationships between teachers’ race and classroom-based outcomes using analytic models that are designed to measure the aggregate, independent contributions of individual teachers. This emphasis on teachers’ contributions is in alignment with the research-based assertion that focuses on teachers (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011) and their instructional behaviors (Wallace Foundation, 2010) as having the most impact on student learning and achievement.

There seems to be a developing scholarly consensus that racial similarities between teachers and students matter for some students. Specifically, scholarly efforts to discern the extent to which differences in teachers’ race are associated with statistically meaningful differences in outcomes for students of particular racial groups have produced mixed results. Using data from the Tennessee STAR experiment, Dee (2004) finds that same-race teacher-student pairing, or race-matching, is associated with higher math and reading achievement for Black and White students. Egalite, Kisida & Winters (2015) conducted an updated version of this study using data from students and teachers in Florida. They report evidence of benefits associated with race matching for Black, White, and Asian students, but not Hispanic students. Further, their findings differ for groups of students across academic subjects. They note that the largest effect sizes are evident
among low performing Black and White students. Gershonsen, Holt & Papageorge (2016) use similar data analytic strategies to examine racial differences in teachers’ expectations for Black students. They find that, on average, White teachers reported having lower expectations for Black students than did Black teachers. Cherng & Halpin (2016) make an important contribution to this discourse by using data that captures students’ perspectives on their teachers’ contributions. Specifically, their analysis of surveys administered to urban students in Grades 6-9 as part of the Measure of Effecting Teaching study reveals variations in students’ perceptions of teachers of White, Black and Latino teachers. They find that students of all races rate Black and Latino teachers more favorably than they perceive White teachers. Additionally, they report that students who are classified as Asian, Black and Other rate Black teachers most favorably.

In addition to attending to the differences in classroom-based contributions of teachers by racial group, scholars have also conducted studies to discern the extent to which same-race pairing of teachers yields benefits to students, if at all. While there is evidence that the pairings work for some student in some cases, it is clear that race-matching is not a one-size fits all solution. The research findings in this regard suggest that the effects of race-matching are largest among low performing Black and White students (Dee, 2004, 2005; Egalite, Kisida & Winter, 2015). At the same time, Rist’s (2000) ethnographic rendering of class-based discrimination in a classroom of Black students led by a Black teacher, serves as a powerful reminder of the need to make decisions based on more than just race. Similarly, Cherng & Halpin (2016) describe different reactions to same race pairing among Latinx students and teachers. Specifically, they report that Black students were the only group likely to see teachers of their race more favorably and that Latino students did not report a preference for teachers of their race.

The findings that teachers’ race is associated with differences in classroom-based outcomes disparate outcomes are both meaningful and highly ambiguous. Specifically, because these studies do not focus on actual classroom practice, they offer little insight with regard to the
mechanisms that produce these results. However, the established patterns of racially disparate classroom-based outcomes generated by teachers implies that racial diversity among teachers is likely to be accompanied by differences in teachers’ contributions to the instructional core (Cohen & Ball, 1999). One plausible interpretation of the findings of variations in the outcomes of interest along racial lines is that in the context of schools, race is an effective proxy for distinct and meaningful educational contributions. This assertion suggests the presence of an omitted variable between a teacher’s race and classroom practice that is worthy of further investigation because these differences are likely to emerge in interactions among teachers in particular schools. Thus, scholars should investigate the nature of these differences, and develop a more precise understanding of the distribution of this expertise that is currently associated with teachers’ race. In the meantime, school-based practitioners would be wise to take both types of differences into account as dimensions of racial diversity in schools. Additionally, these findings highlight the need to attend more carefully to the nature of differences in professional practice that exist among members of particular racially diverse communities of educators. This might be an early step toward a reform practice and a reorganization of the work in schools.

