

Racial and Ethnic Identity Development Case Study*



Ms. Johnson is a first year Montessori teacher in an urban area. She teaches lower elementary in a community in which she is unfamiliar. Although Ms. Johnson has lived in the suburban areas surrounding this community her entire life, she has never crossed to this particular side of the railroad tracks. She is a recent college graduate and is thrilled to have her first teaching job. Ms. Johnson is excited to teach and looks forward to meeting her students. Upon entering her classroom, she realizes that the majority of her students are of African American and Latino descent and Ms. Johnson is White. She assumes that teaching these students will be no different than the students she had as a student teacher in the surrounding suburban areas.

Ms. Johnson had little training on classroom management in her teacher preparation program. There were a few techniques she learned such as “natural consequences” and giving warnings. She used these in her classroom, but soon realized that it would require more tools to effectively manage her classroom.

Now, when students are not meeting classroom expectations, students are sent out of the room. On a regular basis, Ms. Johnson will send 2-3 students out of her room every week. One day, an African-American student, Brian, was having an extremely difficult time meeting classroom expectations. Throughout the day, Brian was off task and required frequent redirection. Eventually, Brian was sent out of the classroom for his misbehavior.

Meanwhile, a White student, Danny, was displaying similar misbehaviors. Danny was regularly off task and distracted other students from their learning. The next week, Brian was sent out of the classroom two more times. Upon re-entry into the classroom, Brian grumbled, “You are racist and only send Black students out of the class. What about Danny? He wasn’t working either!”

Some of the other Black students in the classroom agreed with Brian and said, “yeah” or nodded their heads. Ms. Johnson felt herself getting red and felt flustered. “Get back to work,” she said, and continued teaching.

- **Have you ever been accused of being racist in your classroom?**
- **Have students made comments similar to the one Brian made?**
- **How did you respond? How did this make you feel?**
- **Did you ever notice discrepancies in your classroom management?**
- **Now that this has been pointed out to Ms. Johnson, what should she do?**
- **When students notice instances of race that you may not have noticed, how do you respond? What should you do?**
- **If you are accused of racially patterned behavior, how would you respond?**

*These cases studies are based on real scenarios; identifying details have been changed.