

Disrupting norms to increase diversity of teacher candidates: Restraining forces for junior faculty

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Received : 2019-NOV-01

Accepted : 2020-MAY-26



DOI: 10.46303/jcve.03.01.6

How to cite this paper: Buchter, J., More, C. M., Oh-Young, C., & Stringfellow, J. L. (2020). Disrupting norms to increase diversity of teacher candidates: Restraining forces for junior faculty. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 3(1), 89-103.

<https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.03.01.6>

Abstract

Research in teacher preparation programs in Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) suggests that diverse and non-traditional students face barriers and challenges within teacher preparation programs (Widiputers et al., 2017). Many existing practices and policies negatively impact these student populations. Often, these decisions are made at the preference of administration and tenured or established faculty while others remain from previous times. As we attempt to increase representation of students in teacher prep programs, the policies and practices that meet their unique situations have not been equitably incorporated into the daily practices in higher education. This continues to maintain the status quo rather than increase the diversity of teachers in the workforce: the diversity of teacher candidates has not increased to represent the diversifying population, despite efforts (United States Department of Education, 2016). Junior faculty may engage in disrupting the status quo to create and implement policies that will respond to students' needs and result in increased support for students from backgrounds that are disproportionately impacted by traditional practices. Junior faculty can serve as change agents if IHE can recognize the tremendous time and effort that goes into making sustainable change within the college and surrounding educational systems. Recognizing the barriers to junior faculty and providing support to do this challenging work, while remaining eligible for promotion and tenure is critical. Thus, this paper discusses how junior faculty can be leaders in sustained change and established leaders within IHE. By establishing support systems, especially from administration, within the University and community junior faculty can both support and maintain professional timelines in systems more responsive to change.

Keywords: junior faculty, force field analysis, diversity of teacher candidates

Introduction

Teachers in the United States tend to be from a homogenous demographic group. The majority of teachers are White, middle class, and identify as female (Barajas, 2016; Constantine et al., 2008; Proctor & Truscott, 2012). Additionally, achieving a diverse and representative faculty in institutions of higher education (IHE) mirror and maintain the lack of diversity of teachers in the American school system (Billingsley et al., 2019; Constantine et al., 2008; Grapin & Pereiras, 2019; Sutherland Harris, n.d.). Increasing diversity of both faculty and teacher candidates in IHEs has been a priority for the last sixty years to reduce implicit bias and address discrepancies in educational outcomes; it is not a new phenomenon (Barajas, 2016; Widiputera, 2010). Diversifying the teacher workforce includes increasing the population in IHE of non-traditional candidates, first-generation candidates, candidates who have work responsibilities, diverse gender representation of candidates, candidates who may have family or other care-giving responsibilities, candidates with disabilities, candidates living in poverty, and other ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse candidates. The need for an increasing diversity of teacher candidates to enter the teaching workforce is seen as critical in supporting an increasingly diverse student school population (Gist, 2017; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). Diversifying the teaching workforce shows promise in reducing disparities in suspension and expulsion rates, educational outcomes, retention, and graduation rates (Billingsley et al., 2019; Grissom et al., 2015; Peterson et al., 2016; Rocha & Hawes, 2009; van den Bergh et al., 2010).