III. Teachers as Influential Bureaucrats

While political scientists retain the emphasis on teachers as the unit of analysis that is consistent throughout this discourse, they make a distinct contribution to the teacher workforce diversity discourse by extending the scope of inquiry beyond the classroom walls. These scholars’ investigate relationships between the presence of minority educators and educational outcomes for students of the same race. Their research is grounded in a theoretical framework that focuses on schools as bureaucracies and teachers as bureaucrats. Scholars in this field have produced a robust body of empirical research that links the presence of minority teachers and benefits to students of the same race, as evidenced by outcomes related to student achievement and to the distribution of school-level resources and services (Grissom, Kern & Rodriguez, 2015). Yet the
mechanisms that undergird these relationships are unclear (Grissom, Kern & Rodriguez, 2015; Lim, 2006).

Organization-level studies have found robust evidence of a positive relationship between the proportion of minority teachers in a district and pass rates on state exams (Meier & Bohte, 2001; Meier, Wrinkle & Pollinard, 1999; Pitts, 2005). There is also empirical evidence that suggests that this relationship holds for outcomes such as dropout rates (Meier, 1984), the use of exclusionary discipline practices (e.g. Grissom & Redding, 2014; Pitts, 2005; Roch, Pitts & Navarro, 2010; Rocha & Hawes, 2009) and placement in gifted and/or special education programs (Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Nicholson-Crotty, 2009; Grissom, Rodriguez and Kern, 2015; Meier & Stewart, 1992; Nicholson-Crotty, Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, 2011; Rocha & Hawes, 2009). Yet for the purposes of this analysis, in an effort to maintain consistency in the discussion of organization-focused scholarship in this section and the next, I have chosen to focus on studies in which school-level decisions regarding placement and punishment are the outcome.

Thirty years of scholarship has documented a sustained trend that links the racial composition of a school teaching faculty to the differential likelihood that students will be suspended or expelled based on their race. In Meier’s (1984) study of urban districts, he finds lower suspension rates for Black students with more Black teachers. Nearly ten years later, using data from the state of Florida, Meier and Stewart (1992) also note that higher proportions of Black teachers in schools are associated with lower rates of corporeal punishment, suspensions, expulsion and other measures, and a comparable relationship exists for Latino teachers and students (Meier, 1993). More recently, Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty and Nicholson-Crotty (2009) analyze data from a national sample of schools and find that Black students are suspended less often in schools with higher proportions of Black teachers. Further, Roch, Pitts & Navarro (2010) find, based on data from the state of Georgia, a relationship between more racially diverse teaching faculties and less sanction-oriented, more learning-oriented discipline policies.
Similarly, research also suggests that the presence of teachers of color has a similar effect with regard to issues of placement for students of color in gifted and talented programs. Scholars have found that teacher referrals for gifted and talented programs disproportionately benefit White students (Ford, Grantham & Whiting, 2008; McBee, 2006). Yet the presence of larger proportions of Black teachers is associated with a meaningfully larger presence of Black students in school’s gifted programs (Grissom et al, 2009; Grissom, Rodriguez and Kern, 2015; Meier & Stewart, 1992; Rocha and Hawes, 2009). Similar associations hold true for the influence of Hispanic teachers on the placement of students from the same background (Nicholson-Crotty, Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, 2011; Rocha and Hawes, 2009).

The findings that suggest that teachers of color play an important role in influencing outcomes that enable students of color more equitable access to educational resources, reflect the expanded notion of teachers’ work embedded in theories of representative bureaucracy. Additionally, the scholarship from this field offers a notable contrast to views of school that are rooted in Weberian notions of bureaucracy, defined by red tape and inefficiency (Weber, 1922). Instead, references to bureaucracy in this context frame teachers as street-level bureaucrats who wield influential discretionary powers (Lipsky, 2010) which can be used to influence the distribution of the bureaucratic goods and services to particular clients. Favero and Molina (2016) describe the interaction between the individual bureaucrat and the organization that is at the heart of this theory: “for active representation to occur, the policy or program of interest must be salient to the identity of the bureaucrat, and bureaucrats must be given the discretion necessary to influence policy outcomes” (p. 4).

