

Leadership for Educational and Organizational Advancement



Volume 1, Issue 1

August 1, 2008

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Teacher Qualities that Promote Positive Racial Classroom Relationships

Minority students continue to academically underachieve and receive more disciplinary consequences when compared to other students. This cycle cost schools millions of dollars annually. Reversing this cycle requires that schools overcome the cultural biases that teachers and students bring to the classroom by Promoting Positive Racial Teacher-Student Classroom Relationships.

Teachers who promote positive racial teacher-student classroom relationships exhibit several qualities which include:

- ◆ Good listening techniques
- ◆ Support student introduced ideas
- ◆ Provide students with disciplinary chances/choices

When listening to students, teachers must be aware of the nonverbal behavior exhibited by students. Researchers report that Blacks exhibit nonverbal behavior that some teachers may perceive as offensive. For example, Blacks indicate they are listening by nodding their heads (Erickson, 1979; Feldman, 1985; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997). In the United States, a head nod signifies agreement (Leathers, 1997). In the White culture, a perpendicular nod during a conversation indicates an agreement, acceptance, or understanding (Asante & Davis, 1985). In the Black culture, a perpendicular nod during a conversation indicates a conversational catalyst, not an agreement, acceptance, or understanding. Schools will benefit from an organizational change process that increases teacher awareness of minority student nonverbal behavior.

Teachers must also know that some minority students exhibit verbal behavior when listening. Blacks indicate they are listening by making short sounds (Feldman, 1985; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997), and verbally respond (Erickson, 1979) to indicate that they are listening. While this

behavior may annoy teachers, some minority students will also interrupt the teacher when listening. Blacks accept interrupting others or speaking-out-of-turn communicative approach as valued and an indication that the individual is listening, comprehending, and has anticipated the point being made (Shade, 1994). "A Black child may be listening intently, yet to a White person he gives the appearance of distraction, often because of a different habit of directing his gaze" (Gay & Abrahams, 1972, p. 77).

One of the teachers who participated in a school reform initiative that promotes positive racial teacher-student classroom relationships reported the following:

"I recently had the opportunity to sit down and have a conversation with a student. She was upset about the detention that I assigned her earlier in the day. During our talk, it became clear to me that I had treated her unfairly. We were able to resolve our issues because we both had mutual respect for each other. When dealing with students, sometimes it is best to be quiet and just listen to what they are saying. That could mean more to them than any advice or instruction you have to share."

Teachers who promote positive racial teacher-student classroom relationships support student introduced ideas that promote positive teacher-student relationships. During a recent school initiative that promotes positive racial teacher-student classroom relationships a teacher supported a student introduced idea by developing a mentoring program for incoming freshman. The incoming freshmen were to receive mentoring on how to positively interact with teachers and other staff members. This student introduced idea was an important breakthrough because most school disciplinary and academic challenges can exist for

new and incoming students in the school.

Finally, teachers promote positive racial teacher-student classroom relationships by providing disciplinary chances and choices for students. Another teacher who participated in a school initiative that promotes positive racial teacher-student classroom relationships believed in providing students with choices rather than hammering students with consequences. The teacher noticed that students were having challenges with substitutes and provided the following choices:

- ◆ Continue your current behavior and find yourself with a misconduct and deal with the consequence.
- ◆ Treat the substitute with the same respect you show me and wait till after class to address the issue directly with the sub.
- ◆ If you are uncomfortable with #2 because you are unfamiliar with the substitute you should avoid confrontation and tell me about the problem when I return. I then can assist you in finding a solution.

Teachers who promote positive racial teacher-student classroom relationships are good listeners, support student initiated ideas that promote positive teacher-student classroom relationships, and provide students with disciplinary chances/choices.

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