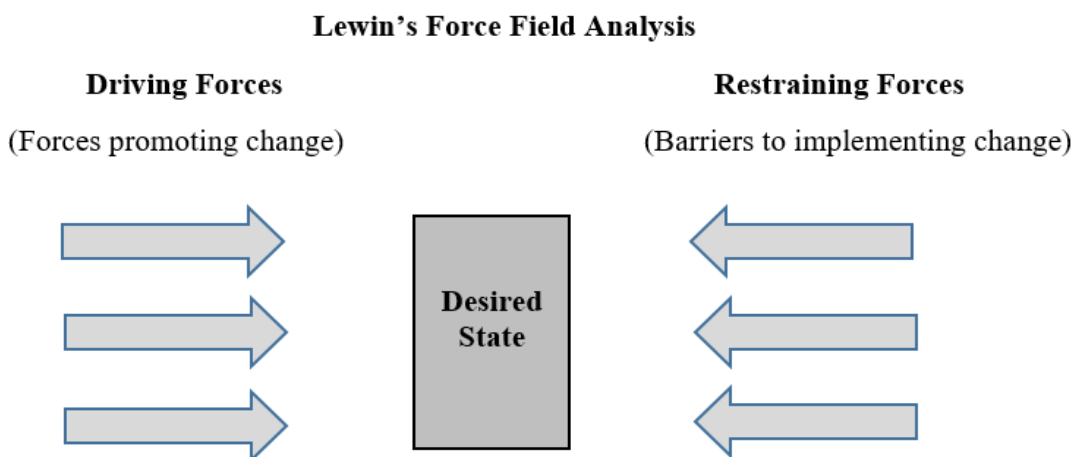
Efforts to increase diversity in the teacher workforce in American public schools have been largely unsuccessful. The changes in teacher demographics have been so insignificant that one could argue it remains unchanged since 2003. For example, from the 2003-2004 school year to the 2015-2016 school year, the number of White teachers only changed from 83% to 80%. During this period, Black or African American teachers decreased from 8% to 7% and Hispanic teachers increased from 6% to 9%. Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian and Alaskan Native, and two or more races remained around 1% with a 1% increase in teachers that identify as Asian and two or more races (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). These numbers do not keep pace with increasing demographics, especially for population increases for Asian-American and Latinx suggesting that diversity in the teacher work force is decreasing despite efforts to increase teacher diversity (Berry et al., 2018; Billingsley et al., 2019; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018).

The purpose of this paper is to describe how junior faculty can be driving forces of change to address the need for a diverse and representative teacher workforce. Specifically, this paper will describe barriers to increasing diversity of teacher candidates in IHE as well as barriers to change specific to junior faculty. These issues will be examined using Lewin's (1947) theory of change framework, and a force field analysis, to examine the driving and maintaining forces as a framework to assist junior faculty to implement disruptive practices that will disrupt the status quo. The paper will end with a discussion of the unique perspective junior faculty members can bring to guide teacher education programs in addressing the need for a diverse teacher workforce.

Theory of Change

Disrupting the status quo cannot occur without addressing the sources of resistance as this resistance becomes a barrier, or restraining force in initiating change and ensuring that the changes are maintained (Weil, 2005). Further, disrupting the status quo is challenging as systems and people respond to disruptions within systems by attempting to maintain the status quo. A common theoretical framework used to identify and sustain change for social justice goals is Lewin’s force-field analysis (1947). In this theory, Lewin describes how all change must be examined within the context of the environment in which they occur. Within each area of change, there are driving forces which push to create a change as well as restraining forces which work to push against a change. When the driving and restraining forces are pushing against each other with equal force, one enters a state of equilibrium in which no change occurs (see Figure 1). In order for change to occur, then, the driving forces have to occur with more frequency/greater force than the restraining forces. As one seeks to become an agent of change, the focus must shift to decreasing restraining forces while, at the same time, increasing driving forces. Moreover, reflection on one’s own resistance can lead to personal growth and uncovering additional capacities for disrupting the status quo (Lewin, 1947; Weil, 2005).

Figure 1
Lewin’s force field analysis



Existing Structures in IHE as Restraining Forces

Institutions of Higher Education grew out of the notion that universities were the protectors of knowledge and science (Neumann, n.d). Over time, demands of society and political pressures have caused Universities to revisit this purpose as more people sought them to increase their employment potential. Although not in opposition to a focus on knowledge and science, adding job acquisition to the scope of work completed by IHE has caused a shift in demand by the consumer, the students attending Universities, and the

