

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

BROOKINGS CAFETERIA PODCAST

WHY TEACHER DIVERSITY BENEFITS STUDENTS OF COLOR

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PROCEEDINGS

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews.

My guest on this episode argues that teacher diversity *is* teacher quality, and that students of color especially benefit by having teachers who look like them. Michael Hansen is The Herman and George R. Brown Chair and Director of the Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings and a senior fellow in Governance Studies. He is co-author with Seth Gershenson and Constance A. Lindsay of *Teacher Diversity and Student Success: Why Racial Representation Matters in the Classroom*, published in March by Harvard Education Press. On the episode Hansen explains why promoting racial diversity among the teacher workforce disproportionately benefits students of color and helps narrow longstanding achievement gaps.

Also on this episode, Senior Fellow Molly Reynolds explains what's happening in Congress, specifically the challenge to the Democratic majority in the Senate to make changes to the filibuster to advance their agenda, and also how House Democrats are dealing with obstruction tactics from Republicans in the minority.

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First up, here's Molly Reynolds with what's happening in Congress.

REYNOLDS: With the American Rescue Plan signed into law, Democrats in Congress have racked up their first major legislative achievement of the Biden administration. But as they attempt to continue to move bills—small and large—through both chambers, they face an age-old problem facing congressional majority parties: how to deal with obstruction by the minority.

In the Senate, we see increasing pressure on Democrats to make changes to the filibuster; because the Senate lacks a way for a simple majority to end debate on most matters, proponents of a bill usually need to muster a coalition of at least 60 votes to bring something up for final passage. In a world with slim Senate majorities—including the slimmest, at 50-50, currently enjoyed by the Democrats—this makes it necessary to get votes from members of both parties for most legislation. But when the parties are polarized and there is less incentive for a minority party to contribute to the majority party's successes, overcoming this threshold can be difficult.

Majority parties in the Senate have been thwarted by obstruction throughout the Senate's history, so the challenges faced by today's Democrats are not new. It is possible to change the Senate's procedures to allow a simple majority to end debate, but doing so would require the support of all 50 Democrats, plus the tie-breaking vote of the vice president—and, at present, all the chamber's Democrats do not support eliminating the filibuster. There are other changes on offer, including restoring the so-called "talking filibuster" and forcing opponents of a bill to actually speak on the Senate floor. The goal of these reforms is to make obstruction more costly to the minority—but they also impose costs on the majority, including preventing them from moving on other legislative items. Exactly how vigorously the Republican minority would respond to a change by the Democratic majority is an open question; Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has certainly threatened a scorched earth reaction, but it's not clear to what degree he'd follow through on that threat—or whether Democrats would be willing to take further steps to respond in kind. Any intermediate change to the filibuster rule short of full abolition is unlikely to be especially stable, however, suggesting that if Democrats do alter the Senate's rules, it is likely to bring the chamber one step closer to simple majority rule.

If Democrats do make a change to the way the Senate's rules work, it is likely to be tied to a particular issue on which the party's members are sufficiently united behind, and have been sufficiently frustrated on, that they are willing to make a change to the way the chamber operates. What that issue might be, however, remains an open question. There's been mounting pressure—including from former President Obama at Representative John Lewis's funeral in 2020—to make a change to the filibuster for new voting rights legislation, but whether that, or any other issue, is the catalyst for reform remains to be seen.

The House of Representatives, meanwhile, is usually considered to feature less obstruction than the Senate; a simple majority in the House rules on most matters, and simple majorities set aside the House's existing rules for particular situations on a relatively regular basis. But that doesn't mean determined minority parties, or factions within them, can't leverage House procedure to make life more difficult for their colleagues. Indeed, in recent weeks, a group of House Republicans, led by several members of the Freedom Caucus including Arizona's Andy Biggs and Georgia's Marjorie Taylor Greene, have used a number of tactics to slow down even routine business in the chamber, including forcing votes on motions to adjourn and insisting that members cast roll call votes on non-controversial legislation that is often otherwise dealt with by voice votes. Like in the Senate, these sorts of attempts by a committed minority to throw sand in the gears of the House aren't new; throughout the House's history, majority parties have found themselves frustrated by minority exploitation of the chamber's rules and have responded by limiting the minority's rights. Whether and how the current House Democratic majority reacts remains to be seen; as House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer put it a few weeks ago, "at some point in time, if this continues, we'll have to deal with it."

