

Dangers Unforeseen: Inequity in Contemporary Teacher Assignment Practices

Darius Stanley
Michigan State University

Abstract

Research shows that Black teachers are severely underrepresented in honors, advanced placement, and International Baccalaureate programs within secondary schools. This literature review expands the concept of *Teacher Tracking*, originally coined by Finley (1984), to develop a better understanding of how this phenomenon disproportionately affects Black teachers. This work draws from sociological, political, historical, educational leadership, and organizational theory literature to further develop the teacher tracking conversation. Through in-depth analysis of existing research this work introduces seven contributory factors to the phenomena, including teacher experience, credentials, residence, preference, school politics, race, and racism. This literature presents significant evidence of racial discrimination in teacher assignment practices suggesting that race and racism could be the most influential factors contributing to teacher tracking. This research has significant implications for leadership preparation programs and school administrative practices in pursuit of social justice leadership.

Keywords: teacher tracking, teacher assignment

Setting the Stage

Where are the Black teachers teaching? The purpose of this literature review is to examine the depth and remnants of America's school desegregation efforts through, beginning with a focus on the *Brown* decision as well as the *Green* factors (Orfield & Eaton, 1997). The 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* case was a pivotal point in the history in tracking as it signified the end of legally segregated schools in the United States. The integration process was implemented with "deliberate speed" under the guise of ensuring equity for traditionally underserved students (Ogletree, 2004, p.10). Wilson and Segall (2001) however, caution us to think about the implications of how the desegregation process played out, as they suggest African American teachers and students lost ground. African American teachers lost jobs as all Black schools began to close and students suffered as *Brown* opened the door for the re-segregation of schools, commonly referred to as tracking. The 1968 *Green* decision promised to create more equity in school districts' faculty ensuring that the Black to white ratio were equal in schools. Faculty ratios were supposed to be one of the determining factors that showed progress in a school's desegregation efforts (Orfield & Eaton, 1997). Ultimately, these promises proved empty as they were never enforced with fidelity. These pivotal decisions were the impetus for future racial inequities and school tracking.

Convergence of Teacher and Student Tracking

The tracking of teachers is inextricably linked to student tracking trends. Frankenberg (2008) found that many white teachers are teaching in a school that is 75% white and no more than 10% Black. Conversely Black teachers are more likely found in schools that are majority Black and only marginally white or Latino. The results from this Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

study (2008) found that teachers of color (Black and Latino) are grossly underrepresented in predominately white schools and heavily saturated on predominantly, same race campuses (Frankenberg, 2008).

This research shows that students and teachers of color are similarly situated across and within schools, leaving them to fend for themselves on financially destitute campuses. It is important to consider that there are significant numbers of white teachers in urban spaces and Black teachers in suburban spaces, but the scope of the Frankenberg study focuses on where these teachers are concentrated. Whereas we know the various contributing factors to student tracking (i.e. zoning, housing policy, high stakes testing) research is not clear on the exact causes of teacher tracking.

Teacher Tracking

The Contemporary Teacher Tracking Problem

Research has shown that racially underrepresented (particularly Black and Latino/a) teachers are assigned fewer advanced placement, International Baccalaureate, and honors courses within schools (Kalogrides et. al, 2013). In fact, even when controlling for experience, ability to raise student achievement, and credentials, underrepresented teachers still receive higher proportions of low income students, lower achieving students, and students labeled with behavioral disabilities (Kalogrides et. al, 2013). As Black teachers are systematically excluded from these more prestigious course assignments there could potentially be greater penalties.

Finely (1984) originally defined teacher tracking as the mapping of teachers onto the hierarchically structured course sequences of students. Additionally, it is defined as a system where some teachers teach the “good classes and others are relegated to remedial courses within schools” (Kelly, 2004, p.56). The Finely (1984) study refutes that this tracking has anything to do with “ascriptive traits” (Kelly, 2004, p.59). There are some racial factors that are

absent from the Finley definition that make it insufficient. Therefore, expanding the definition of teacher tracking to include the segregation of America's teachers across and within schools is appropriate. This is a process by which underrepresented teachers (Black and Latino/a) are assigned disproportionately to students of similar racial/ethnic backgrounds and/or students with labeled behavioral and/or learning disabilities in lower track courses, systematically excluding them from schools and classrooms where these students are underrepresented (i.e. advanced placement or gifted programs) (Stanley, 2016).