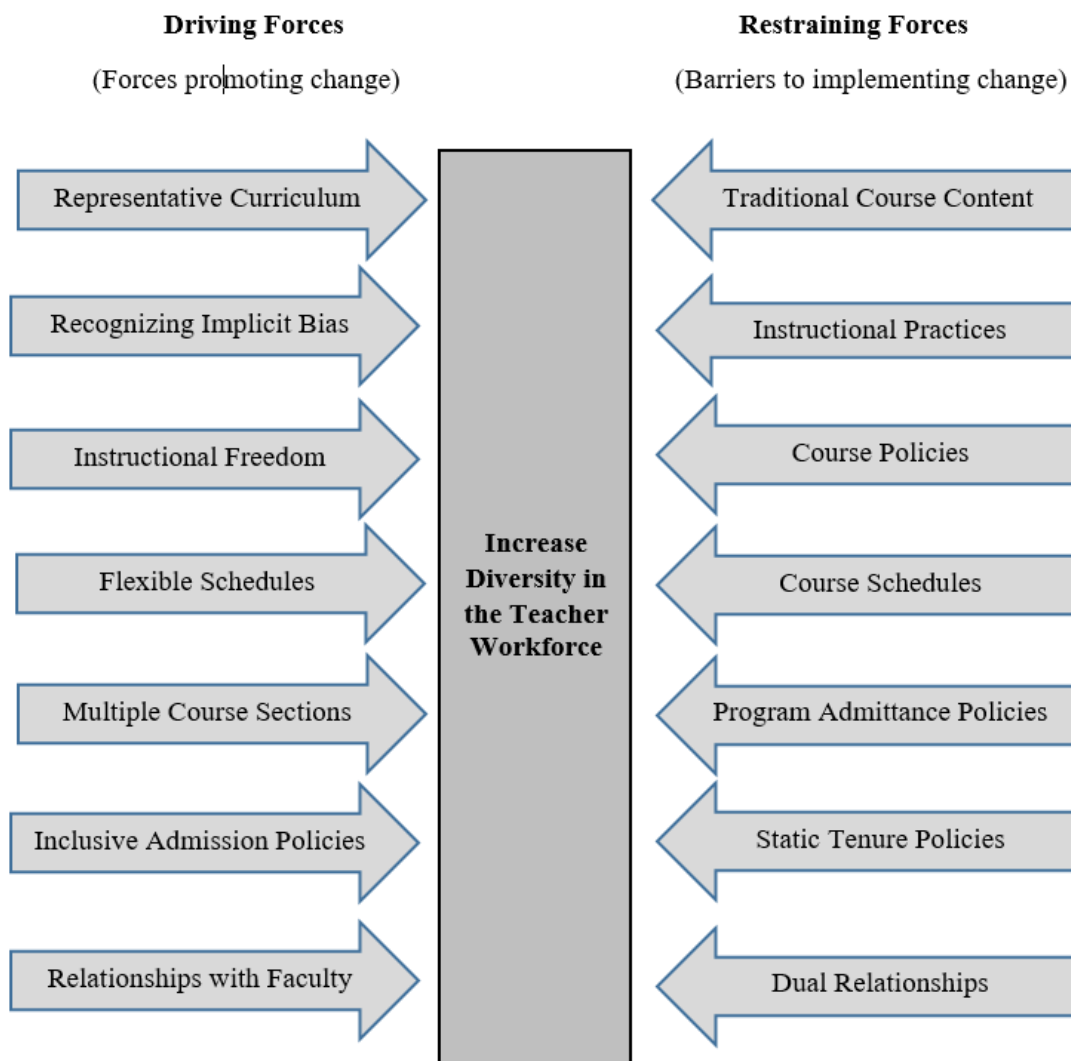
taxpayers funding Universities. Though there is a shift in focus, many of the traditional structures in higher education have not changed. Originally adapted to protect knowledge and science, applying Lewin's theory can show many of these structures and their possible restraining forces that maintain the status quo. Education scholars have highlighted the many systemic barriers in IHE that affect attracting and retaining a diverse teacher education pool of teachers from diverse backgrounds and experiences (Baker et al., 2012; Berry et al., 2018; Billingsley et al., 2019; Constantine et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Grissom et al., 2015; Haddix, 2012; Harris et al., 2020; Proctor & Truscott, 2012; Sutherland Harris, n.d). Although not an exhaustive list, at the University level, where teachers are prepared to join this pool, the content of coursework, instructional practices, course schedules, practicum/field work, and program admittance policies act as barriers that must be disrupted to attract a more diverse pool of candidates (Baker et al., 2012; Berry et al., 2018; Clark, 2002; Chen, 2017; Gist, 2017; Grapin & Pereiraas, 2019; Grissom et al., 2015; Witham et al., 2015). These restraining forces must be identified before any true systemic change can be made (Lewin, 1947; Weil, 2005). By examining these areas in depth, we provide a framework for our conversation related to change (see Figure 2). In the sections that follow, we highlight four examples of implementing change using Lewin's theory.