While Democrats may be enjoying unified party control of Washington, they will need—as congressional majorities have in the past—to figure out how to deal with

obstruction from a committed minority party. Will they change the rules in response? We'll see what happens in Congress.

DEWS: Listen to more What's Happening in Congress segments on our Soundcloud channel, brookings.edu/brookings-institution. And now, here's my interview with Michael Hansen on *Teacher Diversity and Student Success*.

Mike, welcome back to the Brookings Cafeteria.

HANSEN: Thank you. Great to be here.

DEWS: I reviewed the tape and it's been almost three years since we last talked on the Brookings Cafeteria. That was about the state of civics education in America, which the Brown Center had done a report on. So I encourage listeners to go back and listen to that episode, it was really informative. We're here today to talk about, as I mentioned in the introduction, your new book with Seth Gershenson and Constance Lindsay, *Teacher Diversity and Student Success*. It's a really interesting book. And I wonder if you could talk about the origin of this book. Why are you and your coauthors publishing it now?

HANSEN: Well, that's a great question and we are a new team of coauthors who have never worked on something before this book. Now we run in the same professional associations, so we knew each other. We're aware of each other's work. And both Seth and Constance had been working together on race match issues between students and teachers for the past few years. However, I've been working separately on issues related to teacher diversity and the teacher workforce.

Now, before teaming up on this, we independently saw two different things happening in the policy space. First off, we saw a real strengthening of the research literature on race matching between students and teachers. And then we also saw a really new policy opportunity, a window open up, if you will, to focus on teacher diversity issues where many states and districts were starting to take this issue very seriously. And over lunch one day we

were talking about our different research projects, our observations about what policymakers were doing to address the problem. And we were all kind of joking that their solutions all seem to be based on very simplistic understandings of the problem. And it was over that lunch that we realized that there was a lot of complementarity to our work. And we decided to weave these two strands together, both the race match side and the teacher diversity side to really develop a sort of guidebook for policymakers and school leader.

DEWS: Yeah, it really does read as a guidebook, I mean, it's a really tightly crafted argument. There's lots of data, there's history, there's policy proposals. Can you give listeners a sense of what the top line argument is? I mean, it's contained in the title "Teacher Diversity and Student Success, Why Racial Representation Matters in the classroom." Can you just summarize for listeners what that means?

HANSEN: Yeah. And let's take one step back and first look at our problem statement, if you will. So it is common knowledge that we have race based educational achievement gaps in this country. And while these gaps have narrowed somewhat over time, they have proven to be exceptionally resilient to decades of policy tinkering in our public schools.

These achievement gaps and their intransigence constitute our problem statement. We argue that teachers are critically important in schools overall and that teachers of color are critically important to students of color in particular. Currently, however, teachers of color are heavily underrepresented in the public teacher workforce. Just for a statistic, while about 50 percent public school students are students of color, approximately 20 percent of teachers in the teacher workforce are teachers of color. So it's a representation gap of about 30 percentage points.

Our main thesis, then, is that promoting more racial diversity among the teacher workforce and inclusive school environments is going to disproportionately benefit students of color and help narrow these longstanding achievement gaps.

So, we're not the first scholars to make this argument. Our primary innovation, though, is to really map how the evidence should be informing our different strategies to approach this challenge. And a central plank in that solution is to define teacher diversity as an element of teacher quality.

And so, I would say that that is really our main argument—that teacher diversity is teacher quality and that we should be promoting universal access to diverse teachers just as we promote access to high quality teachers. And an argument is that these are complementary features and that we should be promoting universal access to both.

DEWS: So, you just cited the statistics--and there's lots of great data in the book—I think it's also interesting to note, and please expand on this, where half of public school students are students of color. A fifth of teachers are also teachers of color, but they're not evenly distributed. Right? I think there's a higher concentration of teachers of color in certain kinds of school districts, and there's maybe almost no teachers of color in other school districts.

HANSEN: You're absolutely right. As you say, 20 percent of the teacher workforce are teachers of color, but they are not evenly distributed and they tend to be most highly concentrated in large, typically urban school districts. And they are most heavily underrepresented in suburban and particularly in rural areas. Now, if student diversity had the same types of distribution that we have among teachers, then maybe the problem may not be that noteworthy. But what I feel like is the issue here is that student diversity and, in fact, just population diversity overall in the U.S., has been growing outside of these urban areas for the last several decades. However, teacher diversity has really been staying pretty steady within those urban areas and has not been increasing outside of those urban areas very much. And so we have a mismatch between where population diversity is going and trends in teacher diversity.

