The Impact of Personal Beliefs on Teacher Effectiveness

by Courtney Glavich

There have been various reports on how teacher thinking dramatically affects teacher effectiveness and student performance (Pajares, 1992). When future teachers arrive on college campuses, many already have predispositions about the teaching profession. More than likely, positive experiences have influenced them to choose education as a career path (Ginsburg & Newman, 1985). According to Lortie (1975) students that choose to become teachers in college, have often had positive experiences associated with education that dictate their beliefs about teaching and schooling. Why would they change their beliefs of teaching and schooling if their own experiences were positive? Beliefs lead to perspective and ultimately guide an educator’s approach to classroom teaching. Consequently, most teachers’ beliefs do not change dramatically in college. This leads to practitioners entering a profession with beliefs that hinder student progress and a system that begs for change (Lortie 1975).

What are teacher education programs doing to challenge these beliefs and produce teachers that are willing to assist in reform? When No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was brought into effect, highly qualified teachers were needed to implement the program and produce results. The teachers had to meet the following criteria: hold a bachelor’s degree, demonstrate competence in their content area, and possess a full state license (United States Department of Education, 2004). Universities have since attempted to enhance the rigor in their preservice programs through methodol- ogy and content courses, but there is little evidence that these institutions produce teachers that are culturally responsive, and can produce change in urban settings (Siwatu, 2007).

Why are so many beginning teachers ill-prepared to work in urban settings and what are teacher education programs lacking in this regard? Love (2005) suggests “teacher education programs may need to include the examination of beliefs related to knowledge, race, culture, teaching practices, teaching as a profession, expectations of students, and social relations within and beyond the classroom” (p. 97).

References


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Book Review

African Americans and College Choice: The Influence of Family and School by Kassie Freeman

Review written by Dymilah Hewitt

Students have a variety of options when it comes to higher education, so they must accurately weigh their options to ensure the best possible fit. Kassie Freeman’s African Americans and College Choice: The Influence of Family and School is a clearly written book that explores the factors that impact the college selection process of African American youth. African Americans and College Choice was published by State University of New York Press in 2005. Kassie Freeman has enjoyed a distinguished career in higher education. She earned her Ph.D. in Educational Studies from Emory University and has held executive-level leadership positions at Bowdoin College, Dillard University, Alcorn State University and Southern University. The author’s goal in writing this book was to better understand the gap between the number of African American youth that express the desire to earn a college degree, and the number who actually matriculate and graduate from college. As she attempts to address this disparity, she examines the family, school and community factors that influence college choice for African American youth.

African Americans and College Choice addresses the impact of race, gender and social class on the type of college a student selects or whether that student will attend college at all. The specific institutions that the author calls into question are the primary and secondary schools that the students attend, as well as federally funded programs and local colleges. Each entity has the potential to play a huge role in whether or not the students receive the information and support that they need to believe they are college material and make informed decisions to adequately prepare them for college admission. Freeman utilized a qualitative inquiry method. She conducted 16 group interviews of African American high school students, grades 10 through 12 from public and private high schools in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Washington D.C. A total of 70 students (31 male and 39 female) were interviewed for the project from 16 different (inner-city, magnet, and suburban) high schools. Freeman was particularly interested in learning how students plan their postsecondary futures. In the interview transcripts, students exposed problems and provided potential solutions that could help students, parents, teachers, administrators and other stakeholders.

The interviews yielded a number of significant findings. Elementary school is the best time to begin encouraging students to attend college. Students were very aware of when they decided to go to college. She classified students in the categories of knowers, seekers and dreamers with regard to their intent to attend college. The participants had a variety of reasons for choosing a historically black college or university (HBCU) or a predominantly white institution (PWI). Students chose HBCUs to get back to their cultural roots and to learn in an environment where they would not be considered a “minority.” Many of them were convinced by a trusted mentor that an HBCU was the best option. Some of the students who chose PWIs did so because they felt they needed exposure to whites and other cultures to prepare for the “real world.”

According to the students, the barriers to African Americans’ college matriculation fell into two broad categories: economic and psychological. The economic barriers were the lack of funds to attend college or the lack of well-paid job opportunities after graduating. The psychological barriers were the internalization of the belief that college was not an option, the lack of hope and the intimidation factor. From the interview data, Freeman found that some of the actions that could increase African American participation in higher education were the improvement of the physical condition of primary and secondary schools; the recruitment of more committed teachers and counselors; and the emphasis of cultural awareness in the curriculum.

In this book, the author refers to Mame African American students and their parents. She argues that African Americans value education, but schools need dedicated teachers who use culturally relevant pedagogy. They also need principals who know how to create an atmosphere that promotes the belief that all children can learn and go to college. While this book is ten years old, it is an excellent study that covers many of the major themes in urban education. Freeman makes a concerted effort to reach African American youth from a variety of different social classes and educational backgrounds to provide meaningful results. Her sample of students allows for some comparison along gender and class lines. While the design of this study is very focused in its scope, a good follow up would be the exploration of the college choices of nontraditional students.

References

By Katie Brown


Women in STEM: The Roots of the Disparities in Schools & the Workplace

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