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## The Emerging Scholars Issue: Insights on Teaching and Leading through Reshaping Policy and Practice

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Special Issue Introduction

***The Emerging Scholars Issue: Insights on Teaching and Leading through Reshaping Policy and Practice***

Lakia M. Scott & Taylor D. Bunn

The Emerging Scholars program of Texas-NAME was started in 2019 under the direction of Texas-NAME board member Dr. Lakia Scott. Scott shared that her vision for the program was to provide a space where graduate students could network with others from various institutions and share about their experiences, while also having an opportunity to learn from those in the field. It was also important to cultivate scholarship since, at the time, there were few opportunities for graduate students to take leadership roles within academic journal publications. With this idea, the program was birthed. The Emerging Scholars program began at the 2019 Texas-NAME conference with five graduate students; four of which were enrolled in a doctoral program. Students participated in preconference workshops that included topics on establishing a research agenda, understanding academia and higher education institutions, and creating a network as an education researcher. Since its inception, the program has continued to introduce students to collaborations and publication opportunities through Texas-NAME.

This special issue provides doctoral students (some of whom have since graduated) with an opportunity to be single-authors in their scholar. Organized in three distinct sections, readers will be exposed to research and policy briefs and critical reflections that center on the experiences of difference in hopes to provide educational access, equity, and opportunity to historically minoritized populations.

**Research and Policy Briefs**

The first section details research and policy briefs for the readers. Research briefs are meant to be short, informative content that provides one with a breadth of the topic at hand. Research briefs are commonly used to provide concise and up-to-date accounts on topics or issues specific to the field/discipline. Similarly, policy briefs are intended to also provide short and concise accounts on a particular policy or landmark change that has occurred in the field/discipline. It is not uncommon for these briefs to also provide tangible and actionable recommendations or suggestions for policy and/or practice. School staff and administration commonly reference research and policy briefs when thinking about curricular actions or instructional innovation. And, in more favorable cases, what a research or policy brief reveals determines the actionable steps for transformation. It is our hope that the research and policy briefs provide readers with a greater perspective and understanding of the topics addressed.

The Research and Policy Briefs section contains five manuscripts exploring a variety of educational issues. In “Out of Left Field? Requiring Expertise to Teach Secondary Science: A Policy Brief”, Dana Morris explores the shortage of highly qualified science teachers with content-specific expertise in the United States, pointing to inconsistent certification standards and assumptions that expertise in one subject is sufficient for teaching all subjects as root causes of the shortage. In “Reporting of Doctoral Student Attrition: A Policy Brief”, Cece Lively uncovers racial disparities in doctoral student attrition and a lack of reporting of these data. In, “The Intersection of Academic Freedom and Trigger Warnings”, Ashleigh Maldonado weighs the academic freedoms of students and teachers against free speech and trigger warnings in classroom settings. In “Policy Brief: Exploring Response to Intervention’s Effectiveness with

Students of Color”, Camille S. Talbert reviews the legislative context of Response to Intervention and examines the impact of educator ideology on the efficacy of RTI in diminishing racial disparities in special education. Finally, in “Mathematics Tracking: Policy Brief”, Melissa P. Donham considers the arguments for and against mathematics tracking and the implications of such tracking on educators and policymakers.

### **Critical Reflections**

During the first semester of their doctoral studies, Critical Reflection authors completed qualitative interviews with an individual or family from a different racial, linguistic, socioeconomic, or culture background than their own. Though perhaps not fully understood at the time, the assignment served as an introduction to qualitative research, requiring students to collect and analyze data, explain their findings, determine implications, and reflect on how their own backgrounds and intersectionalities impact their worldviews, positionalities, and interactions with others.

The Critical Reflection section contains six manuscripts exploring each author’s reflections on the issues of diversity in education. In “Bridging the Cultural Divide: Learning with Kayla”, Dr. Ashley N. Gibson explores the impact of linguistic diversity and multiculturalism on one student’s experiences at school. In “Not 'Fit in More,' I Would Say 'Stand Out Less': Critical Dialogue with A Filipino-American High School Student in a Predominantly White High School: A Case Study”, Dr. Cristofer G. Slotoroff unpacks the experiences of one minority student in New Jersey to explore the intersection of identity and public education. In “Student, Teacher, Mother, Wife: A Constant Learner’s Education and Call to Action”, Dr. Taylor D. Bunn reflects on one woman’s educational journey as she wrestled with her identity as a lesbian. In “Bridging the Cultural Divide: A single case study exploring connections between multicultural education, identity, self-esteem and leadership”, by Dr. Amy Britton documents the lifelong transformational impact of multicultural education through the lived experiences of a Latina higher education administrator. In “Bridging the Cultural Divide: A Single Case Study to Describe the Lived Experiences of a High School Senior from a Mexican American Working-Class Family”, Dr. Nadine E. Franz posits that diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom is impossible without a deliberate focus on and commitment to multicultural education. Finally, in “The Diversity in Creating a New Dream: A Black Man’s Journey from Sports to Human Resources”, Dr. Sagirah S. Wheeler dissects the impacts of stereotyping on a former student-athlete’s academic, athletic, and professional careers.

### **Conclusion**

While each author offers their own perspective on educational challenges, several shared themes emerged from this collection of manuscripts. First, students learn best when they can be their authentic selves in the classroom and share their unique lived experiences. Next, disparities in academic experiences and preparation exist for both teachers and students from minority groups. Finally, teachers have a profound impact on their students’ academic and social-emotional development. In a time of global distress and the politicization of education, educators and students face competing priorities as hot topics and buzzwords bombard the airwaves: standardized testing, Critical Race Theory, and LGBTQIA+ allyship are embraced and demonized in equal measure. This special issue seeks to raise awareness about many of the policies and challenges impacting education for all students and teachers, especially those who feel a lack of belonging in their schools, to deepen understanding and encourage action, agency, and advocacy.