Factors influencing Teacher Tracking

Despite the potential implications of this research to the field of education only a few studies have directly spoken to this topic (Finley, 1984; Kalogrides et al, 2011:2013; Kelly, 2004). The remaining research that does marginally speak to this problem yields seven influential factors. Those factors include teacher race, experience, credentials, preference, residence, and institutional factors such as racism and school politics (Bacolod, 2007; Boyd et. al, 2005; Boyd et. al 2009; Brar, 1991; Clotfelter et. al, 2005; Jackson, 2009; Kalogrides et al, 2011:2013; Mabokela & Madsen, 2003; Mabokela & Madsen, 2005; Page & Page, 1991; Quicho & Rios, 2009). This review of literature presents the research that contributes to this topic in hopes of more clearly explaining the depth of teacher tracking within America's secondary schools.

Literature Review

It is important to note that teacher tracking, as defined in this paper, is not a conversation that exists in the literature. Using the previously expanded definition of teacher tracking, this literature review explains the racial inequities affirmed by the Kalogrides (2013) study. Therefore, articles that examine race, teacher assignment, and Black teacher experiences more adequately address the teacher-tracking problem. This review exposes gaps

in the literature as it centers race as an essential component and points to racism as a potential factor to be further analyzed.

Historical roots of teacher tracking: The detrimental effects of Brown

Race based teacher tracking has a history that dates back to integration and the *Brown* decision. Despite the perceived benefits of looking at the “bigger picture” of *Brown*, and the notion that separate schools were inherently unequal, Black teachers and leaders continued to have mixed feelings about the NAACP’s integration efforts (Fairclough, 2007). Fairclough states, “The basic premise of integration, that white schools were better than black schools, encouraged an implicit assumption that white teachers were also better” (p. 394). Black faculty’s uneasiness proved to be well warranted. After the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, Black teachers became an endangered species in schools as they were summarily dismissed from their jobs because of the closing of segregated Black schools. What is more alarming is that Black teachers traditionally scored lower on their certification exams than their white colleagues and therefore could not gain necessary teacher credentials (Gitomer, Latham & Ziomek, 1999). They also faced continued denial of access to teaching positions because of district’s racist tactics (Anderson, 1989). These issues had detrimental effects on Black students who no longer had access to these teachers (Tillman, 2004). Even when Black teachers gained access to the newly integrated schools they often experienced limited options. Initially, Black teachers were only allowed to teach Black students and poor white kids whose parents were quiet about their situation (Foster, 1990). Accordingly, these decisions and practices set the precedent for the modern phenomenon defined.

Societal Impact

Larger society and the field of teaching heavily contribute to this problem. Underrepresented teachers who comprise about 17% of the current field (Boser, 2011) and

teachers with large proportions of minority students leave teaching at higher rates (Loeb et al, 2005; Pflaum & Abramson, 1990; Scafidi et al, 2007). Given the vast underrepresentation of minority teachers in the current teacher pool, it is imperative that we examine how teacher tracking may contribute to these trends. In a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Teacher follow-up survey (2005), results suggested that the three most important reasons that Black and Latino teachers left the field were opportunities for a better teacher assignment, lack of administrative support, and dissatisfaction with working conditions. In an earlier study of teacher tracking, Finley (1984) found that teachers who teach in advanced courses tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction and stay in the profession longer, which suggests that assignments are a relevant indicator for teacher retention.

Contemporary Factors

Teacher Experience

Much of research that examines teacher assignment argues that experience is the key component in deciding what classes teachers teach within schools (Clotfelter et. al, 2005; Feng, 2010; Grissom et. al, 2013; Kalogrides, Loeb, and Beteille, 2013; Kalogrides, 2011; Kalogrides et. al, 2013; Kelly, 2004). One of the seminal pieces, Finley (1984), used an ethnographic approach to examine the teaching hierarchy in a school. One of the first and only studies to examine this topic, Finley (1984) found that seniority in the school was most influential factor when it came to who got to teach the “more desirable classes” (p.237). These results have discouraging implications for some of today’s Black teachers, who sometimes have the propensity to be less experienced than their white colleagues within schools. Kalogrides et al (2011; 2013) in their studies of large urban districts (Los Angeles, New York, and Miami Dade County) from 2003-2011, found that Black and Latino/a teachers averaged eight to ten years of experience while their white colleagues averaged about thirteen years of teaching.

