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To cite this article:

Garza, E. (2022). Male teachers in elementary settings: Perceptions of a teaching career. *International Journal on Social and Education Sciences (IJonSES)*, 4(1), 135-148. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijonSES.291>

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Male Teachers in Elementary Settings: Perceptions of A Teaching Career

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Article Info

Article History

Received:

16 August 2021

Accepted:

28 November 2021

Keywords

Elementary education

Male teachers of color

Teacher diversity

Recruitment & retention

Abstract

This study explored the perceptions of teachers who identify as male/male of color teachers about their sense of competence and satisfaction with their choice of career working with young children in elementary settings. This study sought to answer questions about the perceived factors affecting their development as teachers of young children and the potential for improving the recruitment and retention of male teachers in the primary grades. Male and male of color elementary school teachers were invited to share their perceptions of their experiences related to becoming and being a teacher in the primary grades through a questionnaire and interviews. The study found participants felt that their experience as teachers was informed by uniquely gendered factors, such as their male and/or intersectional identities and the associated perspectives and experiences as well as by more global factors such as their commitment to their professional expertise as effective teachers. Overall, the study suggests that both gendered and global factors have implications for recruitment and retention given that they contribute to male and male of color teachers' sense of competence and satisfaction teaching young children in elementary settings.

Introduction

Elementary school teachers who identify as male comprise a small fraction of the overall population of PreK-5 teachers and this study sought to understand their experience. The study explored the perceptions of teachers, who identify as male/male of color, about their choice of career working with young children in elementary settings. What did they perceive affected the development of their sense of competence and satisfaction teaching young children in elementary settings? What, if any, potential implications might these perceived factors have for recruitment and retention of male/male of color teachers in the primary grades?

The ubiquitous association of the female gender with a career as an elementary school teacher is reflected in the actual demographic data, showing that more than 80% of elementary teachers in the U.S. identify as female and White (BLS, 2020). It is in this context, in which it is assumed that the teacher is a White female, that males/males of color undertake a career teaching young children. By exploring the perceptions of the men/men of color who have chosen this occupation despite the societal assumptions, this paper highlights perceived factors for how they develop a sense of job satisfaction as teachers in primary grades. While the percentage of men who teach in primary settings is low, much can be learned by listening to the men/men of color currently in the profession. In addition, "Sharing with male adults how meaningful teaching is could help attract more males

to the profession” (Heubeck, 2021) (Due to the dearth of research in this area, this study sought out male/male of color elementary school teachers willing to share their thoughts and experiences. Listening to the males/males of color who currently teach young children can increase knowledge and understanding of what they believe has influenced them both to become a teacher and to stay in the profession.

Greater participation by males/males of color in teaching PreK-5 merits particular attention given the current teacher shortages as well as the needs for workforce diversification. More men teaching young children could help to address the teacher shortage (Lambert, 2021; Sutchter, 2016). Nationwide, including California, there continues to be ongoing teacher shortages forcing states to consider opening pathways into the profession that knock down barriers (Gangone, 2021). Men/men of color could step into many of these jobs. One but one barrier appears to be the stigma men may face when applying for and working at a job traditionally held by women. In his series, *Making Sense*, for PBS Newshour, Paul Solman (2017) examined why men are staying away from careers in early childhood education, the preschool and primary grades, where the jobs are plentiful and increasing. He spoke with a former member of the Council of Economic Advisors, Betsey Stevenson, who made the pointed to the stigma. “We need to recognize that there are a lot of guys who feel stigmatized, when they take one of these jobs, like they're going in to do girls' work. And that feeling is a barrier for them.” Her comments were substantiated by the results of a survey of members of the National Association of the Education of Young Children (Nelson, 2002). In the survey, most (97.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that one of the main reasons men don't enter or stay in profession is the stereotypes they face; in particular, that teaching young children is women's work or that men are not caring. Men may also face suspicion for their motives (Crisp & King, 2017). Another barrier, particularly to men of color is the lack of diversity in the workforce. Given that the overwhelming majority of the current workforce is White, men of color may not easily see themselves in the role. One Black male teacher put it this way. “We have a diversity problem across our teaching force, and we must do more to ensure that people of color can see themselves as teachers and are welcomed into the teaching profession” (Evans, 2019, p.1). National professional organizations are working to understand the barriers to recruiting teachers of color (AACTE, 2019) and the retention of minority teachers, particularly the reasons why higher numbers of minority teachers leave the field (Ingersoll & May, 2016). The primary goal of these efforts is “to diversify the teacher candidate pool and improve retention of those teachers we already have” (Proctor, 2018). Diversifying the workforce is urgently needed to more closely match student demographics. The data reveal a persistent gap between the percentage of minority students and male students and the percentage of minority and male teachers. For example, in California, 64% of teachers in all grade levels are White while only about 25% of the student population is White non-Hispanic (CalEdFacts, 2020). Male students make up 51% of the total student population (EdData, 2018). If men/men of color were step into these jobs, it could address issues of teacher shortages and workforce diversification to better serve the student population.

