Colombian Teachers’ Expectations of Poor and Black Students’ Ability to Learn Algebra

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Abstract

The study focuses on the ways in which students’ social background and teachers’ expectations interact to shape students’ mathematical experiences at school. From a sociopolitical perspective and using methods and techniques from the qualitative tradition in educational and sociological research, the teaching practices of three teachers implemented to help eighth graders build meaning of algebraic objects were analyzed. The three schools were located in different social and racial contexts.

The findings point out a pronounced relationship between students’ social background and teachers’ expectations. The participating teachers held lower expectations about poor and black students’ ability to learn algebra and adjusted their teaching practices to the perceived students’ abilities. The teachers appealed to cultural and class deficit views to anticipate, explain, and justify the students’ attitudes, behaviors, and mathematics performance. The teachers and students’ interactions were also mediated by these views and as a result, poor and black students were positioned as incapable of developing algebraic thinking.