In contrast to the robust evidence that supports theories of representative bureaucracy, scholars have considerably less clarity with regard to the mechanisms that undergird the translation of descriptive representation to active representation (Grissom, Kern & Rodriguez, 2015; Lim, 2006). In particular, there is limited empirical work that illuminates minority bureaucrats’ indirect
influence outcomes for minority clients. Lim (2006) calls for scholarly attention to differences in the nature of students’ and parents’ engagement in schools where students of color see teachers of their same race on staff. Similarly, he encourages increased attention to the possibility that the presence of minority colleagues influence the behaviors and beliefs of non-minority colleagues. Favero and Molina (2016) offer an example of research that captures evidence of this indirect influence. In a recent study of a district in Texas, they found that: “Latino students in a given school perform better when there is more Latino representation among teachers at other schools within the same district even after controlling for Latino representation within the students’ own school” (p.16). Yet, the interactions that produce them are worthy of further qualitative study in order to understand them in the context of practice. The authors suggest that their findings can reflect either a bottom-up process where teachers have impacted the organization’s norms, routines and policies, or a top-down process in which the presence of more teachers are evidence of a more progressive and equity focused leadership. Additional investigations regarding the mechanisms that undergird these outcomes are needed to develop a more precise understanding of the conditions under which how minority bureaucrats effectively influence a more equitable distribution of resources and outcomes among students.

One limitation of the expanded view of teachers work in schools offered by scholars in the field of representative bureaucracy is the exclusive focus on minority bureaucrats’ influence on the benefits distributed to clients of their same race. This framing narrowly defines the benefits of diversity in terms of the contributions that a small group of individuals make to the education of the subset of students who share their racial classification. It suggests that voluntary action from non-minority bureaucrats that leads to benefits for minority clients is prompted by the presence of minority bureaucrats. This framing reveals the assumption that the ability to positively influence outcomes for students of a particular race is linked to characteristics that are tied to teachers’ race. Notably, scholars in the field have also found evidence of relationships between bureaucrats’ who
describe their role as to act in the interest of minority clients (Coleman, Brudney, and Kellough, 1998) and evidence of active representation, the increased distribution of bureaucratic goods and services to minority clients. Additionally, Bradbury & Kellough (2007) find that attitude congruence between bureaucrats and minority clients is a stronger predictor of active representation than race. Research regarding the salience of these characteristics in the context of education, would be helpful in clarifying the mechanisms associated with teachers’ effective equity focused advocacy on behalf of minority students.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that the findings regarding race matching come from analytic models in which race-matched communities of teachers and students are the focal contexts. While this framing makes sense analytically and theoretically, it offers a distorted picture of the organizational reality of schools where the contributions that teachers make to students’ educational experiences and outcomes are not so easily discernible. As Favero and Molina (2016) acknowledge, their research design, which is aligned to the norms of their discipline, does not facilitate the collection of evidence that offers insight on the organizational supports that undergird these results. As a result, these compelling findings offer little guidance for practitioners with regard to how to strengthen the relationship between increased participation of teachers of color and improved student experiences and outcomes.

Thus, research that would offer a wider range of perspectives on bureaucratic representation would challenge the norms of the discipline. Specifically, more nuanced analyses of across group similarities and within group diversity from scholars and practitioners are essential resources for identifying and communicating barriers to equity, particularly in school communities where the macro-level categories of race (e.g. Asian, Black, Latinx, White) mask meaningful within group distinctions (e.g. ethnic origin, socioeconomic status, pre-K experiences). Similarly, the use of race-matching as the dominant analytic frame limits consideration of possibilities that “active representation” is occurring, but that benefits are distributed according to locally meaningful
social categories that may include people across racial groups (e.g. participants in a particular religious community, alumni of a particular middle school). The focus on race also ignores the possibility of inequitable distribution of educational opportunities among a population of students who share the same racial categorization (i.e. recent immigrants, English Language Learners). Finally, understandings of bureaucratic representation would be further enhanced by studies that include investigations of active representation between White teachers and students. As it stands, the exclusive focus on minorities allows practices associated with representation of the “nonminority” students to go without scrutiny. Thus approaches to inquiry that seek to better understand deviant perspectives offer powerful opportunities to generate learning from instances when the reality is contrary to the expectations of established theoretical frameworks (e.g. Lawrence Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Thus, scholarly inquiry in communities where more proportional representation of teachers of color does not lead to benefits for same-race students is likely to make powerful contributions to perspectives informed by theories of representative bureaucracy.

