

Chantille Kennedy

Race, Class, and Success

Does race affect one's education? Do students with same race teachers achieve more success? These are the questions I explored in this project. Coming from personal experience and experiences in my praxis, I was interested in the success rates of those who have same race teachers. Through this zine I investigated the differences in race within a classroom and how this affects a student's overall academic success.



Race can be defined as a “mechanism of social stratification and as a form of human identity” (Smedley). It is used as the primary form of self identification. Often times people are described as “Oh she’s white” or “The black girl.” While many take pride in their race or races, including myself because of the cultural connections associated with it, race also can unfortunately have negative effects. These negative effects are caused by false stereotypes and are almost always among minorities. These tragic effects can include harsh judgement, which I

will discuss later. Dating back to African enslavement and African-American segregation, some of those racist attitudes are still felt by Americans today.

Race is a huge part of our culture and effects almost everything in society, down to our education system. Some feel more comfortable around those of the same race because around these people they are not being judged. This applies to the classroom. I think there is a different sentiment and vibe felt by minorities when there is a teacher who is a minority as well. While this is my personal feeling, there is research to support this.

Perceptions can be deceiving. Klassen and Carr investigated white and racial minority teachers concerning antiracist education in the Toronto Board of Education. This study investigated the difference in perspectives had by white and minority teachers on racial minority teachers as role models and the treatment of racial minority teachers, in addition to other topics. It was found that racial minority teachers face more obstacles and barriers than white teachers, although the white participants in this study did not believe this to be true. Findings indicated that there is a need of racial diversity in the classroom. The few minority teachers that there are need to stand up and be role models because they can be critical in a child's success. "Racial minority teachers can be role models for all students, and can break down barriers both institutionally and individually" (Carr & Klassen). This study explicitly showed the need and impact a minority teacher can have on minority students.



Douglas Downey and Shana Pribesh studied something similar to Klassen and Carr. These authors experimented with race and evaluations. Former studies have shown that black students classroom behavior is rated better by black teachers than by white teachers, and that white teachers rate black students worse than their white classmates. This could be due a white teacher bias. If we simply ponder on this small fact that black students are an initial step behind than their classmates because of an uncontrollable white teacher bias, one can just think about the extreme effects it can have on a student. If a student is rated to have bad behavior because of a racial bias they have no control over, it can surely be detrimental. In this study kindergartners and eighth graders were studied as they were matched with same race and “opposite” race teachers. Downey and Pribesh found that the effects of matching races are the same in both kindergarten and eighth grade, giving evidence to a white teacher bias.



Continuing on the theme of students success in relation to race, Thomas S. Dee investigated teachers, race, and student achievement. This study is pivotal to my hypothesis of this project. Dee examined test score results from Tennessee's Project STAR. He randomly paired teachers and students, independent of race. Results showed that my theory of success being related to a teacher and student's race is valid, "Models of student achievement indicate that assignment to an own-race teacher significantly increased the math and reading achievement of both black and white students" (Dee). Student achievement indicated that pairing to an own-race teacher significantly increased math and reading achievement of black and white students.



Attending private school all my life, 95% of the time I had white teachers. Even of the 5% non-white teachers I had, none quite looked like me. Out of the 12 years I attended my former school, I had two minority teachers, a black man and an Indian man. Although they both taught History which was my all time least favorite class, I am still to this day closest to these two teachers. I felt the most comfortable with these teachers, and shared personal situations with

them on many occasions. Unlike statistics, as a minority I graduated from a top rated school in my state, and currently attend one of the top rated liberal arts colleges, without have consistent minority teachers in my educational experience. Although I am a contradiction to my own hypothesis, I am living testimony that one can have teachers that are not of the same race and still be successful.



Using what I have learned in this course, I now want to connect this with my praxis. This placement is how I got came up with my topic. The elementary school I am placed in is in a rough area of Philadelphia consisting of lower income, minority students. The people who teach these students, including those in administration, are about 98% white.

It was evident on the first day of my time at this elementary school that the students had trouble obeying their teachers. I first thought this could be due to environment, until I saw their interaction with one of the two or three black teachers at the school. While the white teachers had to yell almost until they were red in face, this black teacher merely had to look and say a couple of words to get multiple classrooms to quiet down during a school assembly.

I recognized “this look” the teacher gave, having a black mother of my own. This distinct look let the kids that the teacher meant business and it was time for the kids to listen. From there I wondered if she had better control over the students because she looked like them or did she just better teaching methods. From multiple weeks of experience at this school I still have not come to a definitive answer. I am unsure if it is a racial advantage of the teachers, or if she just is

better at gaining control of the students. Although this is a difficult topic to conclude on, I consistently ponder the question of whether students will achieve better success because of their teacher's skin color.