DEWS: I want to go back to the issue that you raised about teacher quality, since that's so essential to the book. You write that teacher quality has been defined in terms of what's best for white, well-off students. Can you expand on that?

HANSEN: Yes. Now here in the book, we were specifically referring to teacher quality based on average improvements on standardized tests or what are commonly referred to as value added measures of teacher quality. So, by construction, these are statistical measures that control for many things on the students' side of the equation. So, we can control for things like prior achievement, history, family background measures, which will also include race and measures of family income.

And so, essentially what the statistical model is doing is it's trying to strip out all of those things that are outside of the norm in order to create a common metric that is essentially trying to create something that we can compare across teachers regardless of the different contexts and the different kinds of students that they're teaching. The problem, though, is that this approach is, therefore because we're controlling all those things out, we are ignoring what may be beneficial for specific student subgroups, but not necessarily beneficial for the whole.

We don't see same race matching effects between students and teachers unless we set out to specifically identify them. The same argument could also hold for things like being a good teacher for English learners, for example, or being a good teacher for gifted and talented students. If what the teacher is doing is benefiting just one subgroup of students, but not necessarily everyone, it's sort of getting ignored and overlooked.

And so even though our critique was specifically on value added models, we could also apply the same logic to other measures of teacher performance, like observational rubrics, for example. And if we're trying to see those things that are known to help all students, we are potentially missing out on something critical that could be beneficial for

specific subgroups of students as well. And so that was really the central thesis of why this important information is sometimes being lost and it's being lost because there's a sort of this generic student in mind that we're implicitly controlling for whenever we create these models.

DEWS: So, what are some of the observable outcomes or measurable outcomes that you see when students are matched with teachers of the same race? Are we talking about a better test scores, better high school graduation rates, maybe fewer disciplinary actions? What are the kinds of things that improve when students see teachers, their teachers, that look like them?

HANSEN: All of those things that you just mentioned, Fred, and then some. So let's bin them in terms of short term and long term outcomes. On the short term side, we see things like improved test scores. We see fewer absences, fewer absences due to disciplinary write ups or disciplinary actions taken against students. We also see higher promotion into gifted and talented, for example. We also have students reporting higher levels of engagement when they have a teacher who looks like them, higher levels of sort of self-confidence.

And then on the long term outcome side, we have some strong evidence that being exposed to a same race teacher in your early elementary experience improves your likelihood of high school graduation and it also improves your aspirations to go into college. And so these are very important long term outcomes that really are going to make a very big difference in the student's lives who actually do graduate high school and do go on to college. And we don't have evidence of sort of these longer term impacts beyond high school graduation and college. But we suspect that these are going to be things that are going to be and continue to come forward as if we were to follow these students over even longer periods.

DEWS: What about for white students specifically, and you address this in the book, but as students of color benefit from having teachers who look like them, is the same true for white students? I mean, would you in a in a policy design prefer that white students have white teachers or is there some value in white students having more diversity in their teachers?

HANSEN: Some people have looked at the evidence on race matching and inferred that if students of color are so benefited by teachers of color, isn't this an argument for going back to segregation and segregated schools? And that is not our argument. And let me describe why. First off, we have good evidence that white students are also benefiting from exposure to a diverse, racially diverse set of teachers. Now, the evidence here is consistent with Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis, which says that as people are exposed to others from outside of their typical socialized experience, then they gain greater levels of tolerance and appreciation for those who don't look like them. And we've seen evidence in a number of different settings that this contact hypothesis rings true. And this also has been shown in school settings, including school settings.

And then because white students are also so frequently and serially exposed to white teachers, our argument is the cost of them losing some of this exposure, of white students to white teachers over time, is going to be very minimal, just because they already have such high levels of exposure already.

Now, there are many students of color who will go through their entire experience and may not ever see a teacher of color, or if they do, they see maybe one or two teachers of color. And so the idea here is that what we're essentially trading off is we're going to be trading off these initial levels of exposure for many students to have exposure to teachers of color, and what we're trading off is they're going to be seeing a few fewer white teachers over

their experience, but still, white teachers are heavily overrepresented in their experience already.

