TEACHER STEREOTYPES AND BIASES IN EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR MARGINALIZED STUDENT POPULATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines teacher stereotypes and biases in educational settings, particularly in the face of racial and cultural heterogeneity in student populations. The lack of ethnic diversification in teaching staff often leads to normative stereotypes. These biases manifest in disciplinary measures, academic learning, and standardized testing, perpetuating systemic racism, marginalization, and discrimination. The paper highlights the need for teachers to develop a keen awareness of students' unique backgrounds and tailor authentic instruction to foster academic excellence in diverse contexts.

Keywords: Teacher stereotypes, Biases, Racial diversity, McKinney Vento Act, ESSA, NCLB, marginalized student populations, systemic racism, educational policy, socioeconomic backgrounds, academic excellence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher stereotypes and biases are an often-researched malaise in educational policy contexts. It arises especially amidst racial and cultural heterogeneity in student populations without commensurate ethnic diversification in the teaching staff (Peguero et al., 2015). Due to the dissonance in racial backgrounds, there tend always to be normative stereotypes that are advantageous to one race and disadvantageous to the other. Putting it in context, most teachers and educationists in the US are white, and their 'whiteness' is reflected in the school code of conduct and educational policies. (Cabrera, 2018). In the discipline area, for example, these ethics documents will prescribe rules and attendant punishments against normative whiteness, which often contradicts black normative behavior. Such stereotype, in turn, breeds systemic racism, marginalization, and discrimination (Leonardo, 2013).

Away from disciplinary measures, academic learning and exercises are equally fraught with stereotypes and biases. Most of these stereotypes are perpetuated inadvertently, owing to the accountability measures and standardized testing approaches that fail to recognize students' divergent sociological and socioeconomic backgrounds (Wasserberg, 2022). As a result, students from disadvantaged contexts, including but not limited to poverty and homelessness, are marginalized in the learning process. This leads to a vicious cycle of poor grades, eventual dropouts, and withdrawal from school. (Holbein & Ladd, 2017). Teachers, as the primary agents in the educational process, also rarely possess a keen awareness of the peculiarities of students or ignore these differences, hence failing to develop tailored and authentic instruction that will catalyze academic excellence in differing contexts.

Against this background, it becomes essential to remember the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion that must be infused into an educational system in a heterogeneous landscape to guarantee its success (Lubberts, 2023). To this end, this policy review will examine the influence

of two educational policies—Every Student Should Succeed Act (ESSA, 2015) and the McKinney-Vento Act (McKinney-Vento Act, 1987)—on diversity, equity, and inclusion as a tool to combat stereotypes and biases in the classroom. The first part introduces the topic, setting the stage for subsequent explorations. The second part elaborates on the concept of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the educational context. The third part examines the policies for review, outlining their historical trajectory and contributions to DEI in the US educational system. The fourth part raises criticisms of these policies, and the fifth section concludes by offering pragmatic insights to address the concerns raised.

2. DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI)

DEI represents the measures educational institutions take to promote inclusivity in educational systems, ensuring that everyone, regardless of socioeconomic strata, religious affiliation, gender, race, or ethnicity, is treated fairly (Young *et al.*, 2017). Unpacked, each concept within the framework promotes differing values, and they will be explicated in turn:

Diversity in education encompasses the representation of various identities and differences among students, educators, and administrative staff (Tyler, 2016). On the other hand, equity focuses on providing every student with the resources, opportunities, and support they need to succeed, acknowledging and addressing the systemic barriers and inequalities that may hinder students' access to quality education (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2019). Lastly, inclusion represents the active and intentional effort to create welcoming and supportive environments where all students, regardless of their background or identity, feel valued, respected, and fully engaged in the learning process (NYSED, 2021).

3. REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

McKinney-Vento Act

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act emerged as a legislative response to the escalating issue of homelessness in the United States during the 1980s. Initially introduced as Title I of the Homeless Persons' Survival Act in 1986, it aimed to address the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals experiencing homelessness through emergency relief measures, preventive strategies, and long-term solutions. The urgency to address homelessness prompted Congress to pass the Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act in 1987, which was subsequently renamed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (P.L. 100-77) in honor of its chief sponsor, Representative Stewart B. McKinney of Connecticut. The Act represented a significant federal commitment to addressing homelessness and marked the beginning of comprehensive federal legislation to assist homeless individuals and families.

The McKinney-Vento Act contains crucial provisions aimed at ensuring that homeless children and youth have access to quality education and support services. It mandates states take proactive measures to eliminate barriers to homeless students' enrollment, attendance, and academic success. Specifically, the Act requires states to provide homeless children with the same right to a free and appropriate public education as non-homeless children, regardless of residency requirements. It also calls for the designation of state coordinators to educate homeless children and youth. It provides funding for developing state plans to address their educational needs. Additionally, the Act authorizes grants to local education agencies (LEAs) to provide a range of educational and support services tailored to the needs of homeless students, including tutoring, counseling, transportation, and referrals for medical and mental health services.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) emerged as a response to the shortcomings of its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. NCLB, enacted in 2002, was intended to improve educational outcomes by imposing strict accountability measures based primarily on high-stakes testing. However, NCLB faced widespread criticism for its federal overreach and unrealistic accountability targets. As states struggled to meet these targets, then-Secretary of Education Arne Duncan began granting waivers, sparking debate over federal intervention in education. By 2015, it became evident that NCLB needed significant reform, leading to the development of ESSA. ESSA promised a departure from NCLB's punitive accountability measures and aimed to provide states with more flexibility in education policy while focusing on equity and excellence.

ESSA supports state and local control over three main aspects of education: standards, accountability, and assessment. One significant departure from NCLB is that ESSA allows states to adopt their academic standards, shifting away from the federally promoted Common Core State Standards. Moreover, states can develop their assessments by moving away from the standardized testing approach of NCLB. ESSA introduces a more comprehensive system of accountability, incorporating non-test-based factors such as school climate, attendance, and access to advanced coursework. Additionally, ESSA requires states to provide interventions for struggling schools, emphasizing support over sanctions. While ESSA retains the possibility of school closure or state takeover, it empowers states to design and implement support plans tailored to the needs of individual schools.

4. CRITICISMS OF THE EXTANT EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

ESSA and the McKinney-Vento Act have faced criticism for their need for more awareness among administrative and teaching staff. While both policies aim to provide diversity, equity, and inclusion in educational management, only a few teaching staff are aware of its provisions and only apply (Miller, 2011). Also, like NCLB, ESSA, and McKinney Vento Act, they have faced criticism for their lethargic implementation at the federal and state levels. The implementation of both policies has been slow and uneven, leading to delays and inconsistencies in addressing the needs of underserved students and schools. Lastly, neither policy needs more funding to address the diverse needs of students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The legislation needs to provide adequate funding to support the implementation of effective interventions and support services for struggling students and schools. This serves as a bar to realizing the policy's lofty goals and delimited the achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the U.S. educational system.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Recommendations

Teachers must actively strive to recognize and address their biases through reflective practices and self-awareness exercises. They must acknowledge stereotypes and question assumptions about students based on their racial or ethnic backgrounds (Bovill & Cook, 2016). Also, teachers can incorporate culturally relevant content, perspectives, and teaching strategies to ensure students feel accepted, listened to, and represented (Siwatu, 2011). This approach can help dismantle stereotypes and create a more equitable learning experience for all students (Idrus & Sohid, 2023). Furthermore, teachers should engage in ongoing professional development programs that address stereotypes, bias, and cultural competence (Dasoo & Muller, 2020). These programs can equip

educators with the tools, knowledge, and strategies to establish inclusive and equitable classrooms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the McKinney-Vento Act have aimed to address critical issues in education and support marginalized students, they have faced significant criticism in their implementation. Despite their flaws, these legislative efforts represent necessary steps toward promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the U.S. educational system. Addressing these criticisms and actively mitigating their impacts will ensure that education policies effectively support all students, regardless of their background or circumstances.

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