

## North Carolina Teacher Preparation Programs and their Connection to Effective Teachers

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*Discipline disparities in the U.S. education system are at an all-time high, and a key component to stemming this systemic issue rests in the development of highly effective teachers, who utilize effective classroom management techniques. Teacher preparation programs recruit and train millions of preservice teachers; yet research determining the effectiveness of these individuals as new teachers who are responsible for creating diverse learning environments is limited. This research takes aim at North Carolina Teacher Preparation Programs measurement of their graduates as new teachers, and teachers perceptions of their own development through the New Teachers Working Conditions Survey. This work anticipates finding that perceptions of new teachers regarding multicultural education and classroom management vastly differ from teacher preparation programs' assessment of new teachers' effectiveness in the classroom. The larger implications from text, can reveal areas of improvement for teacher preparation programs across the state of North Carolina.*

*Keywords:* teacher preparation programs, North Carolina, new teachers, effectiveness

School discipline disparities continue to exist in the United States (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Skiba, Nardo, Peterson, 2000). African American students in PK-12 institutions receive the most discipline referrals for suspensions, out of school suspensions, and expulsions despite being a small percentage of the total enrollment (Van Dyke, 2015). Nationally, African American students are 16% of school enrollment, yet comprise between 32% and 34% of suspensions and expulsions (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). In North

Carolina, African-American students comprise 51% of suspensions and 38% of expulsions dispensed but are only 26% of the enrolled population (Smith & Harper, 2015, p. 37). These numbers are interconnected to graduation rates, school dropout rates, student retention and involvement with the juvenile justice system. Although explanations of this issue center on African American students and the community they come from, research that analyzes teachers as important stakeholders to this issue is limited (Peterson & Davilla, 2011). Nationally, an abundance of data exists on teacher retention, teacher pay, teacher experience and teacher turnover (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), yet this data is rarely analyzed as possibly having an impact on school discipline data. This study will utilize national, state, and local level data about North Carolina Teacher Preparation Programs to determine if the effectiveness of beginning teachers impacts classroom management.

### Literature Review

School discipline disparities among African American students exists throughout the U.S. Discipline disparities have increased since the 1980s as P-12 institutions focused on penalizing subjective offenses, as harsh as violent offense as a response to the Anti-Drug Act that the U.S. Department of Justice implemented (Van Dyke, 2015). This change in policy created zero tolerance in an effort to keep schools and students safe, but the shift intensified the scrutiny and surveillance of African American students, equating racial composition to having the propensity for disruptive behaviors. Attempts to stop the hemorrhaging of this issue have come through adopting school-wide positive behavior intervention supports (Flannery et al., 2014), implementing more culturally relevant professional development opportunities for educators, and adopting more community inclusive policies to minimize student involvement with the justice system and increase family involvement in schools (Green, 2015). Still, positive

behavior intervention supports have shown no evidence indicating its deployment can be linked to decreasing the discipline disparity (McIntosh et al., 2014). Research on evidence-based professional development on culturally relevant topics is limited, and although students' familial interaction with P-12 institutions has increased, that impact is minimum in preventing the dispersal of discipline referrals (Skiba, 2000).

Discipline disparities are only a symptom, which if analyzed at a larger level, are interwoven with high dropouts, high retention, poor graduation rates and higher rates of involvement with the juvenile and adult justice system (Skiba, 2000). As discipline referrals are dispensed, it increases the rate at which students will receive future infractions, placing students into the "bad" child label, often causing the student to believe that school is a place of penalization rather than learning (Van Dyke, 2015). This disruption of a natural learning environment marginalizes African American students and places them at greater risk of truancy, informally involving them with the juvenile justice system.

The initial referral or discipline infraction occurs within the classroom, under the care of teachers, however, subjectivity for African American students receiving referrals is still a significant issue (Van Dyke, 2015). Students are referred not for violent acts, but for disrespect, or disobedience, which can often be a misunderstanding due to cultural differences. Regardless of the infraction, teachers and the background composition are seldom questioned as a possible antecedent for the subjective discipline referral.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Teacher Preparation Programs (TPPs) have long required course work in multiculturalism and attempted to place students in student teaching position at diverse schools

(Sleeter, 2001). This practice is in direct response to the need of teachers to become culturally comfortable with an increasingly diverse population of students. Critical relevant pedagogy seeks to mold teachers into agents who are understanding of the cultures of the students they teach, as to empower these students through the bridging of the student's lives (home life, historical background, and contemporary issues) and the knowledge in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Critical relevant pedagogy examines the practical art of teaching and its application in the classroom, to meet the needs of students whose ethnic, racial, gender, religion, and financial needs that may differ from the teaching profession, which is typically white and female (King & Butler, 2015). Often these cultural differences exist regardless of the teacher's racial composition, as the intersectionality of race, gender, religion, ethnic and financial roles provide a multitude of historical background, creating a myriad of complex cultures. Although this conceptual framework prescribes what teachers should do professionally, this lens does not provide a critique of the process that creates teachers.

