

# I Do Want to Know

## Case Studies of Effective Teachers of Students of Color



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### Introduction

While teaching at a performing arts school in Minnesota, it was clear white teachers struggled to form positive relationships with students of color. Some white teachers labeled students of color as “loud,” “difficult,” “pushy,” “arrogant and entitled,” “angry for no reason,” and “little fools.” Parents of color reported white teachers ignored their electronic communications and failed to create relationships. However, a small number of white teachers learned **how to leave the white privilege bubble**. They connected well with all students. Students and parents alike reported higher levels of satisfaction with the teaching of this select few.

### Research Question

How do **some white teachers** at a performing arts high school **consistently and successfully connect with and form positive working relationships with students of color?**

What aspects of these **teachers’ backgrounds, teacher training, and/or life experiences** have helped them to develop the **skills and abilities** necessary to successfully instruct and connect with students from diverse backgrounds?

### Methods

**Setting:** Midwestern, inner city, performing arts high school

**Design:** Action research case study using Qualitative Methodology

**Procedures:** Collected Demographic Data, Classroom Observations, and Interviews of Research Participants

**Participants:** Purposeful sampling of 4 Midwestern, middle class white teachers recommended by students, parents & teachers: 2 male/2 female; 2 academic/2 arts instructors

### Interview Questions

Research participants were asked 17 questions in semi-structured interviews:

**Demographic Questions:** racial or ethnic identity, ethnicity of family of origin, background and life experiences

**Open-Ended Questions:** Life and education experiences, students' voices in their teaching practice, and quality of relationships with non-white students.

### Findings

Analysis through coding and categorization of field notes and interview transcripts. All four teachers shared a commitment to four sets of intentional practices **[See below]**, including:

**Self-development,**  
**Intentionally cultivate personal qualities,**  
**Developing classroom strategies that foster inclusion,** and  
**Develop relationships with students of color.**

### Conclusion

White educators can take **concrete actions** to become effective and engaging with students of color. **Suggested solutions** to improve the positive impact of white educators in culturally diverse classrooms include:

**Immersive Stateside Study:** White teachers living and working in a multicultural and diverse environment where white people are the minority and do not hold all the power.

**Teacher Mentorship Program** for white teachers, begun during in-service & continued through the first 3 years of teaching.

**Digital Social Justice Library** with books, film, and art to foster social justice learning & motivation to effect change (**see Reading List below**).

**Educator Hiring Profile** with specific qualities and life/education experiences for use by school administrators searching for dynamic, culturally competent, 21<sup>st</sup> century K-12 educators, capable of effectively teaching all students.



#### Self Development

Leave the White Privilege Bubble  
Get to Know People of Color  
Immerse Yourself in Another Culture  
Create Art  
Find a Teacher-Mentor  
Commit to Growth  
Seek to Know More  
Live More  
Teach More



#### Qualities to Cultivate

Honesty  
Flexibility  
Empathy  
Self-Awareness  
Courage  
Loving  
Thoughtful  
Trustworthy  
Patience  
Respectful  
Curious  
Responsible  
Gentle  
Tolerant  
Charming  
Persistence  
Positive  
Kindness  
Accepting  
Charismatic



#### Relationship Development

Be Yourself  
Nothing is Personal  
Focus on What Matters: the Student & the Relationship  
Get to Know Your Students  
Validate and Affirm  
Honor Each Student's Voice  
Become Involved  
Admit Mistakes  
Talk About the Elephant  
Earn Their Trust  
Form Relationships  
Praise  
Support  
Share Your Power



#### Classroom Strategies

Create Genuine, Individual, Positive Connections  
Recognize & Celebrate Student Achievement  
Offer Loving Support & High Standards  
Create a Classroom Culture of Respect and Support  
Honor Student Agency  
Engage in Culturally Responsive Teaching  
Honor Students' Voices  
Embrace Chaos & Imperfection  
Collaborate with Students on Their Learning  
Use Humor and Fun  
Convey Enthusiasm for Subject Matter  
Be Aware of Dynamics of Power & Privilege in the Classroom

### Selected References

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**Additional resources & references:** [www.ilahraleigh.com](http://www.ilahraleigh.com).

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