

*Exploring Diversity Issues at Explore Charter School
What it Means to Be a White Teacher for Minority Children*



EAD 822

Kelly Marie Willard

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ISSUE OVERVIEW

Importance of Teaching

- “Next to parents, teachers are the single most influential factor in the lives of children” (Edwards, 2001, p. 494).
- Teachers must understand their role and influence on student success



ISSUE OVERVIEW

Importance of Race

- Race plays a significant part in the ability for teachers to offer culturally relevant educations to minority students
- White teachers often struggle to provide culturally relevant educations for minority students
- “In 2002, about 40% of the children enrolled in our nation’s schools were students of color. At the same time, 90% of public school teachers were white, and 40% of U.S. schools had no teachers of color” (Patterson, 2007, p. 20)

QUESTION

What are the implications for having a predominately white teaching staff in schools with predominantly students of color and how does this phenomenon affect the success and perceptions of minority students across the nation?

EXPLORE CHARTER SCHOOL

- Located in Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York
- 61% of the teaching staff and most of the administration are white (Kleinfield, 2012).
- 98% of the student body is African American or Hispanic (Chu, 2012).
- 80% of the student body qualify for subsidized lunch (Kleinfield, 2012)



THEORY ONE

Personal Connections and Understanding

- Teachers need to get to know their students, their families, and the communities in which they live (Ladson-Billings)
- Enables teachers to understand who they are, where they come from, what they deal with daily, and what needs to be done
- Effective teachers are members of the community and know first-hand of the struggles students face (Ladson-Billings)

ANALYSIS ONE

- Parents and students at Explore see the importance of being able to relate to students
- White teachers do not realize and understand the issues:
 - One mother stated: *“What do they know of our lives? They may be good teachers, but what do they know? You’re coming from Milwaukee. You went to Harvard”* (Delmonte, 2012)
 - One student stated: *“the white teachers can’t relate as much to us no matter how they try—and they really try”* (Delmonte, 2012)

THEORY TWO

White staff are unprepared to handle diversity issues

- “There is very little reliable literature on preparing teachers for diversity. And almost nothing exists on teacher preparation specifically for African American students” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 8)
- Teacher preparation programs do not address diversity issues
- Teachers have not encountered a great deal of diversity in their lives



ANALYSIS TWO

- White teachers at Explore are unsure of how and when to address racial issues and tensions that arise in school
- Race “could be a Pandora’s box to some extent. Is there a proper effective way to bring it in? There probably is. Do I know the way? No, I don’t” (Kleinfield, 2012).
- “It was hard on [him] as a first year teacher and not knowing what to do” when racial issues broke out in class. “I know I should do more...” (Kleinfield, 2012).

THEORY THREE

White teachers have the privilege of not having to think about diversity issues

- Unaware of how the educational system privileges whites and how their students are implicated
- *“Teachers who have not examined their identity and racial structures are likely to use teaching strategies that have worked well in mainstream settings, thereby perpetuating the status quo and academic achievement discrepancy between students of color and white students (as cited in Williams, 2008, p. 34)*

ANALYSIS THREE

- White teachers at Explore do not understand how they contribute to the issue of privileged and underprivileged
- Believe the educational experiences that they received is sufficient for their student body
- Have not reflected on their personal biases and permeated stereotypes



THEORY FOUR

Deficit Thinking and Covert Abuse

- Teachers, “*know on some level, whether it is intuitive, somatic, or otherwise, how their teachers feel about them*” (McKenzie, 2009, p. 135)
- Teachers who have a deficit mentality have very low expectations for poor and minority students and their families and base their judgements on stereotypes.
- “It is extremely difficult to maintain an unblemished sense of self-worth” with negative reflections from teachers (Rosenblum and Travis, p. 226)

ANALYSIS FOUR

- Teachers at Explore are unknowingly insensitive to parents and students
- This insensitivity leaves lasting marks
 - One teacher said that listening to Eminem was ghetto. “She was white” says the student, “I was pretty upset. I was wondering why she would say something like that. She apologized, but it sticks with me” (Kleinfield, 2012)
 - One teacher was quoted in saying, “Oh, you’re so involved” to a parent which was quite patronizing (Kleinfield, 2012).



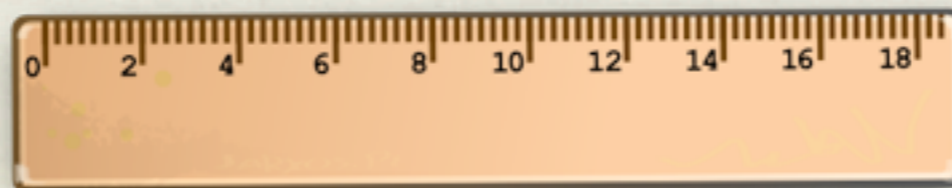
THEORY FIVE

Embracing Culture and Meeting in the Middle

- “Students comes to school with values and behaviors that are in direct conflict with the behaviors valued at school” (Flessa, 2009, p. 354)
- “Culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 19)
- Teachers need to tap into, "cultural funds of knowledge and practices to enrich both culture and intelligence, instead of the current practice, which is to see cultural knowledge as not useful or as an obstacle" (as cited in Amos, 2011, p. 482)

ANALYSIS FIVE

- “Outside the school the kids are being reminded of what their race is,” and “when they come to school, it’s as if they are asked to ignore who they are” (Kleinfield, 2012)
- “Kids feel that they have to choose between family and culture and school success” (Villenas and Deyhle, 1999, p. 422)
- Explore students are ostracized by other students if they choose school over culture (Kleinfield, 2012).



THEORY SIX

Criminalizing Students to Maintain Control

- There is, “no dispute that the poor and people of color, particularly African American, are dramatically overrepresented” in the criminal justice system (Brewer and Heitzeg, 2008, p. 628)
- It is dangerous to use language and implement practices in our schools that are used in the prison and military systems for fear that students will feel like delinquents if they do not live up to the impossible standards (Lipman, 2003)

ANALYSIS SIX

- “Convinced that student unruliness was impeding learning, the school installed a rigid discipline system”.
- Infractions — for transgressions like calling out without permission, frowning after being given a demerit, being off task — lead to detention for upper-school students. On some days, 50 students land in detention, a quarter of the upper school”.
- Because of this zero tolerance system, “some students have taken to referring to Explore as “the prison school”.
- Using demerits, having an elite group of respectable students in a Corp, zero-tolerance policies, wearing uniforms, and punishing students for expressing themselves

(Kleinfield 2012)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Openly discuss racial issues and biases within teaching staff
- Reflect on biases and personal privileges that impede culturally relevant teaching practices
- Consult African American teachers from within and without the school to gain insight
- Venture into the community to develop an understanding of who their students are, where they come from, and what they go through on a daily basis
- Teachers should know their students as well as their subjects

RECOMMENDATIONS

Good teaching is not a function of the color of our skin. It is much more closely related to the temperament of our mind and the hue of our heart. We did not choose whether to be White, but we can affect how we are White. This is both our challenge and our hope” (King, 2000)



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