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Minority Teacher Preparation in an Ex-Urban Setting: A Case Study of the Lakeland College Urban Teacher Outreach Program

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"The issues of race, gender, and authority in the classroom are not simply theoretical issues, but serious challenges that female teachers of color face each time they step into a classroom."

As the percentage of racial minorities entering U.S. elementary and secondary schools is steadily increasing, the percentage of racial minorities entering the teaching force is decreasing. Statistics indicate that minority youth do less well academically, have more health problems, and are more likely as adults to live in poverty than their majority counterparts. Some authors have posited that minority youth have a better chance for success if they have role models from their own heritage. It has also been posited that nonminority youth can benefit by learning from minority leaders.

Detailed studies of minorities enrolled in teacher preparation programs may help to identify sources of support and barriers that these students encounter in teacher certification. Likewise, identification of cultural and linguistic bias in college standardized tests is important. To these ends, perhaps teacher certification programs can be more supportive and break down barriers for minority preservice teachers. Then more minority teachers can enter the teaching force, and eventually more equity in education and society will result.

The purpose of the study described in this paper is to examine a sample of the minority students from an ex-urban, upper Midwest community (Sheboygan, Wis.) who are enrolled in Lakeland College's Urban Teachers Outreach Program (UTOP).
This study sought to: (1) identify the sources of support used by these students; (2) identify the difficulties faced by the students to continue at UTOP; and (3) describe student concerns about linguistic and other forms of cultural bias in standardized tests these students encountered in UTOP.

The sample included 15 students (four Hispanics and 11 Southeast Asians, primarily Hmong). Each participant was given an informational questionnaire in order to gather demographic data, as well as to assist in the development of interview themes. Multiple interviews were then conducted with each participant.

Cross-case analysis revealed that family played a key role in the support systems of all the individuals. Family support primarily came from spouses, children, and parents of the students. The assistance of informally recognized mentors was also important. The participants desired the help of mentors, either formal or informal. The students' own cultures, limited financial resources, and child-care were minor obstacles identified by

some.

Very clearly, linguistic bias, especially for the Southeast Asians, was the primary concern identified by the students. English was the second language for all the Southeast Asian students. Their English vocabularies were limited. Many of them continued to think and write in their native languages, and therefore translated lectures, text readings, and tests. Timed standardized tests thus were a difficult barrier for these students to overcome. Likewise, these same examinations may have actually measured more the students' English skills than their knowledge of the content being measured.

The conclusions were as follows: (1) family members were the main source of support for these students; (2) a mentoring program would be beneficial; (3) the students' cultures, financial resources, and child care were minor concerns; (4) while limited English vocabulary was somewhat of a concern for the Hispanic students, it was clearly the major concern for the Southeast Asian students; and (5) timed standardized tests were biased in the view of the students.

This presentation will share the above findings, as well as give an overview of development and implementation of the UTOP program.

PRESENTER

Perry R. Rettig is Assistant Professor of Educational Administration at Northern State University in Aberdeen, S.D., where he has worked for the last year. Previously, he was a principal for seven years of the Sheboygan Area School District in Sheboygan, Wis. He taught in the Green Bay, Wis., area for five years before his work as a principal.

Rettig received his Ph.D. from Marquette University and his master's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, both in educational administration. His areas of research interest include minority teacher preparation and equity issues and the implications of brain research on classroom instruction.