**Implications of Teacher Workforce Diversity Policy Framing on School-Level Practice**

In summary, the findings from research which is frequently referenced in teacher workforce diversity literature, highlight the beneficial contributions teachers of color make to school communities. This construction of teacher workforce diversity focus on *teachers as essential human resources, teachers as mediators of student learning, and teachers as influential bureaucrats* offers powerful justification for continued efforts to increase the participation of educators of color in school communities as it links their presence to benefits for students. Additionally, the framing of teachers as street-level bureaucrats and the more expansive views of teachers’ influence in schools, which are embedded in theories of representative bureaucracy, offer an important intervention that encourages a more robust consideration of teachers and their work. In particular, this framework suggests there is value in attending to teachers’ interactions
among racially diverse colleagues and understanding the nature of the influences on shared
decisions regarding the distribution of educational opportunities to students, such as those related
to punishment and placement.

At the same time, an honest discussion of the practical implications of the racial differences that
emerge in this body of literature must begin with an acknowledgement of both the ambiguity and
weight of race as an analytic construct and a lived experience. Omi and Winant (2014) describe
race as a construct that captures distinct particularities of the history, legacy, and current reality of
race-based inequality in the United States. They offer a reminder that on one hand, while
discussion of these differences are helpful because they can be understood as analogous to other
kinds of status relevant social differences, such as gender, age, and sexual orientation, the weight
of the social meanings of race is different (Omi & Winant, 2014). So it is important first to
acknowledge that the burden of making sense of race is significant and not distributed evenly in
any community at any time. Thus, some individuals are able to take more distanced views of race,
and read it as a useful indicator of the need for systemic change, as Guinier and Torres (2002)
suggest. Yet discerning the approach to change is often a complex undertaking. Thus, it is
important to say, at the outset, that the practical implications of the findings from the research
diversity literature are not self-evident and highly debatable.

The school-level implications of the finding that race is an effective proxy for teachers
educational contributions are complicated. On one hand, these findings encourage school leaders
to consider the importance of disagreement and collaborative learning in school communities in
ways that allow for the negotiating of professional differences that are likely to accompany racial
differences among educators. At the same time, qualitative research on the experiences of Black
teachers in schools (Foster, 1998; Kelly, 2007), also highlights the need to anticipate and
recognize differences among teachers of the same race. Thus, these findings highlight the need to
pay attention to the likelihood that professional differences are likely to accompany racial
differences among teachers in school, while not assuming that race is determinative of a particular perspective or professional capacity. From a scholarly perspective, it prompts further inquiry regarding how both professional and racial differences are manifested, interpreted and negotiated in schools.

There is also a danger that school leaders and community members may interpret findings that suggest a relationship between race and a particular professional competence as justification for making decisions solely on racial stereotypes. A growing body of scholarship suggests this danger is a reality in school communities in and beyond the US, where teachers of color experience racial typecasting and are placed in roles without regard for their actual skillsets and interests (Bristol, 2014; Basit & Santoro, 2011; Dickar, 2008; Santoro, 2015). Santoro (2015) shares experiences of teachers of color in Australia as grounded in two themes: 1) teachers of color being positioned as “cultural ambassadors: carrying the burden of cultural diversity, and 2) culturally diverse teachers as the homogenous other” (p. 865). She gives an example of a Chinese teacher who is a native Cantonese speaker, being tasked with teaching Mandarin. The teacher, Irene, explains “I learned the old Chinese. I do not speak Mandarin. You know, I have to learn it all from the beginning, right, by myself, because I didn’t have a teacher. I am struggling on and on and making a fool of myself.” (p. 868). Bristol (2014) has documented the expectation that Black male teachers will serve as disciplinarians. He makes a compelling argument that leadership practices regarding the placement and professional responsibilities of teachers often hinder opportunities for the professional growth of teachers of color, and contribute to teachers’ choice to leave the profession. Additionally, it is important to note that this framing of differences as racially determined, and teachers of color as more effective educators for particular populations of students also has implications for White teachers. In fact, race-based arguments regarding effectiveness may position White teachers who work with students of color to work under conditions where they experience stereotype threat, which leads to lower performance
Thus, it is imperative that school-level practitioners engage in the important work of getting to know the people in their communities well enough to examine the extent to which the research findings are relevant in their contexts.