The causes of these trends can be attributed to the marginalization, under support, overburdening, and alienation of Black teachers in schools (Quicho & Rios, 2009). Ultimately, these effects push Black teachers out of the field at alarming rates, often quicker than their white colleagues (Loeb et al, 2005, Scafidi, 2007). These studies are important to consider as they explain how experience or lack of experience, can disproportionately exclude some Black teachers from advanced course assignments creating a space for white teachers to secure positions for themselves.

Teacher Credentials

Important also to the teacher tracking conversation is the influence that teachers' credentials have on their assignments in schools. The research I reviewed suggests that the advanced and honors courses in schools were the property of the most "highly qualified" in terms of undergraduate institution, subject matter expertise (Master's degree), and memberships in professional organizations (Bacolod, 2007; Boyd et. al, 2005; Boyd et. al 2009; Clotfelter, 2005; Ford et. al, 1997; Grissom et. al, 2013; Kalogrides, 2011; Kalogrides et. al, 2013; Kelly, 2004). Described as a necessary evil to maintain the integrity of advanced coursework (Kelly, 2004), advanced content courses are often filled with majority white teachers who are more likely to possess the aforementioned characteristics. Interestingly enough, if these "highly qualified" teachers are not found in higher track courses, they are more likely to leave the school (Boyd et al, 2005).

Similar to experience, there is a "human capital" divide between Black and white teachers, leaving many Black teachers less highly qualified than the majority white teachers in their schools (Kalogrides et al, 2011, p.26). Also, very similar to experience, Black teachers struggle to attain high credentials as a result of culturally biased credentialing exams, standardized tests, and marginalization in traditional teacher preparation programs (Quicho &

Rios, 2009). It is important to note that there are many Black teachers that possess the aforementioned treasured qualifications, but still lack access to advanced course assignments (Kalogrides et al, 2013). Moreover, these studies show that Black teachers are disproportionately affected using credentials as a way of determining assignments. Until the roots of culturally biased credentialing processes are addressed, these practices could continue to improperly assign valuable Black teachers.

Teacher Preference

There is a considerable amount of research that highlights the influence of teacher preferences in their assignments (Bacolod, 2007; Boyd et. al, 2005; Clotfelter et. al, 2005; Fuller & Ladd, 2013; Finley, 1984; Grissom et. al, 2013; Horng, 2009; Jackson, 2009; Kalogrides et al, 2011; Kelly, 2004). There are three separate categories for this argument including demographic preference, experience, and motivation. Experienced white teachers are more likely to be found in schools and classrooms with non/low minority contexts (Clotfelter et al, 2005; Finley, 1984). What I found more intriguing was that experienced, highly credentialed white teachers tend to leave particular poor schools with increasing minority demographics suggesting a preference for schools with predominantly white students (Bacolod, 2007; Boyd et al, 2009; Jackson, 2009). There is substantial evidence to propose that for white teachers, preference is a powerful factor that impacts the way they are assigned to specific courses. Less evident is research supporting a similar impact for Black teachers as well as literature that ties white teacher preferences to the resulting Black teacher suppression. Ultimately, preference seems to carry more weight for white teachers than for Black teachers suggesting that racially unequal teacher assignments could be a consequence of white teacher agency and power in schools. The idea of Black teacher preference and agency is a topic for future research.

Teacher Residence

Slightly marginal, but still significant in the literature findings is the impact that residence has on teacher assignments. According to research from Boyd et al, (2005) and Jackson (2009) the geographic location of teachers can often be a determinant of what types of courses they teach. Black teachers who often reside in urban areas may be more likely to teach in majority minority contexts (Jackson, 2009). The opposite could be true for white teachers in suburban districts. In urban districts that are often under-resourced and sometimes lack the advanced course offerings, Black teachers are not given the opportunities that white suburban teachers have in abundance. This line of research although limited, offers a unique perspective that points to teacher tracking being a product of a larger societal issue, namely residential segregation.