Figure 2

Lewin's force field analysis as applied to increasing diversity in teacher education

Lewin's Force Field Analysis

Junior Faculty as Change Agents



Traditional Course Content

Educational systems continually influence each other to perpetuate whiteness as the standard or norm in which all others are measured (Ahmed, 2014; Gist, 2017; Haddix, 2016; Leonardo, 2009; Puwar, 2004; Rocha & Hawes, 2009; Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2018; Varghese, et al., 2019). At the same time, undergraduate education often relies on professors to determine what students will read, study, and learn. Curriculum, thus, can lack representation of diverse people and experiences as well as the contributions of diverse leaders in the field (Hanesworth, et al., 2019). Within teacher preparation programs, whiteness is often the default of expectations, experiences, curriculum, and is continually reinvented (Mills, 1997). The overall bias and default to whiteness has historically influenced

what is important and valuable, therefore excluding other researchers and perspectives (Gist, 2017; Haddix, 2016; Leonardo, 2009; Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2018; Varghese, et al., 2019; Widiputera et al., 2017). The traditional curriculum process strengthens and intensifies what is perceived as right or the norm, thereby placing individuals who do things differently in a position of being inherently wrong. It is through institutionalized practices and interactions that these practices, biased in whiteness, become ingrained as the standard of measurement (Gist, 2017; Haddix, 2016; Leonardo, 2009; Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2018; Varghese, et al., 2019). Although a framework with outcomes is important, the lack of a curriculum that is both culturally relevant and sustaining further sustains the status quo and traditional course content thereby becomes a restraining force.

Instructional Practices

In IHEs, professors often have instructional freedom to teach the content of the course in the way they deem best which is an important driver for change. While there are generally agreed upon course objectives that should stay the same no matter who teaches the course, the instructional practices used to address content varies from instructor to instructor. As such, there can be inconsistencies related to rigor and grading. This can be a restraining force to disrupting the status quo when trying to address the non-traditional and diverse teacher workforce because what one person considers rigor may actually be a barrier (Chen, 2017; Lombardi et al., 2013). When instructional practices are geared towards increasing expectations for rigor without increasing support and/or when the rigor is not geared towards performance or skills teacher candidates need to be successful in the field, it creates a barrier that must be disrupted in order to attract needed populations of students.

Course Policies

The reality of higher education today is that many students will have to work while going to school in order to afford related costs of school. In 2017, 43% of full time students were employed at least 20 hours a week (Chen, 2017; United States Department of Education, 2016). This may be especially true for first generation college students, students from diverse backgrounds and life experiences, students as head of household, students who are parents, and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Chen, 2017; United States Department of Education, 2016). For example, policies related to attendance, when written rigidly, do not allow the unique needs for students to be met. A student who completes all assignments and exceeds expectations can be punished by a lack of attendance. When this occurs, attendance can become punitive rather than being geared towards increasing performance. While there should be an expectation that students attend classes, factors beyond students' control (e.g., caregiver issues, illness, work rescheduling) can inhibit students, who may otherwise be successful teachers, from being successful in a teacher preparation program. Course policies such as the aforementioned become restraining forces for increasing diversity when students from diverse backgrounds are disproportionately impacted by course policies.

Course Schedules

Program's course schedules may or may not offer courses at times that are convenient to diverse populations of students. Programs tend to offer courses in sequences that build upon each other. As such, the student's course schedule is static each semester, resulting in restraining forces. For example, although established to maintain program integrity, rigid program schedules can serve as a barrier to attract people to teaching who are already in another workforce (Chen, 2017). If a student encounters scheduling issues, such as not being able to register and complete a prerequisite course (e.g. English, math), the student may not be allowed to take classes until the prerequisite requirements are fulfilled. It can be challenging to facilitate alternatives that allow the student to progress in the program and may result in issues with financial aid.