To pursue teaching as a career and step into the teaching profession, men/men of color must deal with these societal and cultural barriers in order to feel comfortable seeing themselves in the role. Some of the literature points out ways this could be achieved. First, highlighting the value of male/male of color experiential knowledge base could support men/men of color to see themselves in the role as an educator. Wood (2014)

promotes highlighting the educational experiences of males/males of color, how they understand educational contexts and what they believe has led to their success even when the system did not serve them well. He states that more needs to be done to understand “gendered experiences of males historically underrepresented and underserved in education, particularly boys and men of color” (134). Second, male/male of color teacher role models could inspire men/men of color to see themselves as teachers. At the same time, seeing themselves as role models could motivate men/men of color to become a teacher. Evans, (2019), shared that his experience with Black male teachers as a young student was instrumental to his own willingness to consider a career in the teaching profession. “Seeing a diverse teaching force at the helm of the classroom showed me that teaching was a viable career for a Black student in Detroit, and they inspired me to follow my dream of becoming a teacher” (p. 1). In addition, a study, which invited Latino teachers to talk about their experiences in the profession, found that being a role model was one of the main reasons that Latinos entered the field (Griffin, 2018). “[Latino] teachers noted that one of their key strengths was being a role model and showing students the possibilities life has to offer by highlighting their own success... serving as an example for students was actually the reason many teachers got into the field” (Griffin, 2018, p. 6).

Like all professional educators, male/male of color novice teachers must complete a teacher preparation program and land their first teaching job. However, this is just the beginning of their professional development and they require lots of support and encouragement to continue their learning as a practicing educator. Teacher professional development is a process frequently described in stages from “survival” to “consolidation” to “renewal” and, finally, to “maturity” (Katz, 1995; Sadker & Zittleman, 2018 p. 20). Teachers at each stage of development pay attention to different concerns. Initially, novice teachers tend to be more focused on their own survival. Then, they grow to become more concerned with their teaching and its impact and effectiveness to meet their students’ learning needs (Arduini-Van Hoose, 2021, p.1). As male/male of color teachers engage in their work, it is important that they find the support, camaraderie and recognition needed to move forward through the stages of development. Another frequently overlooked aspect of professional development is the development of a teacher identity. Many researchers have argued that teachers’ process of professional growth is at its core a process of identity development (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017; Friesen & Besley, 2013; Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; Rogers & Scott, 2008). “Learning to teach is an identity making process... [involving] teachers’ overall conception of who they are as teachers, who they believe they are, and who they want to be as teachers” (Beijaard, 2019, p.1). This may have particular relevance for males and males of color who must forge their teacher identity in contrast to societal conceptions of teachers as female and White. Beijaard & Meijer (2017) suggested that teaching identity forms through the developmental concepts of “ownership, sense-making and agency” (p. 178). To be successful, novice teachers must start by understanding themselves and understanding what they bring with them into teaching. For men/men of color this would include their own personal male/male of color identity as well as their beliefs about what makes a good teacher. Then, teachers use a sense of agency to take control of their own development, “making sense of their practice by integrating what they know with their new experiences” (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017, p. 180). An effective process of professional development can contribute significantly to male/male of color teachers’ overall sense of job satisfaction and a desire to stay in the profession. Males/males of color bring their gendered intersectional identities and related educational experiences with them when they become a teacher. Given that these identities are frequently not perceived as

typical for teaching young children, it is particularly important to understand male/male of color elementary teachers own perceptions about their choice of a career, including their attitudes about their role and experiences. This study sought out their perspectives to shed light on what they believe affects a sense of competence and satisfaction for men/men of color who choose a profession teaching young children.