Institutional Factors, School Leadership and Organizational Theory School Politics

There is a substantial literature base that posits power relations within schools are the most dominant forces driving teacher assignments (Carry & Farris, 1994; Clotfelter et. al, 2005; Finley, 1984; Loeb, Kalogrides & Horng, 2010; Jackson, 2009; Kalogrides et al, 2013; Monk, 1987). This literature argues that white parents, white teachers, and white school leaders develop strong power relationships within schools that often leave Black teachers severely disenfranchised. Moreover, Mabokela & Madsen (2003; 2005) avow that Black teachers specifically experience pigeonhole effects, boundary heightening, and role entrapment as they are often spotlighted as the expert on all things multicultural (p.204). This literature exposes the political forces that have differential effects on Black teachers' identity, pedagogical practices, roles, and mobility in schools. This research implies that the political hierarchy in schools can severely oppress Black teachers who are not often found at the top of the power structure.

Race and Racism

There is some evidence that suggests race and racism could influence teacher tracking in unique ways (Agee, 1998; Castaneda et al, 2006; Mabokela & Madsen, 2003; Mabokela & Madsen, 2005; Page & Page, 1991; Quicho & Rios, 2009). For Black teachers, the journey from pre-service to in-service is loaded with impediments to advanced course assignments that are different than their white counterparts. Quicho & Rios (2009) document the barriers for Black teachers to enter and remain in the field. These barriers include culturally biased teacher certification exams and programs, lack of access to teaching job opportunities, attrition as a result of assignments in severely under-resourced schools and a plethora of other inequities (Quicho & Rios, 2009). This leaves Black teacher in a contentious space, a struggle for access to “more desirable classes” that their white colleagues seem to grasp (Finley, 1984 p. 237). Page & Page (1991) further explain the in-service experiences with racism as they describe one Black teacher’s role entrapment within a school despite expertise, credentials, and the aspiration to teach an open advanced high school biology course. This Black teacher was denied the opportunity by administration in favor of a first-year white teacher (Page & Page, 1991). Evidence from the Mabokela and Madsen (2003:2005) and Castaneda et al, (2006) studies, suggest Black teachers find themselves trapped in limiting roles and boundaries set by the white teachers and leaders in the school. These boundaries inhibit Black teachers’ ascension to the top of the teacher hierarchy within schools in ways that imply that race and/or racism are at play.

The Brar (1991) study is the most important work done on this topic as it points to overt racism as the central cause of inequitable teacher assignments in the United Kingdom. Brar (1991) found that despite superior experience and credentials, Black teachers across Ealing (London Borough) were subjugated to multicultural roles and not allowed to ascend

to the higher teacher ranks (i.e. Master Teacher). This study found that deficit views of Black teachers and students alike were the culprits of this form of oppression. Although there are significant contextual differences to be considered, the evidence from this study and the aforementioned factors from this review suggest that a similar analysis is necessary to expose a more complete picture of teacher tracking in the United States. When all the important characteristics are equal among Black and white teachers, like experience and credentials, it appears that the gross underrepresentation of Black teachers in advanced courses could be a product of racism. Therefore, an analysis that centers race, similar to that of the Brar (1991) study, identifies racism as a significant factor in teacher tracking in ways that previous American studies have yet to do.

