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ATTRACTING AND RETAINING DIVERSE STUDENT TEACHERS AND TEACHERS

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This document accompanies EDU/CERI/CD (2010)12. It was one of two prepared as background for the OECD International Seminar on Teacher Education for Diversity held in Brussels, Belgium on 25/26 October 2010. The two key themes for that meeting were:
-   Educating the Teacher Educators
-   Attracting and Retaining Diverse Student Teachers
Each of the two background documents contains a summary of relevant research, interesting international practice, questions for discussion, and suggestions for further reading. The other background document is EDU/CERI/CD/RD(2010)3.

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ATTRACTING AND RETAINING DIVERSE STUDENT TEACHERS AND TEACHERS

Background Paper prepared for the
OECD International Seminar on Teacher Education for Diversity
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Introduction

The recently released *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Meeting the Challenge* (OECD 2010) identified a set of key themes that require further attention and discussion. Among them was the need to attract and retain diverse student teachers and teachers:

> *Throughout OECD countries, demographic gaps between students and teachers are growing as student populations continue to diversify while teaching populations do not. A teaching force that more closely mirrors the student population can benefit both students and teachers. Diverse teachers can serve as powerful role models for diverse students, potentially motivating them to strive further in their achievements. Diverse teachers bring to the classroom their unique experiences and perspectives, which can help them to better relate to their diverse students. Diverse teachers may also be more inclined to view student diversity in the classroom as a resource, and treat it as such.*

The OECD report went on to identify the following policy orientation:

> *Improve the diversity of student teachers and teachers. For this to be accomplished, there must be a holistic policy plan within countries and regions for attracting, inserting and retaining diverse student teachers into the teaching force (p. 286).*

This document seeks to set the background and basis for a discussion of this key element of the pending agenda for teacher education for diversity. It covers the relevant research base and poses questions for discussion.

Changing demography: do teachers reflect their classrooms?

While student populations in OECD countries have become more diverse, the teaching force has remained relatively homogenous. In all OECD countries, teachers tend to be female, middle class, and from the majority population. In terms of cultural diversity, in the United States, for example, 83% of teachers reported their race as "White, non-Hispanic" in 2007/8, a figure virtually unchanged from the 85%

reported in 1999/2000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). This percentage can be compared to student background: in 2007/8, 59.3 % of the student population enrolled in grades K-12 declared themselves to be White, non-Hispanic, (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009), a clear drop from 68.6% in 1999/2000 (Population Reference Bureau, 2000).

Although these data are not available for all OECD countries, the same pattern can be observed in many other nations. In England in 2008, 94.0% of teachers[1] and 75.4 % of students reported themselves to be white (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009a, 2009b). In Canada the statistics for numbers of "visible minority" teachers and students tell the same tale: in 2001 5.4% and in 2006 6.6% of teachers came from visible minorities. For the same years the percentage of their students reporting visible minority background was 13.4 and 16.2% respectively (Ryan, Pollock, and Antonelli, 2009). In many European countries (e.g. Belgium, Flemish Community), these data are not gathered by the system and so it is difficult to ascertain the exact percentage of teachers from minority backgrounds. However anecdotal evidence indicates that the numbers are very small indeed.

It should be noted that the Canadian data above reflect another significant trend, in Canada and likely in many other OECD countries: while the overall number of teachers from visible minorities is increasing slightly over time, it does not increase at the same rate as the numbers of visible minority citizens. Due to continuing immigration and healthy birth rates in these populations, the proportion of visible minority teachers has thus *decreased* relative to the proportion of visible minority citizens as a whole (Ryan, Pollock, and Antonelli, 2009).

Although neither race nor ethnicity determines the quality of a teacher, there is evidence to suggest that teachers from minority backgrounds can serve as powerful role models for their diverse students (OECD, 2010; Sleeter and Thao, 2007). It has been argued that the self-perception of being a minority can lead to a better understanding of other peoples' cultural experiences, and activates insightful reflection on what diversity is (Kohl, 2009; OECD, 2010). Santoro (2007) interviewed Greek-Australian teachers on how their teaching approaches differed from those of their Anglo-Australian colleagues. The Greek-Australian teachers believed that their practices reflected a unique relationship they shared with their diverse students. Santoro maintains that having experienced discrimination first hand, minority teachers can better understand students of diverse backgrounds. A number of programmes have been created to harness this effect to help attract and retain minority teachers. In the UK for example, the Aspiring to Lead programme is aimed at black and minority ethnic teachers in the second to fifth years of teaching who are interested in developing their leadership skills and knowledge (National Union of Teachers, 2010). Similar programmes can be found in Canada, the United States, and other OECD countries, and aim to build on the strengths of diverse teachers as well as provide role models to attract students from minority populations to enter the teaching profession.

Overall, research suggests that minority teachers can positively influence their students. Although the preceding discussion has focused on cultural diversity and race, the same issues are at play in relation to a number of other variables. Across the OECD the teaching profession has become increasingly feminised, with the latest figures showing that in some countries over two thirds of the teaching profession is made up of women (EAG, 2010). In many systems there is serious concern at the decreasing number of males entering – and staying in – the profession.