Method

This mixed-methods study was conducted at a teacher credentialing program of a public university. Data for this study were collected over two years. Information about the male/male of color elementary school teachers' attitudes were obtained in two parts: a questionnaire using a Likert scale for quantitative data and small, focus group interviews for qualitative data.

Participants

Participants were males who graduated from one teacher credential program with a multiple subject teaching credential, authorizing them to teach elementary age students. 30 responded to the questionnaire. 2 identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, 12 identified as Hispanic/Latino and 16 identified as White. Half of the participants had taught more than four years and half had taught 4 or less years (see Table 1).

Table 1. Questionnaire Participant Demographics

Variable	N	% of participants
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	6.6
Hispanic/Latino	12	40
White	16	53.3
Taught >4 yrs	15	50
Taught 4 or less yrs	15	50
Total	30	

The 30 participants who responded to the questionnaire were invited to participate in the focus group interviews. 8 of these participants were interviewed. 3 identified as Hispanic/Latino and 5 identified as White. 6 had taught for more than 4 years and 2 had taught for 4 years or less (see Table 2).

Table 2. Interview Participant Demographics

Variable	N	% of participants
Hispanic/Latino	3	37.5
White	5	62.5
Taught >4 yrs	6	75
Taught 4 or less yrs	2	25
Total	8	

Data Collection

All 30 participants completed the questionnaire, consisting of 10 items which focused on the participants' perceptions and experiences related being an elementary school teacher. The questionnaire used a 5-point scale which participants used to rate their level of agreement for each item with one of the response alternatives ranging from one to five: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree. Responses to the questionnaire were analyzed for central tendency and range (see Table 3). Based on the results of the questionnaire, 5 open-ended interview questions were designed to obtain qualitative data that illustrated and further elaborated the quantitative findings. The open-ended responses to the interview questions were reviewed and coded (see Table 4). The coded concepts within the responses were then used to describe 3 main themes.

Results

Questionnaire

Add results and findings here. The questionnaire consisted of 10 items, which focused on the participants' perceptions and experiences related being an elementary school teacher. The 30 respondents (N=30) rated their sense of career satisfaction and career choice, their teacher qualities, their role perceptions, their working relationships and their developing professional expertise. An analysis of this ordinal data was focused on "finding the central tendency (what most respondents believe) and the spread / dispersion of the responses (how strongly respondents agree with each other)" (Kostoulas, 2014). The central tendency was determined by finding the median for each item. The spread or range of the responses was determined by finding the Inter-Quartile Range (IQR) of each item (Kostoulas, 2014). The following table shows the median (Mdn) and the range (IQR) for each item (see Table 3).

Overall, the findings indicated a general consensus among male/male of color teachers' attitudes with regard to their careers as elementary school teachers. In a statement related to career satisfaction, respondents almost unanimously strongly agreed (96.7%) that teaching elementary school is a fulfilling career for men/men of color. In statements related to career choice, respondents considered two statements. When asked if their decision to become elementary school teachers was influenced by the male elementary school teachers they have known, 86.7 % of respondents disagreed or were unsure. On the other hand, 93.3% of respondents indicated that they believed it important that men considering a career in teaching have the opportunity to talk with men who already teach. These results may have reflected the reality that most men/men of color surveyed did not know male/male of color elementary teachers that they could consult when considering the profession. However, most of them did think that it would be helpful to have that opportunity if it were available. In response to three statements related to the teacher qualities of males/males of color as elementary school teachers, respondents were in overwhelming agreement. First, 93.3% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed when asked if their own schooling experiences as male students influenced their thinking and actions for effective teaching. Second, 86.7% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that male/male of color teachers have distinct perspectives & life experiences than female teachers that are valuable for working with elementary age children. Third, 86.7% strongly agreed or agreed that men possess the qualities needed to work with young

children, such as being nurturing, patient & empathetic. Also, in statements related to developing professional expertise, respondents unanimously agreed (100%) that male/male of color elementary school teachers can design & implement effective learning activities for young children, both male & female, to support student learning & development. In addition, they were in unanimous agreement that they valued opportunities to grow & develop their professional skills and knowledge for teaching elementary school. In response to statements about role perceptions, responses were consistent, 86.7% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that male teachers have unique role expectations placed upon them (different from female teachers) for what they are expected to do as teachers. Finally, in statements related to working relationships, the vast majority of respondents (93.3%) were in agreement that communication and working relationships with other male/male of color teachers were beneficial to them.