This local level translation work is also necessary in the context of teacher workforce diversity research because the characteristics that enable it to meet policymakers’ standards for academic rigor—the use of large scale data sets and reliance on racial categories to operationalize the impact of racial diversity—also limit the applicability of these findings in particular communities. That is to say, scholarly approaches that render students and teachers as parts of racial monoliths dramatically oversimplify and confuse the racial dynamics in particular communities in several ways. First, as discussed in reference to the framing of teachers as mediators of student learning, the use of macro-level categories masks within group diversity among and between students and teachers of the same race which have consequences for the quality of classroom interactions (Rist, 2000; Cherng and Halpin, 2016). These complexities must be engaged at the school level where it is unacceptable to make a decision about a particular student based solely on his/her race. Second, there is a notable lack of consistency in the literature regarding the aggregation and disaggregation of racial groups that makes it difficult to understand the populations to which particular findings are generalizable. For example, some scholars frame findings in terms of a Black/White dichotomy (Dee, 2005). In other instances, data regarding teachers is disaggregated for Black, White and Latinx teachers, and excludes Asian teachers (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Third, scholarship that highlights the benefits of race matching offer no insights on the extent to which the presence of teachers who are not the same-race of the focal student group impact the outcomes.

IV. Teachers as Organizational Agents

The limitations of the practical guidance provided by advocates of teacher workforce diversity policy, highlight the need for a more comprehensive conceptualization of teachers at work...
currently omitted from the diversity discourse. A small and growing body of research, which is not included in the research cited by teacher workforce diversity advocates, offers a rich source of examples of teachers as organizational agents. Specifically, Lewis and Diamond (2015) and Griffin (2015) present contemporary accounts of teachers’ work in schools that had both persistent racial disparate educational outcomes and racially diverse student and teacher communities.

The pictures of teachers that emerge from these qualitative depictions of schools capture evidence of the discretionary power highlighted in theories of representative bureaucracy and illuminate teachers’ interactions with aspects of the organization. For example, Lewis and Diamond (2015) find a relationship between the use of discretion among educators in practices related to punishment, placement and parental involvement. They analyze data regarding teachers’ enactment of organizational routines and find that inequality is reproduced as teachers modify espoused practices in ways that are responsive to informal status hierarchies. For example, they offer a reflection from Mrs. Morgan, an African American English teacher who had previously reported that she “tends to worry more, to more closely monitor White students in her class.” They continue, “She explained, that she did this because she ‘knew’ that their parents were likely to be upset if they did not do well” (91). This example calls attention to external influences that teachers negotiate as organizational agents who exercise discretion in their enactment of organizational routines.

A view of teachers as organizational agents also attends to the nature of their participation in organizational routines and the ways in which they negotiate community-based belief systems, both of which have a constraining and enabling influence on their work. Lewis and Diamond’s (2015) description of racial ideology helps to make teachers’ individual interactions with features of the organization more evident. They define racial ideologies as a framework for race-based status beliefs which, often unconsciously, shape the inferences and actions of people in school
communities in ways that reinforce racial hierarchies. They explain, “While some might argue that sorting and categorizing is an automatic and natural part of social life, sorting along racial lines in particular and the cultural belief systems that coincide with this sorting are not natural or inevitable” (11). Thus, their findings reveal manifestations of racial ideologies in teachers’ enactment of organizational routines in ways that produce persistent differences in the factors that influence decisions regarding placement and punishment for White and Black students. Additionally, scholars and practitioners must remain vigilant, even amidst racial diversity, in calling attention to institutionalized practices that are embedded in the default organizational culture and confer privileges upon particular community members at the expense of others.