Moreover, the courses in traditional teacher preparation programs are typically scheduled in a way that requires students to conduct assignments and participate in learning experiences embedded in preschool through 12th grade classrooms. These embedded classroom experiences are often called practicums and are similar to internships and field experiences in other disciplines. Practicum hours and observation hours are beneficial for teacher candidates (Barahas, 2017) and most colleges and state licensure agencies have policies that prohibit students from being paid for their practicum work. While the purpose of these policies may be related to mentorship and liability, this commitment of unpaid time can be a restraining force for all students, but especially students from diverse backgrounds who are often disproportionately working to support themselves through college (Chen, 2017). Often practicum hours are during the traditional preschool through 12th grade school day. This acts as a restraining force by adding an additional childcare burden and/or changes to existing work schedules during the quarters/semesters in which practicum experiences are required. Childcare centers often are unable to provide care for a couple of hours or a limited number of weekdays: employers may become frustrated with students requiring different work shifts every quarter/semester to accommodate different course requirements. When program schedules, including practicum experiences, become a barrier to progression, they are a restraining rather than a driving force for change.

Program Admittance Policies

At most Universities, students are admitted and declare a major, but then must apply to be fully admitted/accepted into individual programs of their choice, such as teacher education. Each program sets its own standards for admission, guided by accreditation standards and, if not periodically re-examined, act as a restraining force that results in maintaining the status quo. As programs apply for and renew accreditation, they strive to be rated exceptional. This can encourage programs to strictly adhere to grade point average (GPA) standards, standardized test scores and other criteria. In addition to being biased, these standards, however, may not be the best indicators of effectiveness in teaching (Barajas, 2016; Berry et al., 2018; Billingsley, 2019; Gist, 2017; Grapin & Pereoras, 2019; Grissom et al., 2015; Leonardo, 2009).

Discussion of Restraining Forces for Junior Faculty as Change Agents

Restraining forces, real or perceived, exist in higher education and can particularly disincentivize junior faculty from engaging in disruptive practices. While diversity is a cornerstone in many IHE/teacher preparation programs, there is a lack of critical analysis on the barriers encountered by junior faculty in teacher preparation programs, as well as the long-term career implications for junior faculty when attempting to become agents of change (Berry, et al., 2018; Boyd, et al., 2010). Junior faculty entering established IHE committed to implementing disruptive practices to support diverse students may face barriers and get push back veiled as rigor or licensing and accreditation requirements (Berry et al.).

There is an inherent risk in engaging in change activities as there is no guarantee that a proposed change will lead to a desired outcome. From a systems perspective, junior faculty are vulnerable. Phrases such as, “we have to protect our junior faculty” are often used as a show of support, but the underlying message conveys there are forces that could be detrimental to them (Baker et al., 2012; Boyd et al., 2010; Constantine et al., 2008; Gillespie et al., 2004). In turn, junior faculty attempt to heed this message by balancing choices within the framework of their career trajectory while working around said restraining forces. When junior faculty conform to the restraining forces instead of identifying and engaging in driving forces, there is a postponement of disruptive critical work. Additionally, junior faculty must operate their change initiatives while working in conjunction with tenured faculty who, a) will vote on whether they achieve tenure and, b) have advantages within the Department/College in terms of power/ownership to limit impact or initiative of change. The following describe how junior faculty might encounter the restraining forces of dual relationships and static tenure policies.

Tenure policies function as a guide to ensure academic freedom and the advancement of knowledge proceed without fear of repercussions. Those in the academy view tenure as an honor with great responsibility. While tenure is important for the protection of science and creation of new knowledge within the academy, the process by which IHE grant tenure can impede the work of junior faculty who wish to address the restraining forces that inhibit the ability to diversify the teacher pipeline. The tenure process involves showing a promising trajectory in teaching, research, and service and comes with strict guidelines and timelines. Rather than valuing the process of promoting change and the failures that come with working towards change, the promotion and tenure system is weighted more heavily to acknowledge permanent work products such as positive course evaluations from students and published research articles in peer reviewed journals. This work is judged in its entirety by a committee of one’s peers. If the committee of peers is actually a committee of tenured peers, excluding junior faculty, there can be a perceived dual relationship in which the tenured faculty member is both a colleague and evaluator of the junior faculty member. The ranks of assistant, associate, and full professor are provided as a framework for advancement but, in essence, establish a hierarchy. For example, if a teaching evaluation is completed by peers as one component of achieving tenure, and junior faculty are engaging in disruptive teaching practices, those peers may evaluate the content

of the course as inappropriate or veering too far from the course objectives. Further, if peers have a deeply held conviction that the traditional practices are rigorous and essential for teacher preparation, then the disruptive practices, such as flexible due dates or transformative content, may be interpreted as undoing the Department's previously established work, or not preparing teachers for the "real world". This can result in poor peer teaching evaluations, which can have a negative effect on one's promotion and tenure in the academy.