DEWS: You and your authors have some very interesting historical discussions in the book about why America's educational system has kind of gotten to the point where it is, and especially in terms of why there are so few teachers of color in the system today. You talk about *Brown v. Board of Education*. You talk about the way that Native American students were forced into these certain kinds of schools at the end of the 19th, early 20th century. So there's a lot of history there and it's very interesting and important. The question that comes to my mind kind of in that context is, are there are the benefits for students of color the same across all the different racial and ethnic groups—for Black students compared to Latino, Asian or Native American students?

HANSEN: So to be clear, we don't have a lot of great evidence across all these different racial groups at the moment to really say how different or how similar these race matching impacts are. We do have a couple of studies that have come out on the Latino side. And so whenever Latino students are matched to Latino teachers, we do see a bump in student outcomes. But we don't have enough evidence to know whether the same suite of outcomes are impacted for just as they are among Black teachers or Black students for Black teachers, for example.

But these phenomena stand on the same legs, essentially, that Latino teachers are underrepresented in the workforce just as just as Black teachers are, for example, and Latino students benefit by seeing Latino teachers, just as Black students do for Black teachers, et cetera. From qualitative evidence that we've seen, the same argument also applies for Asian teachers and Asian students, for Native American teachers and Native American students. And so we don't necessarily have the same empirical foundations for all of these. But everything that we've seen to date appears to be pointing in the same direction.

DEWS: We'll be right back.

[MUSIC FADE IN]

DEWS: Here's distinguished veteran journalist and author Marvin Kalb with a word from his new book from the Brookings Institution Press, *Assignment Russia*.

KALB: Please consider *Assignment Russia* as a long letter home after an unforgettable personal adventure. It's the story of a few very important years in my life as a young reporter trained in the crucible of the Cold War. In the 1950s, I pursued one professional goal with an unflinching determination—to become CBS's Moscow correspondent. It took three years for me to get to Moscow, but it was worth the effort.

DEWS: Visit brookings.edu/AssignmentRussia to find out how you can get your own copy of Kalb's new book.

[MUSIC FADE OUT]

DEWS: And now, back to my interview with Michael Hansen.

Let's go back to that teacher gap that you mentioned at the beginning, because it's so important to understand for what you and your coauthors are writing in this book and your policy solutions, and specifically for Black teachers. Why historically and into the present, is there such a race gap between teachers and students, why so few Black teachers?

HANSEN: The Black teacher cases is particularly interesting and we talk about it in the book. So, during the time post-Civil War, during the Reconstruction era, we actually saw a number of schools that were set up specifically to target and to educate the growing Black population of recently freed people. Some of them were integrated. So it may be a surprise, but in places in the south, like South Carolina, they had integrated classrooms back in the in that Reconstruction period for about a decade or so. Though many of the schools were still segregated and they were setting up Black schools for serving exclusively Black students.

Many places were. And then we also saw mostly these were Black teachers who were staffing those Black schools.

And during that time, we saw a lot of a lot of Black teachers. And so there was a lot of professional growth and development. And even after when that Reconstruction era came to an end, even though there was a time where many of these Black schools began closing down and then they were established again later under the Jim Crow era, we had segregated schools crop up again. And again, any time that we have these segregated schools almost exclusively these were Black teachers in these Black schools.

And they were often seen as sort of a sort of a bubble of autonomy, if you will. So they were often managed and governed by white school boards. And often the white school boards were somewhat happy to just sort of leave the Black schools to their own autonomy and their own management. Often they wouldn't get involved or relatively little in many places. And so becoming a Black teacher was one of those few one of the few professions that a motivated Black person could be able to do in during this Jim Crow era and so that they could become a Black teacher and they could have a level of professionalism that that may have otherwise been barred from many other professions.

And so some people see this as a real heyday for Black education. Many HBCUs during this time had many of their graduates were going specifically into education and became school leaders and teachers, et cetera. And so this was a really important time.