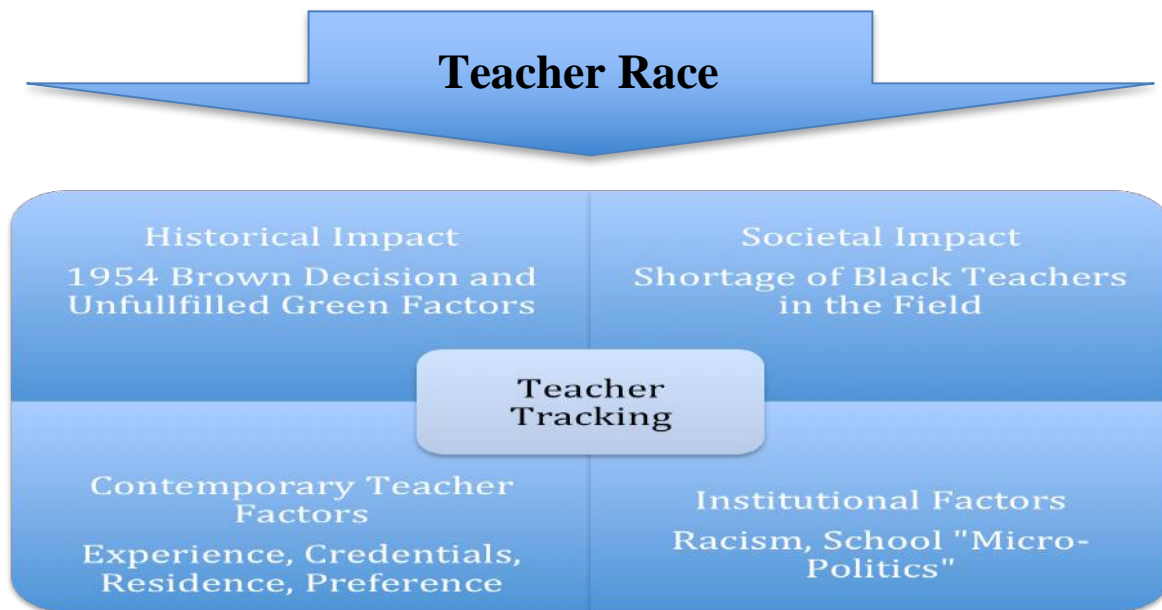


Figure 1: This theoretical model shows the impact of the seven contemporary factors and the impact of larger historical and societal problems that influence teacher tracking (Stanley, 2016).

Analysis

Figure 1 is a theoretical model that expands and complicates the Finley (1984) definition by centering race as a powerful factor and raising the issue of racism as a catalyst to teacher tracking. In this model, race is central to the teacher tracking discussion as it has an impact on the remaining six factors. As the model shows, the contemporary factors all have some impact on the problem, but are all heavily influenced by teacher race, meaning that for each of them the implications are different for Black and white teachers. In order to contextualize this problem it is important to consider the larger social and historical factors that have created these contemporary factors. The *Brown* decision and unfulfilled *Green* factors explain where modern teacher tracking originated and how it was maintained throughout history. The larger societal impact of the shortage of Black teachers in the field helps to further explicate why potentially these tracking trends occur.

Implications

Teachers

The assumption that minority teachers best educate minority students only, establishes a perspective that absolves dominant or majority teachers from their multicultural responsibilities (Banks, 1989). Given the inequitable access that academically talented students have to cross-cultural teacher perspectives, this work accentuates the importance of diverse connections in advanced courses as a means to increase cultural competence for students and teachers alike. As eluded to earlier, there are clear implications for minority teacher recruitment and retention as Black and Latino/a teachers are fleeing the field in alarming rates, sometimes due to inequitable course assignments.

School Leaders

Furthermore, from a leadership standpoint it is considerably important to understand the degree of diversity that exists within schools. Research has shown that leaders, especially those who are white, are not always aware of how to properly meet diversity standards and are often unable to execute district diversity policies given their lack of cultural competence (Mabokela & Madsen, 2005). The continuation of ethnic matching or the pairing of minority students with minority teachers exclusively is not a best practice for increasing diversity nor is it conducive to multicultural initiatives. Leaders have to be more intentional about understanding how their practices affect the existing school culture.

Students

It is important to also understand how these practices affect the predominately white, higher track classroom's perceptions of minorities in general. Loehr (1988) cautions educators to think of the long-term implications for students:

As the proportion of white teachers grows, role modeling that might encourage minority students to pursue careers in education decreases...Without sufficient exposure to minority teachers throughout education, both minority and majority students come to characterize the teaching profession and the academic enterprise in general-- as best suited for whites.

(Loehr, 1988, p.32)

Conclusion

The literature suggests that teacher tracking is a multifaceted problem that has historical roots, social, and contemporary factors that are racialized. Whether intentional or unintentional, school leadership has been complicit to this tragic injustice and the residual effects are alarming. Effectively rehashing and nuancing the conversation will hopefully illuminate the unforeseen dangers of teacher tracking.

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Darrius A. Stanley is a second-year doctoral student in the K-12 Education Administration program at Michigan State University. His research interests include social justice leadership, particularly as it pertains to the experiences of Black teachers in secondary institutions. His current work focuses on both historical and contemporary issues of faculty-level racism in American secondary schools.