

The portrayal of teacher bias: Differential interactions with favoured vs unfavoured students

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Teacher bias

Identification of teacher bias

- Teacher expectations
- Implicit bias

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Teacher expectations

Ethnic minority groups (e.g., Tennenbaum & Ruck, 2007)

Indigenous groups (e.g., Turner, Rubie-Davies, & Webber, 2015)

Special needs students (e.g., Ivey, 2007)

English Second Language (e.g., Wedin, 2010)

Boys and girls (e.g., Robinson-Cimpian, Lubienski, & Ganley, 2014)

Predictive effect of teacher expectations

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Implicit bias

Different way of measuring teacher bias

Nascent area

Less susceptible to social desirability responding

Can uncover unconscious bias

Has been identified (e.g., van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010)

Predicts achievement (Peterson, Rubie-Davies, Osborne, & Sibley, 2016)

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Gaps in knowledge

Possible consequences for students (e.g., expulsions, referral to special education)

Characteristics of biased teachers (e.g., Babad, 1989; less positive relationships with students, behavioural differentiation towards students)

Proposed that biased teachers interact negatively with some students. Unknown.

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Study purpose

Through classroom observations of primary and secondary school teachers, identify whether teacher bias towards some student groups can be identified in regular classrooms

Non-verbal behaviours, verbal behaviours, differential reactions to the same situation

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Method

Participants:

- 4 primary school teachers, 4 classrooms
- 6 intermediate school teachers, 6 classrooms
- 10 secondary school teachers, 19 classrooms
- 3 high decile schools, 1 low decile school
- 20 participants in total: 16 female, 4 male
- Ages: 22-60+
- Experience in teaching: 1 to 37+ years
- Ethnicity: Pākehā (12), Pasifika (3), Other European (3), Asian (1) and Middle Eastern (1)

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Method

Observations:

- Mean number of observations per classroom:
 - Primary 4, intermediate 3, secondary 1.9
- Mean length of each observation
 - Primary 45 min, intermediate 45 min, secondary 55 min

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Method

Data collection:

- Participant observations in natural settings
- Non-involvement to the regular flow of the classrooms
- Teachers' verbal and nonverbal behaviours towards students recorded

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Method

Data collection:

- Hand-written field notes on running record sheet including class list with ethnicity, academic achievement and special education needs information,
- No pre-nominations for participant students,
- Teachers' interactions towards all students during the period

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Method

Data analysis:

- Observations transcribed immediately after each observation
- Teachers' verbal and non-verbal behaviours
- Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013) approach to thematic analysis
- Inductive analytic approach, informed by the literature on teachers' biased behaviours


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Method

Data analysis:

- Familiarisation with the data,
- Complete coding,
- Identification of patterns,
- Generating, reviewing and refining themes,
- Re-reviewing themes in relation to student characteristics (gender, ethnicity, achievement, special needs, second language learning)


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Findings

- Teachers' differential behaviours were identified in three broad categories
 - Differential nonverbal behaviours
 - Differential verbal behaviours
 - Differential reactions to different students in the same situations
- Participant teachers seemed to have different (non)favouring patterns that might be categorised based on some student characteristics: ethnicity, achievement, special needs, English second language or gender

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Findings

Differential NV behaviours
included differences in


- Eye contact
- Smiling
- Physical distance
- Tone of voice
- Facial expressions

Differential verbal behaviours
included differences in

- Interactions during instruction
 - Questions
 - Feedback and praise
 - Monitoring progress and needs
- Interactions for behavioral management
- Social interactions

Differential reactions in the same situations

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1. Differential NV behaviours: eye contact

A noteworthy pattern across the data was teachers favouring some students by smiling, making eye contact, interacting more versus showing limited or no interest toward other students.


Diana's Year 8 Class (Female, Other European, Exp. 3 years)
"...Each time the teacher asked a question, she always looked at Scarlett (Pākehā, Average), Mandy (Pākehā, Average), Terry (Pākehā, Above Average) and James (Pākehā, Average) but not at the others. However two Asian boys who sat at the front table raised their hands and when they were given a chance after the Pākehā students, they responded correctly."

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1. Differential NV behaviours: Smiling and eye contact

Jonathan's Year 6 Class (Pākehā, Male, Experience 6 years)
"...At the end of the activity, Nina (Tongan, Girl, Below Average) was asked to join a small group, sitting at a half moon shaped table, that the teacher was going to supervise. She sat between Donna (Middle Eastern, Girl, Below Average) and Edward (Asian, Boy, Average). The other group member Francisco (English/ Pākehā, Boy, Average) was sitting next to Edward. On the straight side of the table, the teacher joined them and sat directly opposite Nina. When the teacher was working with this group, Nina was the only student of the four who kept her eye on the teacher with a tiny smile on her face. But the teacher only made eye contact with her once and he did not smile back at her. The teacher frequently made eye contact with the boys (each time he asked a question or they responded back) and smiled at Francisco after every contact. For the girls, his eye contact was limited. When he asked a question of the girls his gaze was on their notebooks. In contrast to Nina, Donna did not smile at the teacher. She answered all the questions the teacher asked correctly. The teacher responded back saying "correct" but with no warmth or eye contact ..."



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2. Verbal Behaviours: Differential interaction during instruction

Besides the NV behaviours, teachers treated students differently during academic tasks.

For the favoured ones, teachers frequently checked if they were ready, let them answer the questions first and, repeatedly, monitored their progress closely, providing more praise and feedback.