Now, in 1954, we had the Brown versus Board of Education decision that integrates schools. And in this integration, as students were integrating, we did not see a parallel argument for integrating teachers. And in fact, as students were integrating, there was actually an effort to prevent Black teachers from integrating. And so many Black teachers lost their jobs because typically in most places, it was okay for Black students to start going and integrating into white schools. We did not see the reverse where white students were

going into Black schools. And so therefore Black schools would often lose more of their student populations more quickly. They were shut down often, and when they were shut down these Black teachers had to go find jobs elsewhere. And then they found themselves in a more hostile working environment and labor market and everything, trying to secure a job in historically white schools. And so it was a very uneven integration effort between what students saw and what teachers saw. And that really impacted the Black teacher workforce. And over time, studies have shown that over time in the decade or so after the Brown vs. Board decision, over 50 percent of the Black teacher workforce was lost in some way—

DEWS: —I found that shocking, a shocking statistic—

HANSEN: —a huge statistic and then it even continued past that 10 years as well. So that 10 years alone was not the only time of reduction, but it continued on for a while.

DEWS: And so then a whole generation of Black students following the Brown v. Board of Education decision were less likely to be exposed to Black teachers, which then, as you've discussed in the book, had additional follow on effects that you also discuss in the book. One of them being there's fewer role models for young Black students to see that I can be a teacher as well.

HANSEN: Yeah, that's right. And so one of the ironies noted coming out of that Brown versus Board decision is that while the arguments of the case were centered around unequal school resources that were being made available for Black students. And while that was entirely true, one of the most important elements that we know of school resources is access to quality teaching. Though we didn't know that at the time. Back in the 1950s, our understanding about the importance of teachers was not nearly as advanced as it is today, of course. So at the time the decision overlooked that element of school resources, which are teachers and access to and access to high quality teachers. And for these Black students, having great access to quality Black teachers was a real asset.

And so the irony here is that by integrating students to have access to the white students' faces, yes, it does improve access to other elements of school facilities and school resources, but it's simultaneously lowering access to Black teachers, which were high quality teachers for many of these students.

DEWS: So let's talk about some of the policy approaches to diversifying the teacher workforce. Some of it stems from the historical circumstance of the loss of teachers of color over the decades and the follow on effects that has. Can you talk about some of your policy solutions in terms of state versus federal actions? Then also, and I think this, again, goes back to the historical issues and where we are now, the long term versus the short term policy approaches, which you also alluded to earlier.

HANSEN: Let's start with the short term versus long term issue. And this goes back to what I described before as what we saw as being misguided or very simplistic policy approaches that we feel like that we observe different state and state leaders and school leaders making to try to diversify the workforce. What we saw and what we were a little bit frustrated by was that many places were saying that they want to start taking teacher diversity very seriously. They start putting out goals for having X percent of a diverse teacher workforce within a certain number of years. Some places have set up different incentive programs, for example, preferential mortgage rates for buying a home, et cetera, for teachers of color, et cetera.

So I think these are all well intended policies. However, to us, these policies fall in the area of being a zero sum game effort. And so if a state like Connecticut is offering some of these incentives and trying to attract teachers of color, the problem is, we have a really weak pipeline leading into the teacher workforce in general. And so if we start making these aggressive incentives right away and we have a specific timeline that we want to achieve this goal in, are we actually creating these teachers of color? Are we developing them and

actually increasing the number? And our argument is that in the short term, we're not. We're probably more likely going to be poaching from neighboring states, maybe from Massachusetts, maybe from New York state.

And so that approach may be good if only places where the access to teachers of color is very low and the demand from students is very high. But often what we've actually seen is it's the places that the places that are taking the most interest in doing something about teacher diversity are those places that already tend to have the highest concentrations of teachers of color in their schools. So many of the approaches that we've seen in the incentive programs and the recruitment programs, many of these have been led by cities. And as I mentioned earlier in our conversation, cities already have the highest concentrations of teachers of color. So, yes, we need them there, but we also need them out in the suburbs. We also need them out in rural areas. We also need we need them everywhere.

And so what we speculated is that if these types of incentive programs are coming from the places that already have high concentrations of teachers of color, then we're going to be doing a disservice and just creating a more uneven distribution where we really should be trying to counter that distribution.

So, your question was about short term versus long term strategies. And so we see diversifying the teacher workforce as something that we need to work on as a marathon, as a long term goal, and that this is something we need to really pace ourselves and get towards and not something that we need to demand immediate results from right away. And the reason why is because we need to develop and train those teachers to get a more diverse teacher workforce. And so we need to develop things like grow your own programs where we're helping to identify interested high school students or college students and helping them to get degrees in education and get their training that they need in order to enter the classroom. And so this is necessarily a multiyear process. And given the size of the gaps that

we have, we're not going to be doing anything close to closing these gaps for many years, probably a decade or more to really start seeing some progress on these gaps.

