

Race-Making in Teacher Narratives: Defining Black Educational Access and Opportunity Via the Stories Teachers Tell

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Abstract : In this paper, we provide a preliminary analysis of the stories teachers tell about their Black students in their efforts to make sense of and professionally resolve the underperformance of Black students in their district. The teachers themselves hail from three demographically distinct districts that participate in the state coordinated inter-district school choice system. The districts are Varuna Hills (a pseudonym, as are all other names in this manuscript), a district that serves a predominantly White and affluent community; Newport, a district that serves a socioeconomically diverse but still majority White population; and Aspen, a district in which the student body is predominantly Black and predominantly working to lower middle class. Relying upon teacher focus group interviews in each of these districts which share a common reform context, we show how teachers' everyday and narrative discourse makes meaning of the bodies and achievement of Black students and their families. More specifically, we show that these discourses construct Black students as interlopers, as suffering from extraordinary neediness, and in dire need of proper parenting. Our analysis reveals that there are nuances by which the teachers articulate these discourses with the nuances being a function of how the schools of choice reform context intersects with the demographics of each school and beliefs about the demographics of the schools of choice population. We unpack the racialized and classed nature of these narratives and the implications for teachers' personal practical knowledge.

Keywords : black achievement, educational access and opportunity, race and schooling, teacher knowledge and education

Conference Title : ICETE 2015 : International Conference on Education, Teaching and E-learning

Conference Location : Venice, Italy

Conference Dates : June 22-23, 2015