Griffin (2015) offers another disturbing perspective that offers further evidence that attention to teachers as organizational agents must be a part of the dominant discourse positively framed workforce diversity discourse. Griffin’s ethnographic account describes the experiences of Black and White teachers in an exurban high school, with a powerful and constraining organizational culture. She writes, “Race was a taboo subject . . .” (179). She shares a conversation with a veteran Black teacher at work in which the teacher describes her awareness of the discretionary power embedded in her role and the invisible organizational constraints. She writes, “One demoralized staff member who had been in the district for many years felt ‘shame’ at having not done more to change the racial culture at Jefferson. When I asked what had hindered such action, the staff member replied: ‘There was only so much time in a day. I am stretched so thin with (Black) students coming to me, with (Black) parents coming to me, with them needing to be around me, needing to see my face, there was not enough time to do more’” (p. 168). Griffin offers this summary of the culture in the school and district. “‘The Jefferson way’ was about nostalgia for a community long gone and perhaps never real; the continued privileging of Whiteness; the marginalization of Black staff, students, and families; the failure to utilize data related to race and class to inform practice; the struggle to celebrate difference and diversity at
even the most basic levels; and the reinforcement of stereotypes about Black students and families” (196).

Notably, the view of teachers as organizational agents requires understanding the ways in which organizational forces affect all teachers in the community, not just teachers of color. Griffin (2015) illuminates the impact of Jefferson’s culture on White teachers by highlighting the power and sources of fear that teachers described. In a section titled, “the power of fear” (p. 105), she offers evidence of six types of fears that plagued teachers in this school community: fears of standards, student conflict, parents’ responses, being perceived as racist, and colleagues’ opinions. Her examples evidence the negative impact that this organizational culture had on White teachers as well, even those who knew better. Griffin reports, “Although some teachers claimed not to see race, a significant number understood racial inequality and rejected the color-blind approach. Yet in practice, both groups struggled to take productive action around race” (156). These alarming descriptions of the experiences of educators in this school highlight the need for discussions of teacher workforce diversity to also include scholarship and practical guidance to help teachers of all races see and challenge inequity through their inherently interdependent day to day work as organizational agents.

In a more instructionally focused example, Bridwell-Mitchell (2015) illuminates a similar aspect of teachers work, and uses the term teacher agency. She focuses on how teachers’ decisions about their response to work are influenced by the instructional context of their communities. In studies of schools engaged in mandated turnaround-focused reform, she finds evidence of a relationship between diversity among staff members and engagement with instructional improvement. Notably, she acknowledges racial differences and highlights the impact of differences in “instructional attitudes and activities” (p. 154). Her findings suggest that teachers play a powerful role in negotiating the balance between strong socialization patterns within school, and the push to learn. She notes that teachers exercise agency as they negotiate organizational practices that
facilitate cohesion—as generated through school-level emphases on peer learning, interaction in
collegial communities, and shared instructional understandings, aims and practices—and those
that encourage change—increasing diversity, innovation, and changes in standard ways of doing
business. Bridwell-Mitchell’s data suggests that teachers’ responses to these conditions are
powerful drivers of instructional change. Her research lays important groundwork for scholarship
that depicts teachers work as characterized by their negotiations of schools as complex learning
environments.

The view of teachers as organizational agents emerges from research that illuminates the ways in
which practitioners negotiate the tensions between the pursuit of educational equity and
adherence to community norms. This tension is perhaps most evident as teachers reflect on the
ways that they calibrate their behavior in response to the implicit and explicit demands that shape
standard practice in their school communities.

