Diversity

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Of all ethnic groups in my school, I would say the group that has presented me with the most challenge in my experience is black students. I have had more conflicts with black males than any other ethnic group, and written more discipline referrals. Nationally, African American boys are overrepresented on indexes of school discipline. (Monroe) Very often these conflicts are illogical and unnecessary in my opinion. Reading Lisa Delpit's book "Other People's Children" gave me some insight into this problem by explaining some of the thought process behind black students, specifically male, in how they need to seek attention, and perceive weakness etc. So I decided to research the topic further here, and further my understanding on how to enhance learning for this group in my classroom. This essay is a summary of some of the findings I uncovered in reading about the topic.

A good starting point is the negative imagery of the American black male. According to a 2009 study, fewer than 10% of African American males were at or above grade level in reading, math, history and science while fewer than 3% performed at advanced levels. While black males make up only 8.1% of the US population, they make up 26% and worse of the sub groups of special education. This is due in part to the historical characterization of black males as subhuman brutes and worse. (Howe, Flenneguh, Terry) Anger on the part of black males over how they are prejudiced against on a daily basis plays a big part in behavior. This high percentage of black males in special education and other groupings actually leads to a surprisingly high percentage of racial segregation.
Despite Brown vs the Board of Education, school systems are more segregated now than in years past. (Crawford)

While there is a large number of black students in my school, the teaching staff is almost exclusively white. A question posed by some researchers asks what role do white teachers play in facilitating black students success, or contributing to their academic failure? Findings show that black students feel discriminated against and that white teachers need to be more aware of the needs of black students and to be more careful about the frames of reference that they use in teaching them. (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, Garrison)

Having said that, I thought it was interesting to note that according to a study done in Texas, The present investigation has shown that minority and non-minority students taught by black and white teachers in a southeastern school district in the state of Texas understood more mathematical concepts and knowledge when taught by teachers of their own ethnic background. (Ikegulu)

This is intriguing because it would counter the generally accepted idea that black students are racially oppressed because there are few black teachers. But race aside, teachers both white and black need to understand how to better communicate ideas to students of different races.

How do we address this? Danne Davis suggests the "Critical consultive interaction" model (Davis) that suggests the three Rs of regarding black and latino children as resources, raising the right questions of them, and reflecting on school children's response in training new teachers. This allows new teachers to better get important information from the primary source, the kids. Similarly, it is
suggested that a teacher training program with the goal of eliminating racialized processes must focus on practitioner inquiry that pushes teachers to honestly interrogate their beliefs on African American students. (Kenyatta)

A scientific review study deals with reducing stereotype threat in the classroom. It looks at intervention studies to improve academic achievement of black students. The study found positive impacts of using three social-psychological strategies: reinforcing that intelligence is expandable and gets stronger by working hard, teaching students that difficulties in learning are normal and not part of a racial deficiency, and helping students reflect on other values in their lives besides school that are sources of self worth for them. By focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses, I can use these approaches in my classroom.

Further addressing the stereotyping threat in the classroom is addressing "Lookism" which is prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of appearance. (Decastro, Cho) I found this interesting study that gauges how teachers perceptions of how students look affects their beliefs of how those students will perform. This stereotyping will undeniably lead to unfair treatment in the classroom which translates into unequal educational opportunities. Their recommendation, as expected, is that universities spend more time in teacher training focusing on race and gender issues, giving new teachers more experience in dealing with such things in order to eliminate race issues.

It seems that while there is at least some contention as to who black students learn better from, it is agreed that cultural bias and prejudice play a
major role in the academic performance of black males. The training of new teachers is the best place to begin focusing on this. As more new teachers are taught with a greater understanding of racial concerns, and more minorities are integrated into teacher training, black male students should increase in mean academic achievement. As for my classroom, paying close attention to these factors will improve my teaching, and hopefully lessen the amount of conflicts I have with them.
References