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[1]   It should be noted that these are national statistics that do not reflect variations between regions. In London, for instance, 81.3% of teachers are white while in northeast rural areas this percentage increases to 99.1%. Regardless, in all regions the percentage of students reporting a non-white background exceeds that of their teachers.

Although teachers from minority populations can play a unique role in the classroom, it would be naive to think that they can solve all diversity-related issues. It must be emphasized that what matters most is not a teacher's cultural background or gender/sexual identity/etc, rather but his or her ability to effectively target individual student needs. Merely identifying as a minority teacher does not mean that a teacher is capable of addressing the needs of a diverse student population. Some scholars maintain, for instance, that many minority teachers have difficulty relating to students with backgrounds other than their own (Nieto, 1999). Schools and policymakers must be aware of this and provide both minority and majority teachers resources and support in order to translate their multicultural sensitivity into effective teaching practices. Teacher education programmes, then, should prioritize the content and quality of teaching strategies and seek to build diversity issues broadly into the curriculum. As much as possible, these skills should draw from and build on teachers' individual cultural backgrounds and experiences, whether they come from majority or minority populations or are male or female.

Challenges to Attracting and Retaining Diverse Teachers and Student Teachers

Challenge #1: Attracting diverse student teachers

There are a number of challenges from policy and practice perspectives when attempting to improve the diversity of student teachers and teachers. A first critical challenge is attracting minority students to the teaching profession. In Flanders, for example, the number of minority students enrolling in teacher education is extremely limited. Reasons given for this low rate include an unsuitable secondary education, fear of insufficient skill in Dutch/ academic skills, fear of not getting placements for practicums or difficulty finding employment, a lack of role models, and socio-economic difficulties with pursuing the study programme (Lacante et al, 2007).

In many systems, strategies have been developed to target specific minority ethnic groups for recruitment into the profession. In the UK, for example, these groups include African-Caribbean boys and young people of Pakistani origin. More broadly, children from socially deprived backgrounds (regardless of minority status) have a very low take-up of teacher education and are also a focus for targeted recruitment. Similar strategies targeting specific populations are present in a number of other countries, including Australia, Canada, and the United States.

There is also an interesting argument concerning self-selection into teacher education and whether there are characteristics of the system or institution that attract some populations (e.g., middle class females from majority groups) more than others. This question is particularly pertinent in educational systems where teachers are trained at specific training sites, i.e. in systems where teacher education offers an alternative to a university degree. In empirical research comparing the profiles of Swiss high school students who express a desire to teach to those choosing a career requiring university schooling, Denzler and Wolter (2008) find that the students entering teacher education were significantly different from their peers entering higher education. They argue that this self-selection is reinforced by institutional and structural characteristics of the type of institution and the courses of study offered, and that often students appear to be selecting *against* a type of career (i.e., those requiring long post-secondary education) as opposed to *for* teaching per se. Attracting a diverse set of student teachers in these systems would entail looking closely at such structural elements and where and how teachers are trained.

Challenge #2: Combating drop-out from teacher education

A second critical challenge is a high rate of drop-out among minority novice teachers and student teachers. In the Netherlands, for example, minority teachers attending the teacher training programme for primary education (PABO) drop out more often than do their native Dutch counterparts. From 2002 to 2005, 20.6% of native Dutch students in the PABO programme left without earning a diploma compared

with 35.3% of non-Western ethnic minority students. Minority teacher students reported negative experiences in the teacher education programmes, from feeling unwelcome to having difficulty finding placements for their practicum (OECD, 2010). In addition, minority student teachers often suffer from a lack of social support and greater financial insecurity compared to their majority colleagues (Basit *et al*., 2006).

The risk of early dropout increases when educational systems marginalize minority student teachers. The most common way this plays out is through perceived discrimination in the system. Many minority student teachers report feeling under-valued and believe that they must prove their abilities more than their colleagues from majority backgrounds. In addition, reports suggest that teacher educators often have stereotypical views on student-teacher backgrounds, cultures and languages, and this in turn has an impact on how welcome teachers feel in the profession (Teacher Education Quarterly, 2007).

Although research in combating drop-out of minority student teachers is limited, there is evidence that small changes can make a difference. Examples from the Dutch research (OECD, 2010) include having: the welcoming events for the first year students not including a sleep-over (which often excluded girls from Muslim families); teachers choosing group composition rather than students (who tend to choose similar others as group-mates, thus ostracising minority students); and providing coaching and mentoring during practicums. Simple to enact, these small measures all served to increase feelings of social and academic integration of minority students and were associated with much lower drop-out rates from the teaching programme.

Challenge #3: Unintended consequences and system effects

Marginalization of minority student teachers and teachers themselves also occurs as an unintended consequence of attempting to address diversity issues. Minority teachers are frequently expected to be "experts" in teaching for diversity, regardless of whether they have adequate preparation or not. Schools often transfer the bulk of responsibility for dealing with challenges related to diversity to their minority staff or even student teachers. This shift of responsibility limits the degree to which teachers can develop other necessary capacities, and can also result in heightened stress for the minority teachers in question. Similar patterns have also been documented with other underrepresented groups: e.g. male teachers in primary education, who are often automatically expected to be good at physical activities or manual tasks (Martino, 2008). Although well-intentioned, such strategies can backfire in two ways: 1) by placing an undue burden on minority members of staff; and 2) by avoiding the need for teachers and student teachers from the majority population to also become actively involved in and take responsibility for diversity issues.

