

TEACHER BELIEFS AND PRACTICES REGARDING THE BLACK-WHITE MATHEMATICS ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Gau, Tonya & Laurie Rubel
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Recent results from National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate dramatic differences in mathematics performance between White students and Black students at grades 4, 8, and 12 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Moreover, despite the national emphases on equity and mathematics for all (NTCM, 2000), the achievement differences have not narrowed over the span of the last decade. Sociocultural factors (Ogbu and Simons, 1998), socioeconomic conditions (Reyes and Stanic, 1988), school practices such as tracking (Oakes, 1985), and past and present discrimination (Robinson, 2000) have been proposed as potential reasons for this performance gap. Yet we have little information about how classroom teachers explain this achievement gap.

Our research investigates the beliefs and practices about the Black-White achievement gap of twelve in-service mathematics teachers in a small mid-western city, six at the elementary level and six at the secondary level. Structured interviews were conducted with all twelve participants, beginning with a display of national testing data according to racial subgroup. The specific discrepancy between White and Black achievement was noted and participants were asked to respond to the query "How did this happen?" Participants were also asked about current actions being taken to address minority student achievement, both in their specific classrooms and by their departments or schools at-large. Responses were categorized in terms of belief structure and enacted practices. Data is presented in the form of case vignettes. It is our contention that such an analysis of teacher beliefs and their connections to classroom and/or school practices will inform both the teacher education and professional development communities.

References

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