But in the meantime, there are a number of short term solutions and strategies that we can be talking about. And in the book, we do talk about what some of those strategies are. These include things like providing more frequent exposure opportunities for the teachers of color who are already in your district. And so some of these exposure opportunities could be things like manipulating classroom assignments or the classroom allocation of teachers across a middle school or high school, for example. And so we can give preference to students who haven't had a teacher of color for the last three or four years. And so this requires a little bit of work. And we need to track how students are being exposed to teachers over time. And so we acknowledge it's not going to necessarily be easy, but it's something that we could do quickly with the resources we do have.

And we even have evidence that exposure opportunities in something as small as afterschool programs or things like special assemblies and having a diverse set of speakers and people represented, or career days, or those kinds of things. As students are exposed to different individuals in these kinds of experiences, we see evidence that these change students perceptions of themselves and their interest in following these different ways.

So what we want to do is we just want to raise the opportunities for exposure in multiple aspects, and that's something we can do quickly.

DEWS: Then to reinforce what you're just saying about the policy ideas, there really are a lot of them in the book; it's a guidebook for educators, school administrators, school boards, anybody interested in approaching this problem. There's a lot of really interesting ideas there. Mike, let me ask you to then focus on the federal-state issue. And you talked about if Connecticut today tries a program to diversify its teacher workforce, it might then

poach teachers from Massachusetts or from New York, other neighboring states. So, I mean, is there a federal role in this as opposed to a state role?

HANSEN: We feel like the federal role here is to really lead on recognizing diversity as a priority. They can help spread the message that this is something that not only large, large cities need to care about this, but this is something that everybody should take interest in. And what the federal government can also do here is they can promote the tracking of differential exposures, and we write about that. They can also do a lot to support teacher training institutions across the country because they already do quite a bit of legislation through their support of teacher training institutions so they can establish and promote wider widespread adoption of things like cultural studies programs, or just encouraging different approaches to developing more inclusive environments in schools and helping teachers train along those lines.

Beyond that, they can also, of course, support research, support initiatives and efforts that are trying to scale up and trying to promote diversity and inclusion in public schools in different ways.

DEWS: And you also write in the book about some ideas for new training for white teachers specifically, and maybe this gets at some of the short term policy solutions because you have the current teacher workforce as is, largely or predominantly white teachers. So are there things that white teachers could do differently or training ideas for white teachers to start to address some of these issues?

HANSEN: Yeah, absolutely. So now to be clear, when we say we want to retrain white teachers, that's not to say that these are low quality teachers. And in fact, we argue that many of them are excellent teachers. They're doing the best that they can with the students that they have. But it's clear from many studies now that we've seen that everybody comes into a situation with their own unconscious biases. And that's something that takes training to

get rid of. And so part of the argument is that we need to be doing diversity and inclusion training on unconscious biases for teachers. And we can also provide different exposure opportunities for teachers themselves. So just as a moment ago we spoke about exposure opportunities for students, we can also be creating exposure opportunities for teachers. And so some of these exposure opportunities, for example, they could be during the student teaching experience that most graduates of a teacher training program will go through. They can specifically try to have them student teach in relatively disadvantaged areas or in areas of greater racial diversity. As of right now, it tends to be the case that student teaching itself tends to be a place where the student teaching experience often is in relatively more white and relatively more affluent school settings, whereas once teachers actually start, they actually start at relatively less white and relatively lower income settings. And so there is this a bit of a mismatch. And so we feel like there's an opportunity there for exposure.

We can also envision things like teaching summer school or short term assignments that we can put teachers into different experiences to give them different opportunities for learning.

We can look at technology, even. There are there are virtual reality modules that have been built to give teachers opportunities to be exposed to different situations. It's all virtual reality, so it's simulated. But even these simulated realities, they help to provide some of those experiences that you need. And so we can simply provide a more diverse, racially diverse, classroom and help allow teachers to be in those experiences, see how they react, reflect upon those experiences afterwards, and create a strategy so that they can try to respond better in the situation in these in these kinds of experiences.

DEWS: Well, one of the many strengths of this book is that you and your coauthors anticipate and answer a lot of the kinds of questions that people will ask. And one of those

has to do with, what about addressing other forms of diversity beyond race, like gender, like sexual orientation, like ability, and language?