After all the research and thinking put into this project, I still am undecided on my viewpoints. I am still not sold on the idea that minority students have to have minority teachers. While I think it significantly helps in the educational experience, I am not sure that it is pivotal. I leave this project open ended, in that I will allow the reader to decide for themselves if he/she believes minority teachers are essential for student success.

#### Works Cited

Different perceptions of race in education: racial minority and white teachers  
Klassen, Thomas R; Carr, Paul R. **Canadian Journal of Education** 22. 1 (Winter 1997): 67.

#### **"Race" and the Construction of Human Identity**

Audrey Smedley

*American Anthropologist* , New Series, Vol. 100, No. 3 (Sep., 1998), pp. 690-702

#### **Teachers, Race, and Student Achievement in a Randomized Experiment**

Thomas S. Dee

*The Review of Economics and Statistics* , Vol. 86, No. 1 (Feb., 2004), pp. 195-210

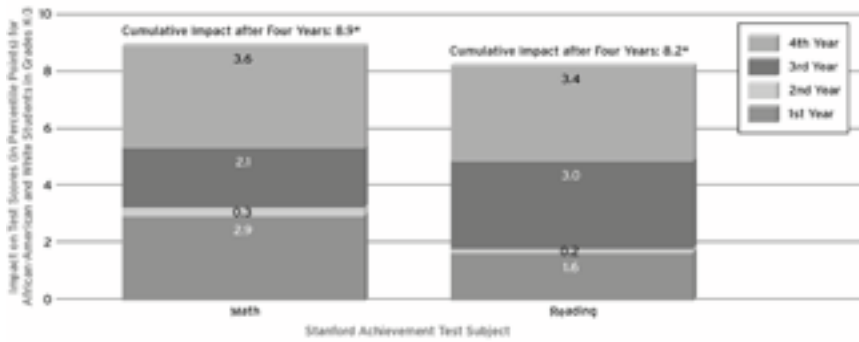
Praxis Placement Experience

#### **When Race Matters: Teachers' Evaluations of Students' Classroom Behavior**

Douglas B. Downey and Shana Pribesh

**Cumulative Impact of Sharing a Teacher's Race (Figure 3)**

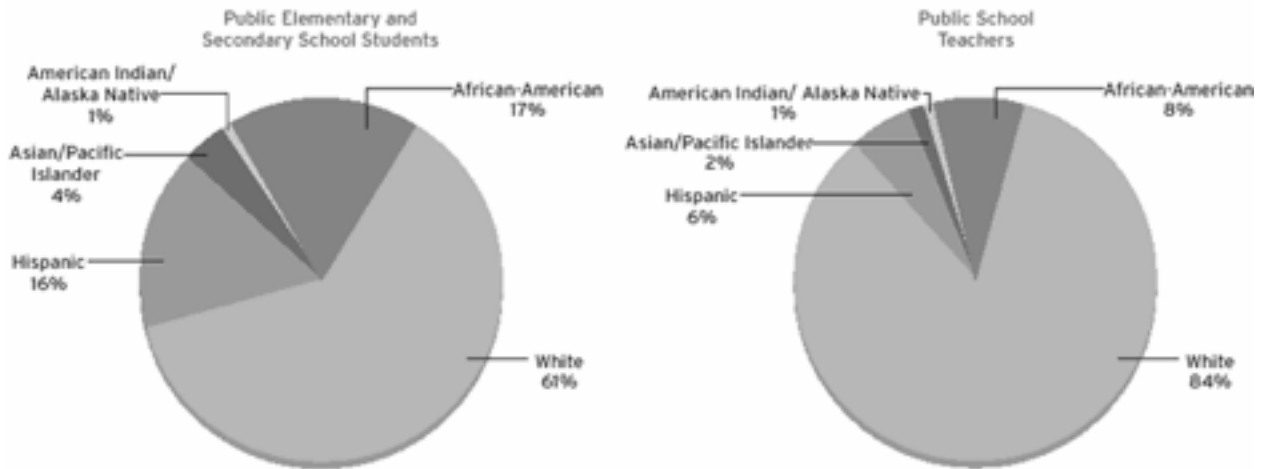
The benefits of being taught by a teacher of the same race appear to be cumulative over time. Note, however, that 96 percent of the students who shared their teachers' race for four straight years were white.



\* Results significant at the .01 level. Additional gains in the second year are not statistically significant.  
SOURCE: Author

**The Need for Minority Teachers (Figure 1)**

The student population in America's public schools is 17 percent African-American, yet African-American teachers compose just 8 percent of the teaching workforce.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education. Data are as of Spring 2000