Moreover, teacher preparation work, such as the work that it takes to change culture and mindset takes time. In the case of increasing diversity, the time it can take to address the restraining forces and to create driving forces may create moral hazards for junior faculty. Do they engage in this critical work now, or delay the work until after tenure? Many are advised to wait to do the more challenging work until after tenure, thereby placing static promotion and tenure traditions ahead of the needs of the field. This restraining force carries with it the risk that the junior faculty member will abandon the challenging and time consuming work required to attract a more diverse population to the teacher workforce all together for other lines of inquiry.

Junior Faculty as Driving Forces for Change

Disruption to systems and change often occur in the margins that position junior faculty to serve as change agents (Baker et al., 2012; Chang, 2013). Junior faculty bring expertise and information on the latest research, but can be viewed as inexperienced, idealistic, and unfamiliar with the system (Gillespie et al., 2005). Nonetheless, Junior faculty can be important change agents in IHE by being more aware of their academic freedom, particularly the freedom to change practices related to push back against resistance forces previously described, in order to disrupt the status quo. Driving forces are not a set of practices specifically for diverse populations. Rather, they are disruptive practices that push against established norms. Aforementioned examples include flexible due dates, transformative content, attendance policies, and course assignments not part of a major assignment for accreditation purposes. Junior faculty can benefit from taking a systematic planned approach to implementing changes over time so as to not overwhelm themselves, students, or set anyone up for failure. In keeping with Lewin's theory of change, the goal is to make sustained change over time.

Force Field Analysis to Support Disruptive Practices

To decrease programmatic and IHE restraining forces, junior faculty along with their Department and College colleagues need to engage in a critical analysis of driving forces such as instructional practices and transforming content (Baker et al., 2012, Berry et al., 2018; Billingsley et al., 2009; Clark, 2002; Johnson et al., 2014; Varghese et al., 2019). To do so, junior faculty must establish relationships, build trust, and get other faculty support in order to plan effective, sustaining system reform (Baker et al., 2012, Clark, 2002; Berry et al., 2018; Billingsley et al., 2009). Collaborating with other faculty and administration with similar interests may act as a driving force, as these established professionals may already

have relationships and leadership that can assist in developing a plan for how to approach curriculum changes and how to move within the system. Additional support can come from University diversity initiatives on campus and can act as driving forces supporting change. The following will discuss specific areas in which junior faculty can engage in disruptive practices to increase diversity (see Figure 2).

Representative Curriculum

In order to support diversity of teacher candidates, junior faculty in IHE need to ensure the curriculum is diverse and representative. One way to increase disruptive forces to traditional course content is to examine how traditional curriculum acts as a restraining force maintaining the status quo. Non-representative curriculum can become a driving force or a disruptive practice with new course preparations. Transforming content to include a diversity of students and scholars includes rethinking course curriculum (Clark, 2002; Hanesworth et al., 2019; Harris et al., 2020; Leonardo, 2009; Peterson et al., 2016). This means IHE, especially teacher preparation programs, must incorporate histories of oppression (Hanesworth et al., 2019). In preparing teachers, it is imperative that teachers can identify histories of oppression across various systems including oppression of students, families, and individuals across multiple systems to address implicit bias that negatively impacts diverse student outcomes and to learn and hear from others who have different experiences and perspectives than the experiences of traditional students in teacher preparation programs. Also, in order to increase diversity within the content of courses, the concept of whiteness must be acknowledged and addressed as a restraining force to disrupting the status quo. Making sure curriculum in IHE examines whiteness and includes and reflects diverse perspectives and experiences expands students' knowledge and ability to appreciate diversity and awareness of bias. Representative curriculum then becomes a driving force for change.

Recognizing Implicit Bias and Instructional Freedom

Instructional practices include teaching strategies, interaction styles, and assessments. Implicit bias can impact how faculty chose to implement or not implement practices that can disproportionately negatively impact diverse and non-traditional students. Non-traditional students and first generation students tend to not self-advocate when facing barriers when compared to their peers whose parents have attended college (Grissom et al., 2015; Hanesworth et al., 2019; Harris et al., 2020 van den Bergh et al., 2019). As such, policies such as grading, assessment, classroom interactions, and participation requirements can all serve as restraining forces in maintaining the status quo. Alternatively, when policies and schedules are truly rooted in instructional freedom and flexibility, they become driving forces for change.