Table 3. Questionnaire Response Data

ITEM	Mdn	IQR
Teaching young children at the elementary school level is a fulfilling career for men/men of color.	5	1
My own positive & negative school experiences as a male student/male student of color influence my thinking and actions for being an effective elementary teacher.	5	1
My decision to become an elementary school teacher was influenced by the male elementary school teachers I have known.	2	1
It would be beneficial for men/men of color considering this career to have opportunities to talk with men/men of color who are already teaching elementary school.	4.5	1
Male elementary school teachers have different perspectives & life experiences than female teachers that are valuable for working with elementary age children.	4.5	1
Men/men of color possess the qualities needed to work with young children	5	1
I can design & implement effective learning activities for young children, both male & female, to support my students' learning & development.	5	0
It is important for men/men of color to have opportunities to grow & develop their professional skills and knowledge for teaching elementary school.	5	0
Male elementary school teachers have unique role expectations placed on them (different from female teachers) for what they are expected to do as teachers.	5	1
Male elementary school teachers benefit from having working relationships with other male elementary school teachers.	5	1

Interview

The interviews consisted of 5 open-ended questions related to the topics of career satisfaction, their lived experience in relation to their teacher qualities, their developing professional expertise, their role perceptions and expectations and their working relationships. They were designed to obtain qualitative data, in particular, examples from participants own experiences to illustrate and further elaborate the quantitative findings from the questionnaire. Responses to the 5 open-ended questions were analyzed resulting in a total of 7 codes for all

responses (see Table 4). Then, these were utilized to describe overarching themes.

Table 4. Interview Analysis Results

Question	Codes Assigned
1. Career satisfaction	Relationships, Role model, Identity match, Nature of the profession
2. Lived experience & teacher qualities	Relationships, Role model, Identity match, Nature of the profession
3. Developing expertise	Relationships, Role model, Identity match, Nature of the profession
4. Role perceptions & expectations	Relationships, Gendered perceptions/expectations, Identity match vrs mismatch
5. Working relationships	Relationships, Gendered Communication

The first three questions of the interview explored the male/male of color teachers' attitudes related to their career satisfaction, the value of their lived experience, both personal and professional, to their work as elementary school teachers, and their developing professional expertise. Questions One, Two and Three had 4 codes: (1) relationships, (2) role model, (3) identity match, and (7) nature of the profession. When answering the first question about their high sense of career satisfaction, the top reasons given included their relationships with students and their position as a role model. Participants reported feeling that there was a good match between how they saw themselves as men/men of color and how they saw themselves as teachers who were positive male role models for their students. In addition, they were very satisfied with nature of the profession which allowed them to center their work on their relationships with students, playing a role in their development and academic success. When answering the second question about the value of their life experience as males/males of color for their teacher qualities, they shared that their gendered lived experience served as an asset enabling them to be an effective male role model and build relationships with their students. Participants expressed that their experiential base and the associated understandings were helpful resources for them to develop qualities they needed to be effective teachers of young children. They also reported that they brought with them into teaching interests and work preferences that aligned well with the very nature of the profession itself. When answering the third question about their developing expertise, all participants indicated that their professional expertise was best reflected in the success they had building relationships with their students that allowed them to play positive role in their lives. They shared that they thrive as teachers because they are allowed sufficient autonomy in their work and can take self-initiative to develop their craft. They expressed deep satisfaction with the nature of the profession, which allowed them to do work they enjoyed and to continue developing their professional expertise in rewarding ways. The remaining two questions of the interview explored the male/male of color teachers' attitudes related to their working relationships and the perceptions and expectations they experienced in the school context. Questions Four and Five had 4 codes: (1) relationships, (2) gendered perceptions /expectations, (3) identity match vrs mismatch, and (4) gendered communications. When answering the next question about the unique experiences that men/men of color had in a field dominated by White women, participants indicated that relationships with their colleagues, students' parents and students was the

primary source of their unique experiences. They explained that they constantly worked to understand how their colleagues, students' parents and students perceived them as male/male of color teachers differently and/or similarly to teachers of other genders. They learned that the expectations they frequently faced in the school setting resulted from the fact that they identified as male/male of color. Participants indicated that these unique perceptions and expectations sometimes matched and sometimes did not match their own sense of identity as a male/male of color and their sense of who they were as a teacher. When asked the final question about their working relationships, most participants stated that their professional relationships regardless of gender were productive and rewarding. However, participants also emphasized an extra benefit of communicating with other male/male of color teachers. These gendered communications gave them opportunities to talk with one another about their unique experiences within the context of their professional work lives.

