

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER EDUCATION

A CLOSER LOOK INTO THE ROLE OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY IN DIVERSE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Excellent learning begins with excellent teachers. This is often overlooked in many low-income or minority areas where good teachers are needed the most. These teachers are needed to teach all students so that they can grow into studious and prosperous adults. This would challenge the idea that these areas simply are not cut out for college. However, reality shows that these students often lack the access to good teachers. These students fall behind in education. They often drop-out or have lower college admission and completion rates. One way to get these students ahead is through teacher education. This article will look at current issues surrounding students in the West Lafayette and Lafayette area and how the studies of Dr. Elham Kazemi and Dr. Hala Ghouseini in teacher education can be used to help level this student and teacher imbalance.

Access and opportunity have been increasing issues in the US schooling system. According to the U.S. Department of Education (ED), “traditionally underserved students, including minorities and low-income students, attend and complete college at far lower rates than their peers. These students are suspended, expelled, and drop out at higher rates, and are less likely to have access to strong teachers and challenging curricula” (ED). This claim is made evident in Tippecanoe County by looking the differences between two local elementary schools.

Table 1 and figures 1 and 2 show various statics for an elementary school in West Lafayette and Lafayette. Table 1 shows that the reading and math proficiencies are lower for Amelia Earhart Elementary School, one of the main elementary schools in the Lafayette School Corporation, than in the West Lafayette Elementary School while the number of students on free or reduced lunch is higher. Figures 1 and 2 show that while white students make up most of both schools, Amelia Earhart Elementary School has a larger percentage of Hispanic and African American students than West Lafayette Elementary School.

Besides demographics and school performance, a disparity in teaching can also be seen. While the student-to-teacher ratio and teachers in first- or second-year teaching are similar, the school’s performances are different (Niche, 2020). This means that teaching quality is more likely to cause performance differences rather than student-to-teacher ratios or teacher experience. This shows an increasing need for better teacher education in the Lafayette School District. This is where the studies of Dr. Kazemi and Dr. Ghouseini could play a role.

Figure 1: Amelia Earhart Elementary School

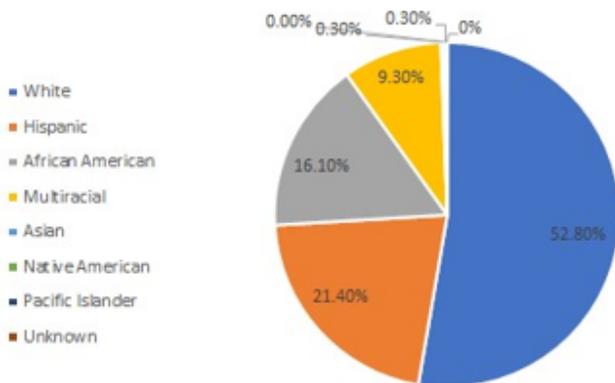
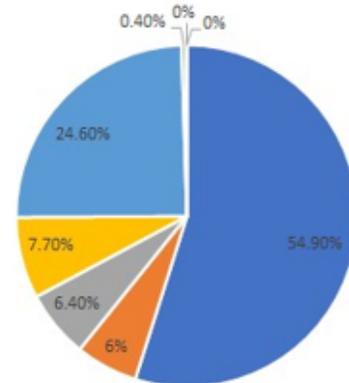


Figure 2: West Lafayette Elementary School



Data for Figure 1 and Figure 2 was supplied by Niche

Table 1: Comparison of School Statistics

	Amelia Earhart Elementary School	West Lafayette Elementary School
Reading Proficient	48%	92%
Math Proficient	26%	82%
Free/Reduced Lunch	62%	20%
Student to Teacher Ratio	16:1	17:1
Teachers in First/Second Year	9.7%	7.3%

Data for Table 1 was supplied by Niche

In their interview for the Purdue Honors College Visiting Scholars Series, Dr. Kazemi and Dr. Ghouseini stressed the importance of understanding students' cultures, ethnicities, and native languages how these affect the way the students learn. Dr. Ghouseini mentioned that teachers need to be aware of how culture and backgrounds of students shape how students learn in the classroom to better shape how teachers teach. She also mentioned that students may have language or cultural barriers that prohibit them from fully succeeding in the classroom and teachers need to learn how to approach this. This could be one issue causing disparities in math and reading proficiencies between the schools.

As seen from figures 1 and 2, Amelia Earhart Elementary School has a larger Hispanic population where English may not be the main language spoken or understood at home. These various cultural and language backgrounds could cause students to disengage and feel alienated from class. Their guardians may not know how to approach the school to help their students as mentioned in the interview by Dr. Kazemi. In an author interview, Dr. Kazemi and Dr. Ghouseini mentioned how their studies on teacher rehearsals could help fix this issue. They mention:

"For us, close attention to the quality of classroom interactions matters in efforts to create more equitable learning contexts for students from marginalized communities. We think it is partly our responsibility to prepare teachers who have commitments to social justice and have the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to foster day-to-day classroom interactions that can make schools affirming places for young people" (Kazemi et al. 2016).

This quote shows that through rehearsal, teachers can learn how to teach diverse groups of students to create opportunities for marginalized communities. By adopting rehearsals into teacher education, the Lafayette School Corporation could be able to help close the gap in test scores to better prepare their students. The teaching quality would then increase, fostering excellent learning, and creating the opportunity for these students to succeed.

Through rehearsals, teachers could also practice other teaching skills such as three-act tasks. Three-act tasks is a problem-solving formula designed to help elementary students from all backgrounds understand solutions to problems by offering various intuitive ways to solve a problem. Since the students from Amelia Earhart Elementary School come from various backgrounds, having the ability to teach in a way that fits every student's learning style is important. In one of Dr. Kazemi's studies, she states, "[three-act tasks] tap into elementary students' intuitive ability to make sense of problems in a new way that presents entry points for all learners" (Lomax et al., 2017). This quote shows the impact three-act tasks could have on all learners. This could then be used in the Lafayette School Corporation to help various students learn by offering multiple ways for students to grasp the concepts.

The access to good education is not consistent in this area, as seen by comparing the West Lafayette and Lafayette elementary schools. There exist disparities in reading and math proficiency due to varying access to good teacher education. These disparities in education could be eliminated by incorporating rehearsals and three-act tasks, as demonstrated by Dr. Kazemi and Dr. Ghouseini. Teachers would then be better suited to teach a diverse student population and close the educational gap seen between schools.

References

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