Critical Theory from a societal/education standpoint asserts that although there is a main story or narrative, counter stories also exist which critique societal systems created by the dominant culture. In terms of education, more specifically the issue of discipline, accepting the normative view that the backgrounds of African Americans are the only factor in causing the disparities is unacceptable. From this theoretical framework, an assessment of TPPs (counter-narrative) is required to garner an explanation to the type of teachers, students in North Carolina are being exposed to. Teachers are graduating at higher rates; however, graduation does not necessarily equate to the teacher being able to act on culturally relevant pedagogy, in terms of classroom management during their initial years in the profession. The central analysis of this study is to determine how culturally prepared teachers are in North Carolina upon graduation.

## Data

Data for this study was gathered from the U.S Department of Education, National Education Center for Statistics, Department of Public Instruction for North Carolina, and the New Teacher's Working Conditions Report for 2014-2015. The following is a description of the teaching force, and factors impacting the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District. During the 2014-2015 academic year, Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District (CMS) employed 9,253 individuals who were teachers during the same time frame. Similar to the state of North Carolina, 31% of CMS teachers have 3 years of classroom experience or less. In 2015, CMS experienced a 16.5% teacher turnover rate (NC Report Card, 2015). In that same year, 48% of teachers left for personal reasons. CMS rate of attrition is higher than the state of North Carolina average. Teacher attrition is at a five-year high according to the state Department of Public Instruction annual report (Department of Public Instruction, 2015).

In an annual survey, new teachers (0-3 years of experience) in CMS were surveyed by the Department of Instruction (2015), to determine their effectiveness in the classroom, and perception of their own needs, professionally. When asked about professional development opportunities in the past two years, 77% of surveyed teachers indicated that they were not provided any opportunities to strengthen their classroom management training for more than 12 hours. The majority of participants (over 50%), indicated that they needed additional professional development in specific subject areas such as: closing the achievement gap, differentiating instruction, working with special education and gift and talented students, working with English Language Learners students. Also in the survey, when asked about needing additional classroom management training, 77% of the participants indicated they required no professional development in this subject (Department of Public Instruction, 2015).

New teachers are constantly encouraged to sharpen their craft; yet based on the survey, classroom management is not a training they want more of.

As shown in Table 1, the North Carolina Institution of Higher Education (NCIHE) surveyed new teachers (with less than 3 years of experience), at the end of their third year to determine teacher's level of effectiveness with creating a diverse learning environment in their classroom (IHE, 2015). The significance within the data highlighted in Table 1 indicates that even after three years of teaching, the vast majority these newly appointed veteran teachers are displaying basic competency in creating diverse classroom environments. Furthermore, this data suggests that TPPs, and P-12 institutions have not provided enough support to ensure that more teachers are reaching the level of “accomplished” for this content area.

Table 1.

*2014-2015 Academic School Year, North Carolina Institution of Higher Education Report Card for Teacher Preparation Programs, Effectiveness in Creating Diverse Environment.*

Institution Name	Student Teachers Enrolled	Proficient	Accomplished
Appalachian State	446	55.1	38.3
Barton College	34	54.3	38.6
Belmont Abbey College	25	51	45.1
Bennett College	7	N/A*	N/A
Brevard College	15	40	53.3
Campbell University	83	59.2	38.7
Catawba College	61	56.3	35.6

Chowan University	1	80	20
Duke University	27	66.7	27.8
East Carolina University	677	55.3	38.9
Elizabeth City State University	56	63.4	28.3
Elon University	73	54.5	40.9
Fayetteville State University	81	64	30.9
Gardner-Webb University	35	58.2	39.8
Greensboro College	59	60.9	34.5
Guilford College	14	59.1	34.1
High Point University	69	69.5	24.2
John C. Smith University	8	58.3	25
Lee-McRae College	31	45.1	47.5
Lenoir-Rhyne College	37	52.2	44.4
Livingstone College	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mars Hill College	49	46.3	49.3
Meredith College	43	45.2	49.4
Methodist University	19	71.4	25
Mid-Atlantic Christian University	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mount Olive College	30	84.6	15.4
NC A&T State University	49	63.4	31.7
NC Central University	141	58.7	37
NC State	291	49.8	42.6
NC Wesleyan College	14	87	13
Pfeiffer University	25	54.9	39.4

## North Carolina Teacher Preparation Programs

Queens University of Charlotte	34	52.2	41.1
Shaw University	2	N/A	N/A
Saint Andrews Presbyterian College	N/A	70	20
Saint Augustine's University	2	N/A	N/A
UNC-Asheville	69	40.4	52.6
UNC-Chapel Hill	119	53.4	40.3
UNC-Charlotte	571	54.4	38.4
UNC-Greensboro	301	58.3	37
UNC-Pembroke	161	64.9	31
UNC-Wilmington	279	51.5	43.2
Wake Forest University	23	50	46
Western Carolina University	220	55.8	39
William Peace University	8	40	60
Wingate University	34	46.8	50.6
Winston-Salem State University	33	71.2	25.4

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\*N/A equates to less than 5 student teachers being in the program, to which no survey was conducted.