Opportunities for Future Research
The gap between policy, research and practice that has become apparent in this review of the
literature regarding teacher workforce diversity can be best summarized as a consequential
oversimplification of a complex reality. Bryk, Gomez, Grunow & LeMahieu (2014) argue for
using the tools of improvement science to support learning that includes “the active, full
engagement of educators” (p. 8). From this perspective, Bryk and his colleagues argue, effective
improvement is a product of regular interactions among participants who form a “colleagueship
of expertise—academic, technical, and clinical—deliberately assembled to address specific
problems” (p. 8). While Bryk and his colleagues are referring to the involvement of non-school-
based influencers as additional sources of expertise, the teacher workforce diversity literature
suggests that such a meaningful range of perspectives is likely to be present among communities
of teachers. This suggests that schools might engage with their diversity, and not simply the
presence or participation of people of color, as a resource for reform.
Berrey’s (2015) research on communities that have garnered national recognition for their diversity, highlights pitfalls of well-intended diversity initiatives and insights to inform alternatives. Specifically, she argues that organizational approaches must go beyond the traditional focus on who does the work and to what extent desired organizational outcomes are achieved. Her studies, which investigated the organizational practices of mobility enhancing institutions that were nationally recognized for their diversity—The University of Michigan, Chicago’s Rogers Park Neighborhood, and a Fortune 500 company in the Midwest—revealed powerful instances where organizational diversity strategies routinely exacerbated existing inequality. As an example, she highlights the University of Michigan’s decision to signal their commitment to inclusion by requiring applicants to write an essay to describe how they would contribute to a diverse community. A high school counselor from Detroit public schools highlighted the inequity embedded in this focus on diversity, which disadvantaged the students that she served because they “don’t exactly sit down and think about their lives in this way” (p. 117). Similarly, her data reveals a view of life within the University of Michigan that was significantly less inclusive than the curated images on the marketing materials and University leaders refused to engage with students’ critiques of the university’s framing of diversity. Thus, Berrey calls for greater scrutiny of commitments to diversity that are presumed to be linked to increased equity. She calls for examining the extent to which normative organizational practices include seeking out and responding to data regarding the impact that approaches to achieving organizational goals have on the lives of people within and effected by the organization.

There is an important opportunity for K-12 focused research in which diversity is understood at the organization level and in relation to school improvement efforts. Specifically scholarship that builds on the compelling arguments made by Bryk et al. (2015) and Berrey (2015) would add meaningful nuance to the existing teacher workforce diversity discourse. For example, an organizational view of diversity in K-12 schools that presumes the mix of racial differences and
substantive differences that are implied by the empirical research, could focus on describing the nature of differences and documenting their impact on school improvement practice. Additionally, scholarly inquiries could inform practice by attending to organizational factors that influence how racial differences are manifested and negotiated during teachers’ collegial interactions. For example, given the research findings that link racial differences among teachers to differences in student outcomes, the nature and extent of differences, both racial and otherwise, between colleagues who learn from one another is ripe for scholarly investigation. Another, organization level question could examine patterns of practice that exist in schools around the negotiation of differences that arise during school improvement related interactions. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) offers a window into teachers’ engagement with differences in her research on parent-teacher conferences. Her example suggests that ritualized events in schools, such as staff meetings and professional development sessions, may be context worthy of empirical exploration because they are often “double-edged, offering a structure and a routine that can inhibit expression and mask feeling, or providing a framework and safe space place for authentic and honest dialogue” (p. 77).

Future investigations of opportunities that facilitate the sharing of professional knowledge among racially diverse teachers and the organizational conditions that enable and constrain these interactions should also offer important insights to inform school-based practice. Specifically, scholarship that considers diversity in the context of teachers’ work in school would complement a growing body of school-level research linking professional environments in schools to outcomes suggesting improved school-level capacity to support students. For example, Bryk et al (2010) report the effective organization of shared resources provide essential supports for teachers is positively associated with improved school-level outcomes over time. Notably, these supports, which are anchored by leadership as a catalyst for change and also focus on parent community ties, professional capacity of the faculty and staff, a student-centered learning climate,
and ambitious instruction, are operationalized through collegial interactions among teachers. More recently, Kraft and Papay (2012) report evidence that links strong professional environments to improvements in individual teachers’ effectiveness over time, as measured by changes in student test scores. Similarly, Kraft et al. (2015) describe ways in which the nature of teachers’ work varies according to local decisions regarding the nature of the distribution of work related to student support, instructional planning and parent/community outreach.