Junior faculty can utilize instructional freedom to adjust teaching strategies and learning assessments that support a diverse student population and examine their policies, who they impact, and if they can be changed to support non-traditional and diverse students without eliminating the intended outcome. For one, recognizing implicit bias and how it impacts instructional practices and policies can serve as a driving force to support students

from diverse experiences and backgrounds. Also, reflection can enhance the ability to push against restraining forces. For example, do the course assessments measure teacher performance or do they measure time available to commit to projects? Are performance assessments sensitive to linguistically diverse students or is grammar and spelling heavily emphasized in the rubric. Do attendance policies disproportionately negatively impact students who are parents or work or caregiving responsibilities? Alternatives, such as recording class sessions and uploading in a version of a modified hybrid platform to support students who may have issues with attendance is a support that can benefit all students with minimal extra work of the faculty. Finally, developing relationships with a diverse student population and creating a supportive environment for all students are strategies within the junior faculty member's locus of control that can be driving forces to increase diversity (Clark, 2002; Johnson et al., 2014; Pettigrew, et al., 2011).

Flexible Schedules

Issues with program offerings and course schedules can become driving forces of change as junior faculty can become involved in Department and College level committees to communicate the needs of diverse and non-traditional students. Universities are active in collecting and reporting data related to students timely progression to graduation. Communication with administration and communicating barriers reported by students can result in increased course offerings, allowing students to petition to take courses without prerequisites, and holding courses outside of traditional work hours. Offering multiple sections of the same course during differing times, or offering in-person and online options can address these restraining forces.

Multiple Course Sections

Program admittance standards are often associated with accreditation requirements to achieve high accreditation ratings. These requirements may not be reflective of research or validity of these standards and if they disproportionately impact diverse students. State licensure exams, GPA, and college entrance exams are biased and disproportionately impact diverse and non-traditional students negatively (Gist, 2017; Haddix, 2016; Leonardo, 2009; Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2018). Junior faculty can increase driving forces to disrupt the status quo and bring change by advocating for different or inclusive admission standards. Other alternatives include pre-admittance standards paired with support and mentoring to increase the representation of students admitted to the program and completing their degree requirements. Additional funding through university grants, state and local grants, and foundation or federal grants may be available to support this line of scholarship in teacher preparation programs.

Discussion

As we attempt to increase diversity of teacher candidates, the policies and practices to meet their unique situations have not been incorporated into the daily practices in IHE. In order to be agents of change, junior faculty not only must attempt to decrease the

restraining forces and increase the driving forces, they must do so in an IHE system that promotes the creation of knowledge while, at the same time, has policies and practices that are static. However, this is not the fault of the IHE system. Rather, we, as faculty, should be informing these policies and procedures and advocating for change when restraining forces are present. Although change is necessary to increase the diversity of the teaching field, junior faculty may be hesitant to engage in disruptive behavior. The challenges of engaging in work that takes considerable time combined with dual relationships and static tenure policies that are present within the existing structure create a system that promotes new knowledge while also constraining such with arbitrary timelines and increasing productivity metrics.

A system wide, data driven, outcome-based plan is critical to examine what barriers are restraining change, how they can be reduced, and how to develop and identify driving forces of change. The status quo will be maintained if restraining and driving forces are not analytically identified and addressed. Without identifying these driving and restraining forces, efforts for change will result in frustration and failure between change agents and those representing the status quo (Berry et al., 2018; Lewin, 1947). Given that people and systems function to maintain the status quo or equilibrium, people may begin to view disruptive practices and the process of change as burdensome and a waste. This is why junior faculty are so critical. They may be in the unique position to promote change as they have not had as many experiences with system barriers and, as such, might be less accepting and/or frustrated. They may bring a perspective that is not influenced by history with the IHE system. Recognizing the barriers to junior faculty and providing support to the challenging work of implementing disruptive practices within a system grounded in traditional norms and remain on target for promotion and tenure is critical. Establishing support systems within the University and community can support junior faculty and accelerate timeline or target systems that are more responsive to change.

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