



Cultural Influences: Differences in Teacher Perspectives

During a recent study designed to promote positive racial teacher-student classroom relationships several interviewed teachers reported their perspectives on how differences in race impact teacher-student classroom relationships.

Minority teachers' reported cultural differences with students are beneficial and are a source of conflict for non-minority teachers while a White teacher reported cultural differences with minority students make no difference in maintaining positive relationships with students.

In a school where most students are Hispanic, a Hispanic teacher reported that "I think that it is another benefit for me . . . They relate to me. We talk about it with other teachers. We have one student in particular, she is very nice with me and the other Spanish teacher. We talk about it with other teachers. We never have problems with her. Her other teachers say that they have problems [with her]. We thought about it, and it has to be [related to her] culture. She is such a good girl".

It seems that White teachers have difficulties with developing and maintaining positive teacher-student classroom relationships with Hispanic students. However, researchers report findings that are

contradictory to this discovery. European Americans have favorable attitudes toward Mexican Americans compared to Blacks and are more likely to accept Mexican Americans compared to Blacks due to Mexican Americans having a closer skin color to European Americans (Burmali, 1970).

One Black teacher, in the same school, reported teachers from different ethnic backgrounds encounter difficulties due to their different ethnic backgrounds. The teacher claimed "a lot of it has to do with culture . . . If our students have a bad background, and if you are not familiar or cannot relate to that type of background, it is going to be hard for you to relate to them as people. Because you do not understand where they are coming from".

An interviewed White teacher indicated culture has an insignificant impact on teacher-student classroom relationships. This teacher stated "I have not had any problems with that for a number of years. We used to get that cop out. I am Hispanic, and you are picking on me. Or I'm Black, and you are picking on me. My comment is, excuse me. I have been here too long. I taught your mothers, I taught your fathers . . . When you do what you are supposed to do and [I] do what I am supposed to do, we are fine. Race has nothing to

do with this". "Race has long been acknowledged as having a major effect upon the teaching process and classroom situation" (Feldman, 1976, p. 20). Classroom interaction studies have found teachers discriminate against students who are not White, male, and middle class (Entwistle & Webster, 1974; Safilios-Rothchild, 1979). White teachers create classroom problems when they interpret culture as a limitation to student progress (Powell & Caseau, 2004). This teacher was a long-time veteran at the school and developed a tradition to sidestep the racial conflict that survives in the classroom.

References:

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