

Diversifying the Educator Workforce: Diversifying the Educator Workforce: An Ignatian Approach

Leigh Anne Prugh, M.Ed.

Mentor Dr. Renee' Zuccherro (Psychology)

Understanding the Why

In the fall semester, the School of Education began implementing the work involved with our Diversifying the Educator Workforce (DEW) grant. The current racial makeup of Ohio's teachers is 94.2% White and non-Hispanic (Weir, 2021). This statistic does not represent the racial diversity of students who attend Ohio schools, and the state of Ohio is seeking to increase diversity in its educator workforce. Research has shown that a diverse educator workforce increases the achievement of all students and that racial representation matters in the classroom setting.

Community Partnership

The grant involved working with Princeton City School District, which is one of the most diverse school districts in the state of Ohio. The school district is both racially and economically diverse. Princeton Schools and XU School of Education recruited and supported paraprofessional educators from diverse backgrounds to become fully licensed teachers as a grant component. Like Saint Ignatius, these teacher candidates are adult learners who have returned to school to obtain their initial teaching license. In the spirit of *cura personalis*, each candidate received a mentor in the school district. The mentor, carefully chosen by district leadership, supports the teacher candidates throughout the journey. As a part of the grant team and in solidarity and kinship, we visited the school district to support the paraprofessional teacher candidates and their mentors. The support included team members from the Graduate Office and Dr. Winterman, the Director of the School of Education. The district's feedback, particularly Dr. Deborah Jackson, was a sincere appreciation that Xavier came to them. We provided individual support and academic advising to the teacher

candidates. We held several meetings throughout the school year with the mentors and mentees. The meetings began with a motivational speaker, and when in person, we also provided dinner followed by break-out sessions with the mentors and mentees. The new teacher candidates began their coursework during the spring semester. The regularly scheduled meetings helped address concerns and support both the mentors and mentees through their first semester of courses. The district also supported the new teacher candidates by arranging time out of their duties during the school day as paraprofessionals to attend the Crossroads Antiracism Training. The Princeton City School District leaders, School of Education Faculty, and teachers candidates from my EDSP 401 & 601 Student Teaching Seminar also attended the training.

Pedagogical Implementation

The Crossroads Training provided a powerful introduction to systemic racism. The new teacher candidates and student teachers worked together in small groups to understand and discuss the materials presented in training. My seminar students were able to hear perspectives and experiences from the paraprofessionals in the field. The training focused on engaging in authentic, Courageous Conversations. The concept of Courageous Conversation includes engaging in and deepening interracial dialogue about race so that we can examine how this exists in the school setting and improve student achievement (Singleton, 2015). I have reflected on how closely this aligns with many of the readings and conversations with my Ignatian mentor through this work. It is so important to be intentional about taking the time to read and reflect. I remember reading that we should be thoroughly using our freedom for dialogue and conversation. A seminar course should provide the time and space for these critical practices and sincere reflections on how we can promote Courageous Conversations in the educational field setting.

Background:

Before coming to Xavier in 2019, I had the privilege to work in both public and private educational settings. However, I did not experience Ignatian Pedagogy before teaching at Xavier University. My mentor, Dr. Renee' Zuccherro, has been an incredible support throughout this journey. Engaging with a mentor outside of the School of Education was essential in widening my perspective. Dr. Zuccherro and I worked together throughout the year. We were very intentional about using *A Jesuit Education Reader* to guide our discussions and help support incorporating the Ignatian vision into my professional identity (Traub, 2008). We met regularly throughout the fall and spring semesters twice per month. Dr. Zuccherro was a great support in helping me determine how to incorporate my work with the Diversifying the Educator Workforce (DEW). In particular, the grant's mentorship component and the teacher candidates in the EDSP 401 & 601 Student Teaching Seminar course.

References

- Traub, G. W. (Ed.). (2008). *A Jesuit education reader*. Loyola Press.
- Singleton, G. E. (2015). *Courageous conversations about race : a field guide for achieving equity in schools* (Second edition.). Corwin, A SAGE Company.
- Weir, M. M. and K. (n.d.). *94% of Ohio's teachers are white. Could that change any time soon?* The Enquirer. Retrieved October 12, 2021, from <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2021/08/18/94-percent-ohio-teachers-white-could-change-any-time-soon/8113681002/>