Themes

Overall, 3 themes captured the coded concepts expressed by the male/male of color teachers related to perceptions of themselves as teachers of young children and their sense of career satisfaction: 1) centering work on relationships with students 2) mitigating gendered perceptions and expectations 3) making the most of the profession's possibilities.

Theme One described participants' perceptions that relationships with their students was what gave their work as teachers in elementary settings meaning and purpose. Participants' responses continuously pointed to the importance of relationships with their students. *"Being able to educate starts with relationships. I make connections with kids to build those relationships."* All of the participants shared that teaching was a second career that they had chosen specifically because it gave them the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of young people. *"I changed careers to go into teaching to leave a legacy in this world. I felt that doing something positive in this world is to help young children."* They became a male/male of color role model for their students. *"As a teacher, I am a male role model for my students, a consistent male role model who is with them throughout the day."* The men/men of color shared that their gendered experiences and cultural funds of knowledge helped them to connect with their students. *"I have a variety cultural experiences that I consider valuable. I have had experiences in life that make it easier for children to relate to me and build those relationships."* They frequently drew on their own personal experiences as boys/boys of color in educational settings, which gave them a nuanced understanding of their male students' emotions and needs. *"It's just understanding the mentality of a boy, crazy energy that is almost uncontrollable. We have to let the child experience the world in their own way. To be themselves."* In addition, the participants shared that they drew upon the "father figure" aspects of being a male role model to be nurturing, patient and empathetic caregivers for the young children in their classrooms. *"I see a lot of emotion pour out of the boys. They are communicating 'I am angry and I am going to be angry all day.' I really understand this and I can respond, 'Well you don't need to do that just come talk to me.'" The participants gained a deep sense of fulfillment in developing these relationships and serving as male/male of color role models for their young students at a critical time in their child development. "It is amazing to see how the students I had in my classroom are still being successful even years later. To know that my positive influence on these students early on in their lives as a male role model,*

made a difference in their lives going forward.” They believed that by connecting with their students in these meaningful ways, they were instrumental in their students’ academic development and success in life.

Theme Two described participants’ perceptions that mitigating gendered perceptions and expectations was a necessary in order to have a satisfying career. The pointed to the gendered perceptions and expectations that were placed on them due the fact that they were males/males of color in a position typically held by White women. To begin with, the participants felt the need to push back on societal perceptions that teaching young children is “women’s work.” *“There is a place for males in this setting. The stereotypes that men can’t be in that role has to be broken.”* Some felt they had to prove themselves to their female teacher colleagues. *“A perception was maybe my room setup wasn’t going to be as pretty and decorated because I’m a man. When I realized that’s what they thought, I worked to show them and on purpose I made a super cute poster.”* The participants shared that they were sometimes surprised by and did not always understand the perceptions and expectations that were placed on them by virtue of the fact that they were males in early childhood and elementary contexts. For example, they explained the frequently they were perceived as natural disciplinarians by their female colleagues even though that is not how they saw themselves. *“There is this expectation that ‘oh, discipline will be easy for you since you are a man.’”* They were frequently expected to deal with misbehaving students. *“There are oftentimes when I am asked to speak with misbehaving students because they perceive that students respond to me as a man differently... they may be sent to my class because I am a male teacher.”* One way that they dealt with these expectations was growing their professional skills. For example, learning to deal with the behavior of students, male or female, was part of their developing professional skill set as a teacher. Another way was by talking with other male/male of color colleagues, which could be particularly helpful in figuring out how to navigate the expectations and perceptions that they encountered. *“One other male teacher in the school that first year I was teaching~ I spoke with him a lot about how I was perceived and how he had been perceived. I valued his input because he had had the same kind of experience in his first year of teaching as well and took a while to get around it.”* Most importantly they had to learn to hold onto what they brought with them from their own life experiences and male/male of color identity to inform their teacher role in a way that reflected their own values. For example, while the participants overwhelmingly agreed that they had the attributes needed to work with young children (e.g. being nurturing, caring, patient), they made clear that the expression of these qualities did not always look or sound identical to that of their female colleagues. One participant shared that although a sing-song sweet voice when speaking to their young students was perceived as the norm, he did not try to mimic the female voice. Instead, he, like many of his male colleagues, drew on their experiences with the voices of their Dads, the fatherly figure, to express the nurture and care that the students needed. *“I teach like a dad. I have expectations of the students and I make it clear. It’s my ‘Dad energy.’”* These teachers found a way as men/men of color to successfully demonstrate appropriate ways of caring for their young students. *“The kids are so affectionate and loving. I take my responsibility very seriously.”* In addition, they stated that overtime, they learned to draw on their own male/male of color experience and perspective to grow their contributions to the educational setting. For example, a couple participants described taking opportunities to guide school gender-based projects, such as engaging fathers in the education of their children.

