

REAFFIRMING THE UNION BETWEEN WHITE TEACHERS AND BLACK STUDENTS

WHITE TEACHERS WHO TEACH IN PREDOMINATELY BLACK “INNER CITY” SCHOOLS HAVE MORE IN COMMON WITH THEIR STUDENTS THAN THEY MIGHT REALIZE.

By Ivory A. Toldson

White teachers who teach in predominately Black “inner city” schools have more in common with their students than they might realize.

They are often compared unfavorably and sometimes unfairly to teachers at more well-funded schools. Researchers use data to paint them as less qualified because they are more likely to be within their first two years of teaching; teach courses that they are not certified to teach; and enter the field through alternative certification programs. While none of this, in and of itself, makes anyone a bad teacher, it can leave White teachers at inner city schools vulnerable to stigma and stereotype threat.

White teachers at inner city schools also often have low expectations placed upon them. Unfortunately, sometimes teachers reaffirm these expectations by showing signs of insolence and indifference toward their students. Characterizations of their lack of professionalism has led to some extreme, and often unfair, measures against them; such as attacks on their unions and requiring them to be rated on the basis of standardized tests.

Additionally, like many of their students, people often assume that White teachers who teach at predominately Black schools are there because they have to, not because they want to. People believe that if they had the talent, resources, or connections, they would be at a different school – one with opulent facilities and students with bright blue eyes and private tutors.

But, White teachers at predominately Black “inner city” schools (and Black teachers who have internalized similar experiences) can be excellent and make a difference in the lives of students, no matter what anyone else says.

It does not matter if this school was your first or last choice. What matters is the pride you take in your work once you are there.

It does not matter if you don’t look like your students. What matters is that you treat every student with dignity, respect, genuineness and unconditional positive regard.

If you have disdain or apathy for your students, their families, or their community, but continue to stay and collect a check, you are being exploitative and dishonest, and you probably will short-circuit any future you have in education and in life.

The way you feel about your students, is a reflection of how you feel about yourself and your career. If you are able to find and cultivate resilience and optimism in your students, you can certainly do this for yourself and your loved ones.

Remember, at this point in your career, these students are your opportunity to be a more seasoned professional and better person. Never resent them. Even in their immaturity and imperfections, always appreciate them.

If not for them;

Then for you.