Conclusion

The four conceptualizations of teachers and their work in schools I have identified in this literature highlight the gap between the ideals of policy and the resulting implications for practice. I argue that each of these characterizations: teachers as essential human resources, teachers as mediators of student learning, teachers as influential bureaucrats, and teachers as organizational agents, reflect important aspects of teachers’ contributions to students and schools. They offer frames that bring perspectives about how racial differences among teachers are linked to meaningful differences in the nature of teachers’ experiences in and contributions to schools into sharp relief. Yet, these depictions are also lenses through which to seriously consider arguments linking a racially diverse workforce to substantive education reform by articulating areas of incongruity between the analytic categories and constructs used by policymakers and researchers and the imperfect complexity that characterizes educational practice. Thus, I have tried to both recognize and celebrate the value of these views of teachers and teaching which offer important justifications for investments in efforts to continue to increase the number of teachers of color in schools. At the same time, their success also increases the responsibility to ensure that there are adequate supports for racially diverse communities of educators engaged in the work of creating more equitable schools and systems.

Thus from the perspective of practice, we learned that the teacher workforce diversity policy emphasis on recruitment, representation, and retention is necessary, but not sufficient to generate
equity focused reform. Additionally, the empirical research cited by teacher workforce diversity advocates illuminates macro-level patterns suggesting that, on average, teachers of color play important and distinct roles in supporting the education of all students in schools, and especially students of color. Further, scholars in the field of representative bureaucracy call attention to evidence that highlights teachers’ influence on school-level outcomes. Their findings highlight the need for further investigations of the mechanisms through which teachers’ influence leads to a more equitable distribution of educational resources to students of color. Thus, practitioners and scholars would be wise to acknowledge and engage with the range of professional expertise that is implied by the evidence of teachers’ differential contributions and by the broader range of pre-service experiences that serve as reference points for teachers (Lortie, 1977). Finally, given the trade-off between the power of macro-level analyses and attention to particularities, it is imperative that scholars and school leaders supplement policy arguments by attending closely to the nuances of diversity in local communities.

Additionally, I argue for the importance of conversations that consider scholarly and practical perspectives on mechanisms through which racial diversity might accompany equity focused reform. Lessons learned from views of teachers as organizational agents force a sober look at the complexity of schooling in the United States. These school-level perspectives replace representations of teacher workforce diversity that focus on subsets of non-White teachers within a school, with a view of diversity that includes and describes a racially heterogeneous community of teachers. Most importantly, this perspective shifts the focus away from expectations of individual heroism (Kelly, 2007) implied by arguments that describe systemic reforms in terms of the aggregated individual level contributions. Instead, it illuminates the interdependence that is at the heart of the act of organizing work. Notably, a view of teachers as organizational agents acknowledges the fact that the contributions of all teachers are enabled and constrained by organizational context, though perhaps not in the same way. It is also robust enough to include
the discretionary powers that teachers use to both advance and undermine change. Though this dynamic and unpredictable view of racial diversity among teachers in schools is not discussed in the teacher workforce diversity literature, and the nuanced school-level implications of diversity are not acknowledge in the school improvement literature. Yet both of these fields highlight learning needs that seem to exceed our current capacity. Thus if we are serious about effectively serving the generations of young people in schools today and in the future, it is time to bridge the gap. There is a critical role for research to help inform efforts that focus on capacity building and collaborative learning among racially diverse communities of adults. At the same time, it is imperative that school and district leaders also engage in the work of building support systems for racially diverse professional communities that can learn from difference in ways that enable the development of more equitable school systems.
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