Theme Three described participants’ perceptions that making the most of the profession’s possibilities was a

main reason that teaching was an enjoyable and satisfying job. For some participants, becoming an elementary school teacher was a surprising new direction. *“It was not a profession that I initially went off to do.”* While for others it had always been a dream. *“This is a second career – everything I’ve been through (military, small business, contract labor, manager) in the back of my head I always wanted to be a teacher.”* Regardless of how they got into teaching, all the participants rated teaching positively in comparison to other jobs. *“You are helping kids achieve goals, and helping them in life. I like the thought that I am part of their educational journey and that in the future I may be a small fraction of whatever successes they have.”* They repeatedly expressed how much fun they had interacting with their energetic young students every day. *“I like kids and just working with them is fun... they are so funny and creative. They keep me creative.”* The participants shared that they found their personal and professional preferences for active engagement, hands-on activities, movement and variety were a big part of their work teaching in primary settings. *“I typically try to approach teaching in a fun way, fun up and moving around a lot, group projects. I do a lot of fun activities, e.g. tech challenges, where students have to build something with certain tools.”* Inherent to the nature of the profession was work that offered a certain level of autonomy, opportunity and creativity. *“I can take projects from inception to conclusion, from curriculum creation to implementation.”* In contrast to previous jobs, they felt that teaching provided them more agency and opportunities for self-initiative. *“There are so many opportunities within education. Coming from the business world – I’m running my own operation and responsible for myself, lot of creativity. There is growth potential, stability, personal connections with kids...”* They were responsible for running their own classroom, getting to know their students and developing tailored learning experiences. *“Running a personalized learning program, inductive, hands-on project-based type learning... I am always trying to create engaging experiences that allow students to make those connections.”* The participants emphasized that their expertise was constantly growing in new directions and that they took various opportunities to deepen their skills and collaborate around curriculum, *“I am always looking for new units and new ways to teach. We collaborate as a grade level and are always looking to change things up. The biggest thing in my professional growth is collaboration with other teachers.”* In addition, they were committed to their own professional development and finding new ways to contribute by developing innovative projects or taking on different responsibilities. For some of the participants, this meant getting a master’s degree to develop a specialization such as educational technology while for others it meant developing a passion, such as child advocacy. *“I love this job. It has really changed me. I am an advocate for kids. I have a purpose and I have a direction and I make sure that I carry that inside of me.”*

Discussion

For males/men of color to consider teaching elementary school, they need to be able to see themselves in that role. The overwhelmingly female and White demographics of elementary school teachers can present challenges for men/men of color to see themselves as teachers of young children. Nevertheless, the teachers in this study showed that they could. Listening to the males/men of color who currently teach young children highlighted that men/men of color perceive themselves as capable and effective teachers and that their sense of competence and career satisfaction results from both gendered and global understandings of their role as teachers. The teachers in this study acted with a sense of agency to take control of their own development as teachers. Their