HANSEN: So that is that's a great question and this is something that we often get asked about usually whenever we write about teacher diversity or race matching, is specifically what about male teachers? That's the number one thing that we get a lot. And we've looked into this and our position on this issue is that we don't see the evidence for any of these other levels of diversity.

So let's start just specifically with gender diversity. We don't see the same level of evidence that says gender diversity is critically important for students. We don't see evidence that boys are systematically worse off because of low exposure to male teachers. And there are studies that have looked at this. The results are mixed or if anything, point to boys actually getting slightly more advantage from female teachers. And so because we don't have that evidence to really argue that position, we don't feel like there's there is a reason to take a policy interest in it.

I haven't seen any studies on those other aspects of protected classes. So, for example, military status or sexual orientation, we just don't have any studies. Maybe that matters, but we don't have any evidence to say one way or another at this point. And so therefore, we don't really offer a position.

But as for race, we know that American society at large is very stratified by race. And it is something that has a lot of meaning. And it has a history to it as well. And so we argue that is a very salient characteristic that is worth paying attention to and is policy relevant.

DEWS: Mike, to conclude our conversation here, let's go back to the beginning and kind of one of the central points of the book, which is that teacher diversity is teacher quality. Can you expand on that and then also address, as we do in the book, why that seems controversial to some people?

HANSEN: That's a great question, so let me just first define what we mean by teacher diversity is teacher quality. First off, we want to establish that teacher diversity should be one of many relevant factors of teacher quality. That's not to say that a teacher's race is the only sole criterion that we want to pay attention to. But it's one of many important criterions that we argue we should be paying attention to.

And so to be clear, there's good evidence that various teacher characteristics matter to students and some of these characteristics do make a difference. So whether a teacher is experienced or not, for example; whether a teacher has a graduate degree in education or not—that's something we actually pay teachers more for, but we don't have any evidence that it really makes much of a difference to their students themselves. But our argument is that teacher race is something that we now have a lot of strong, solid evidence that it matters. And if it matters, we should be doing something about it and we should be prioritizing it as something that we care about. And so that's that is our central argument. And of course, we care about other things as well. But teacher race and teacher diversity warrants to be part of that conversation. So that's one thing.

Second is that when we're talking about teacher diversity, we're not just talking about this in a macro lens where we just want to make sure that public schools have a representative share of teachers overall or even at a more micro school level, for example. But we actually want to talk about teacher diversity from the students' perspective. We argue that students themselves, they should be seeing a diverse set of teachers as they matriculate through public schools. And so that's an important element too.

Now to your question about what makes this potentially controversial is that for a long time, teacher diversity was seen as something that was an inherent tradeoff against teacher quality. So for the last 10 or 15 years, we've seen a very large and concerted policy effort to promote teacher quality and teacher diversity was seen as, yeah, that would be nice, but

actually it's probably going to come at the cost of quality. So therefore, we can't actually stress that. Now, I want to be clear, that's not everyone's view. It was just the views of some people who were sort of in those more influential positions and they were emphasizing and prioritizing quality first and therefore diversity was sidelined.

And our argument now is that given the evidence that we have, teacher race and these race matching effects that we're seeing are just as strong or even stronger than many of the studies that we have about the strength of other elements of teacher quality. And so, if we are promoting teacher diversity, that it is not at all a substitute for quality. But in fact, it's very highly complementary to promoting teacher quality. And that's really our central thesis.

DEWS: Well, Mike, let's leave it at that. I want to thank you for coming on the show to talk about this very fascinating and important book.

HANSEN: Thank you, Fred. It was a pleasure to be here.

DEWS: Again, the book is "Teacher Diversity and Student Success Why Racial Representation Matters in the Classroom," by Seth Gershenson, Michael Hansen, and Constance A. Lindsay, published by Harvard Education Press. You can find out whatever you like to buy books. And may I suggest your local independent bookstore.

A team of amazing colleagues helps make the Brookings Cafeteria possible. My thanks to Audio Engineer Gaston Reboredo; to Bill Finan, Director of the Brookings Institution Press who does the book interviews; to my communication colleagues: Marie Wilkin, Adrianna Pita and Chris McKenna for their collaboration. And finally to Camilo Ramirez and Andrea Risotto for their guidance and support. Our podcast intern this semester is David Greenburg.

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Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.