

Racial Expectations in the Classroom and the Cruelty of “Caring”

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Warm-up Questions:

1. Do your expectations for your individual students have any effect on their motivation and ultimate success in your class? If so, how?

2. What do you think “racial expectations” mean in the context of a classroom? Could these ever have a positive influence on minority students? Besides race, what other implicit biases might influence an instructor’s expectations for their students?

3. Is it pedagogically useful to be “race conscious”? If so, how?

Mini Case-Study

Please read the following two situations, keeping in mind these questions:

1. What do these situations have in common?
2. Could these result in any negative outcomes for the students? If so, how?

Situation 1:

- In a language class which requires use of the target language 100% of the time by both students and instructors, a particular instructor uses, from time-to-time, a few phrases in English when answering one-on-one questions with most students. Additionally, if students ask questions in English, the instructor will gently remind them to use the target language, or give them scaffolding in the target language to help them avoid using English. However, the African American students often ask questions of the instructor in English without reprimand, and the instructor generally spends additional time with them, giving them extra support and speaking exclusively in English, though quietly.

Situation 2:

- A 20th Century Scholar in her second year in University Division shares with her instructor, whom she views as a valued mentor, that she plans to attend the Harvard School of Law. The instructor frowns with a somewhat worried face, and asks whether the student had considered additional safety schools or alternative career paths.