great sense of satisfaction with their career choice was the result in large part of their willingness to define their role on their own terms and to deal with gendered perceptions successfully. They took ownership of all that they brought with them into teaching, including their conceptions of themselves as men/men of color as well as their beliefs about what makes a good teacher. These gendered intersectional identities and associated perspectives and experiences became a richly textured resource for them informing their role as a teacher of children in the primary grades. They prioritized their relationships with their students as the central aspect of their work as teachers. In so doing, they became male role models dedicated to fostering the development of the young children in their care. In addition, they recognized the global aspects of teaching such as the generative possibilities the nature of this profession offered that they found particularly interesting and enjoyable. This expanded their commitment to develop their professional expertise and engage more deeply in the work of teaching young children. Their satisfaction was also the result of learning to deal with gendered perceptions and expectations that they faced due to being male/male of color in a setting demographically dominated by White females. They took opportunities to have conversations with other teachers, particularly male teachers, to talk about the gendered perceptions and expectations, learning to respond in ways that helped them to clarify who they wanted to be as male/male of color teachers in elementary settings. They concluded that learning to navigate these perceptions in the ways that were most productive was part of their development as teachers.

The participants of this study showed that men/men of color teachers can feel a sense of competence and satisfaction working with young children. To do so, they can tap their gendered experiences as males/males of color and incorporate them into their teaching roles. Embracing their uniquely gendered characteristics within their conception of themselves as teachers can deepen their understanding and effectiveness as teachers. At the same time, they can tap their global experiences as members of this engaging profession, developing their professional expertise and collegial collaborations. Embracing work that is characterized by variety, fun, creativity and determination to move ideas from concept to completion, they can see their own potential to make a difference for their students, schools and communities.

Conclusion

Given the problems related to the teacher shortages and lack of diversity of the teacher workforce in the US, males/males of color could step into careers teaching in early childhood education and the primary grades. This study suggests that more males/males of color can overcome societal and cultural barriers in order to redefine work teaching young children as a career that they could see themselves doing and doing well. In order to be successful, recruitment and retention of male/male of color teachers could do more to be sensitive to the uniquely gendered factors as well as the more global factors that men/men of color perceive inform their experience as teachers of young children.

First, successful recruitment of males/males of color hinges on helping them see themselves as teachers of young children. Encouraging men/men of color to speak with those who are already teaching young children could detail the specifics of what makes this enjoyable and satisfying work for men/men of color considering the profession. Recruitment should focus on the sense of meaning and purpose that men/men of color find in

teaching as a career where relationships with students are at the center of the work. It is important to not ask men/men of color to give up their gendered intersectional identities when considering a career as a teacher. Instead, it is more useful to help them see that who they are as males/males of color is actually a good match for the job and central to their success as teachers. Emphasis could be placed on the benefits of their lived experience to the role and the joys of becoming a male role model for young students. It is helpful for men considering.

Second, successful retention of male/male of color teachers depends on the sense of fulfillment that they derive from their work. Men/men of color teachers should to be recognized for the value they place on developing relationships with their students and the positive influence they have on their young students' lives and academic development. In addition, it can be helpful to provide male/male of color teachers regular opportunities to converse with other teachers who are male/male of color. These conversations can support them understanding the gendered perceptions and expectations they face as well as give them opportunities to share their joys and challenges, for example related to their work preferences, for variety, autonomy, creativity and growth potential. Retention efforts should also include professional development that focuses on the commitment male/male of color teachers have to their professional expertise including opportunities to contribute to and lead innovative projects. Doing so values their commitment to grow, expand and specialize their work as teachers. This includes ensuring that they have access to various professional growth opportunities that interest them as well as acknowledging and even celebrating their accomplishments and achievements.

Recommendations

This study has added to the knowledge about what leads to the success of male/male of color elementary school teachers. While small, this study provided information on perceived factors that have made the profession possible for some men. More research is needed into opening up the field of early childhood and primary education to more male/male of color teachers in order to address teacher shortages and to diversify the workforce. Further research that highlights the voices of male/male of color teachers in early childhood education and the primary grades should also focus on how to best utilize the identified factors in recruitment and retention efforts. Based on this study, it is recommended that recruitment and retention programs for primary grade teachers lift up the voices of male/male of color teachers working with young children. These teachers have valuable experiences to share of their work in this profession, the joys and the challenges, which show that this is a viable role for men/men of color in US society. It is further recommended that professional development programs across the stages of teacher development support male/male of color teachers in ways that are sensitive to and supportive of their gendered intersectional identities.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Dr. A. Quiocho for her encouragement to pursue this line of inquiry, her thoughtful support and feedback. Special thanks to Dr. G. Barrios for his example and insights which have inspired this research.


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