A further critical challenge to the retention of new teachers is systemic. There is an extensive body of research that focuses on how seniority and teacher preferences direct the more qualified and more experienced teachers to the best schools, which often happen to be schools in higher income (and less diverse) areas (Hanushek *et al*., 2001; Bénabou *et al*., 2003; Karsten *et al*., 2006). As senior teachers move to schools with better resources, more professional opportunities, higher student achievement and lower proportions of minority and poor students, novice teachers are more likely to be placed in lower achieving and more challenging inner-city schools. In addition to the challenge of finding themselves in the classroom for the first time, then, new teachers often find themselves faced with the highest needs students and in the lowest achieving schools. This can lead directly to frustration and burn-out, particularly if they are surrounded by other novice teachers and lack strong mentors and school leaders. Although it is difficult to find data on the impact of particular classrooms and schools on novice teacher attrition, placement of novice teachers is a key policy lever in the quest to increase the retention of new and diverse teachers.

There are a number of mechanisms that can be used to attract and retain more diverse teachers. In addition to addressing the issues raised above, countries can also seek trained teachers from within their immigrant populations. For example, teaching is the fourth largest profession among Canadian immigrants (Ryan, Pollock, and Antonelli, 2009). A study by the Ontario College of Teachers (2006) found that internationally educated teachers (IETs), are "six times more likely than other Ontario graduates to be unemployed in their first year of teaching, 10 times more likely to be unemployed because they could not find a teaching job, three times more likely to be underemployed, three times more likely to be in substitute teaching, and three times less likely to have found a regular teaching job" (ibid, p. 604).

This study highlights many important questions regarding assumptions made about immigrant teachers and the need for strong mechanisms to recognise foreign qualifications. It also highlights an important source of teachers from minority backgrounds that are often overlooked in discussions on how to attract minorities to the teaching profession. Immigrants who are trained and experienced teachers looking for work can serve as a ready-made work force of capable and motivated teachers, while at the same time adding diversity to the teaching workforce.

The Key Role of Teacher Educator Programmes

Teacher education programmes (including ongoing professional development for teachers) play a crucial role in emphasizing the importance of personal cultural experiences for both professional development and the quality teaching of diverse populations. Teacher education institutions should encourage student teachers and teachers to draw upon their individual backgrounds as they develop and build their competencies, and work to build diversity issues throughout the curriculum. Educators' experiences with discrimination should be harnessed and translated into opportunities for learning. The recognition that these experiences enhance teachers' ability to connect with their students can reinforce the notion that diversity is an opportunity rather than a hindrance. Neglecting other cultures, *"...is a subtle, but powerful, form of racism* [and] *when students learn about the world through this hierarchical lens, it can have a deep impact on the way they see themselves and the world around them"* (Kohl, 2009, p. 241).

Like their students, student teachers and teachers benefit from individualized and diversity-conscious education and training. To attract and retain diverse teachers, it is essential that teacher educators are equipped with the same set of skills that they are expected to pass on to their student teachers: the ability to create learning opportunities that draw on the diverse knowledge that students bring with them into the course. In order to do this the institutions need to work together with partners from professional organisations and the broader community to address these issues from a holistic and inclusive perspective.

Ultimately, to effectively attract and retain diverse teachers, the notion that diversity is an asset and not a liability needs to be initiated from the top and championed at all levels. Effective teacher educator training programmes must cater to multicultural backgrounds and supply educators with the tools necessary to support teachers and student teachers as they engage with their increasingly diverse classrooms. However the relationship is not one-way: for a learning programme to be effective it must be built on a bidirectional relationship between programme providers and users. Stakeholder participation in the learning process is fundamental to developing intrinsic motivation, which is characterized by long-term, quality involvement in and commitment to learning (Ames, 1990). As intrinsic rewards motivate more than extrinsic rewards (Pastor and Erlandson, 1982), including their voices and views in the learning process is the best way to ensure continuing commitment to honing their instructional practices.

Questions for discussion:

- How can we attract diverse student teachers into teacher education programmes, and what are examples of successful strategies to retain them?

- How can we engage influential national and regional partners in encouraging people from diverse backgrounds to consider teaching as a career?

- How can we overcome challenges to attracting and retaining diverse teachers and student teachers? What are roles of government, school administration, and teachers in accomplishing this?

- What kinds of support services or structures should be provided to increase the retention of diverse teachers (in terms of gender/ethnicity/sexual identity/…), particularly in the first few years when drop-out is highest? Which of these should take priority in the case of limited funding? And how should these priorities be decided?

- Are there examples of successful programmes aimed at retaining minority teachers that could be shared?

- What are potential risks of a role models discourse/expectation (on the part of policy makers and of schools)?

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