*Note.* Adapted from NCIHE Teacher Preparation Program's Teacher Effectiveness 2014-2015. (2015)  
Retrieved from <http://apps.schools.nc.gov/pls/apex/f?p=141:5:0::NO::>

### Findings/Discussion

How the university prepares teachers has a direct impact on the teachers' capability to effectively manage a classroom and remain in the profession. The North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards do not provide a definition of what *proficient* or *accomplished* means in relation to creating a diverse environment for students. Still, when examining TPPs in North Carolina, out of the 46 eligible programs, only four programs have a higher number of



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graduates who scored *accomplished* than proficient on the NCTS, as new teachers. The remaining 42 programs, had a majority of graduates score as *proficient*. A *proficient* score in academic terms means that the teacher is exhibiting average ability in creating a diverse environment, versus *accomplished* meaning an above average ability in creating a diverse environment the majority of the time.

This data when coupled with the DPI data, creates an alarming picture. New teachers constitute 31% of the workforce, yet the majority of those teachers are just average, at creating an environment that promotes and respects diversity. This analysis, coupled with the fact that new teachers are self-reporting the lack of extensive professional development opportunities, and their strong self-efficacy in classroom management indicates that what TPPs are reporting, and what new teachers truly believe, are at an impasse. How can TPPs indicate a lack of knowledge and skills amongst their graduates, yet graduates indicate their proficiency in areas of diversity and classroom management?

From a critical theoretical lens, deeper analysis of the data begs the question: Are TPPs truly preparing their candidates to promote culturally relevant pedagogy within their schools? A third of the teaching profession in North Carolina, are teachers who are just barely displaying the knowledge and skills to promote a diverse environment within the classroom. Without the self-efficacy to promote cultural inclusiveness, it is improbable that African American students are receiving equitable classroom management from newer teachers, because of the teacher's inability to promote a culturally inclusive classroom. From the data, TPPs in North Carolina continue to allow a large number of teachers to enter the profession, without reaching an *accomplished* level of knowledge and skill in creating a diverse environment, prior to entering the classroom. Teachers are mastering their subject area, yet are unable to promote culturally

diverse learning environments upon graduation, which indicates that the source to promoting cultural relevance is embedded within TPPs promotion of quality clinical teaching experiences within diverse cultural environments and the quality and quantity of courses centered on classroom management and multiculturalism.

### Recommendation/Conclusion

Research regarding TPPs and their ability to effectively promote culturally relevant pedagogy in North Carolina is in its infancy. Discipline disparities within education exist across the U.S. (U.S Department of Education, 2014), however without developing a scaffold research approach to address the issues on a local and state level first, the development of an impactful, sustaining remedy is unlikely. Due to the infancy of the research, it was limited in scope, as additional in-depth data is required to create a working theory on the topic. An extension of this research exists, through removing beginning teachers who did not attend a North Carolina TPPs, to see if their effectiveness differed from their peers who did attend.

Attrition within the teaching profession is a legitimate concern and North Carolina is not immune to this issue. North Carolina, because of the low starting teacher salary, lack of funding for support services and higher starting salaries in neighboring states, ranks as one of the lowest states for supporting teachers (Smith, 2015). This is causing an exodus of qualified teachers both in tenured and beginning status. As teachers exit North Carolina because of budgetary restraints, one could definitely argue that *accomplished* teachers are being pulled away due to higher salaries and support in other states, leaving schools within the state with a large number *proficient* teachers. Without a more in-depth study of the number of graduates from these TPPs who practice teaching in other states upon obtaining their teaching license, this prospective explanation is inconclusive. In addition to this, future research can be conducted to examine

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why certain TPPs are producing more *accomplished* teachers than others, to develop core courses and other intangible features to be implemented statewide.

Future research critically examining the connection between TPPs, their ability to promote culturally relevant pedagogy for student teachers provides the possibility to draw stronger inferences between the effectiveness of the program, the effectiveness of the teacher, and student achievement, through inclusionary classroom management knowledge and skills. It is recommended that subsequent research on beginning teachers, be extended to more tenured teachers to determine if their effectiveness in regards to creating a diverse learning environment grows, after the teacher's initial years. Teachers and students cannot be solely responsible for decreasing discipline disparities as TPPs can and should play a more integral role in preparing education to address this systemic issue.

Finally, the key stakeholders in this matter (TPPs, policy makers at the state and national level, and P-12 institutions), must redefine what inputs are going into preservice teachers that can bolster the number of new teachers who are classified as *accomplished*. TPP must critically examine their courses that include a component of multiculturalism; as to ensure that the content within the course produces high measurable competency within preservice teachers. For policy makers at each level, the requirements of being defined a highly qualified teacher must elevate beyond basic proficiency. This requires an overhaul of state and national standards, requiring TPPs to incorporate additional courses in multiculturalism, and mandating TPPs to immerse their potential graduates in environments that truly reflect what diverse learning environment looks like.

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