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Nancy's Year 8 Class (Female, Pākehā, Exp. 1 year)
"...When the students were googling "the Internet's influence on kids" for a writing task, the teacher was walking and passing behind the students looking at their screens. She stopped behind Molly (Pākehā, Average) and asked "What does it tell you Molly?" and gave her feedback about what she had read "You don't have to change your idea, it is your argument". Julia (Chinese, Below Average, ESOL) was sitting next to Molly. The teacher did not even look at her screen and did not ask her the same question or give her feedback... After a couple of minutes, the teacher said "Let's have a little talk about what the Internet is telling us?" Molly and Lena (Southeast Asian, Average) raised their hands at the same time. But the teacher did not look at Lena and let Molly answer. Then, she let Karen (Chinese, Well Above Average), Patricia (Pākehā, Average) and then Lena respond..."

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2. Verbal behaviours: Differential interaction during instruction

Another key point was related to limited or delayed interaction with non-favoured students. More likely to be Special needs students.

Carol's Year 9 ESOL Class (Female, Pākehā, Exp. 30 years)

...Then she turned to Sue (Chinese, Average, *good maths skills, language a little weak*) and asked 'Sue do you know what to do?' Then she wrote on Sue's book and added 'This answer is right. And it is better to put an arrow to remind yourself'. Immediately after the teacher turned to Sandra (Chinese, Poor vision, Well Below Average, *Struggling with English*) and asked 'Sandra is that too hard?' Sandra said nothing and the teacher did not explain to her individually and just passed her by. She turned back to Sue again and asked 'Sue are you getting better?' Then she asked her to solve a problem at the board and then commented on her performance 'That was nice and well done' Sandra was ignored....



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2. Verbal Behaviours: differential interaction for behavioural management

The other key category related to teacher bias could be identified during their behavioural management decisions. Teachers treated favoured students differently from non-favoured. They were more likely to warn, threaten or sometimes humiliate the non-favoured students. For instance, in some classes, boys were treated as a small group, and in these classrooms, it was common for teachers to call out "boys" (in a gruff tone) more frequently for behavioural engagement. Especially in primary classes, girls were more likely to be called, "good girl" when they were performing an academic task.

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Samantha's Year 3 Class (Female, Pākehā, Exp. 12 years)

...When the teacher asked the students to follow her instructions carefully and silently, John (Chinese, Below Average) was sitting (in a group circle) not very close to the teacher and not having eye contact with her; he was playing with his workbook. The teacher noticing him said, 'Silent hands' but, he kept on playing with his workbook. Then the teacher in an angry manner, reached his workbook, and shut it (very loudly) and threw the book in front of him. Then she added 'Tidy your arms, leave your pencil and sit on your bottom.'...

Jordan's Year 8 Class (Female, Pākehā, Exp. 3 years)

...in the first half of the period, the 'boys' were warned to be silent, and in the second half, the teacher threatened them by saying 'Slow down if you don't want to be sent to the ESOL place', in a firm and raised tone of voice, no smiling. He kept directly staring at the group for a while as if waiting for the effect of his treatment...

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2. Verbal Behaviours: differential interaction for behavioural management

When teachers warned the favoured students, they were more likely to portray positive nonverbal messages and they were more likely to treat the behaviour as occasional.

Margaret's Year 12 Class (Female, Pākehā, Exp. 35 years)

...Teddy (Tongan, Well Above Average) and Niki (Samoan, Above Average) were sitting together. At the beginning of class time, the teacher decided to make a quiz reading the questions aloud. When the teacher just finished reading the first question, Teddy shouted out the answer. And the teacher with a high but warm tone of voice and a light smile on her face said 'Excuse me!?' and then Niki and Teddy smiled at each other...

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Marta's Year 13 Class (Female, Pākehā, Exp. 12 years)

...an Asian boy was warned firmly for using an electronic device while the teacher was lecturing and told to put it away. Soon after and while the teacher was still explaining at the board, a Pākehā boy's computer made a musical tone in the left front row. Immediately the teacher looked at him smiling. Then the group laughed at the situation and the teacher said 'We've planned it before hah?' and smiled....

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2. Verbal behaviours: Differential interaction for behavioural management

Non-favouring behaviour management decisions often involved warning, criticism and sometimes humiliation accompanied by nonverbal negative cues.

Samantha's Year 3 Class (Female, Pākehā, Exp. 12 years)

...In the last period, when the teacher was instructing the class on the food pyramid, Edward (*Well above average, High Functioning, ESOL, Chinese*) was yawning. The teacher said (to the class): 'Edward is hunting flies'. A student from the class asked 'How does it taste, teacher?' The teacher replied in a firm tone of voice and not smiling 'I don't know, I'm not a frog'. Following this incident, Edward for the first time walked beside the teacher and initiated a conversation. ...he had finished the assignment early and wanted to show it to the teacher. 'I finished M's S' and the teacher said 'Well done, do your math task then.' Edward not giving a response waited silently. Then the teacher said in a directive manner 'Please do not interrupt me, do your math task....'

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2. Verbal Behaviours: Social interactions

Teachers were more likely to have small talks, ask for help, give prestigious duties and have fun together with the favoured students.

Sally's Year 12 Class (Female, Other European, Exp. 37 years)

...She began the class with an announcement and invited four volunteers to help her. The first question was 'Tongan people please raise your hands?' Teddy (*Well Above Average*) and Patrick (*Average, Was the only kid warned for disengagement in this class*) were among those who rose their hands. These two were sitting together... Then the teacher explained there would be a dinner invitation that their school was invited to host. And the host students were expected to join in their neat and tidy school uniforms and they were expected to be social. While she was explaining, her gaze was mostly on Teddy. Then the teacher chose four students (3 girls 1 boy) including Teddy but excluding Patrick. Her last question was 'So we are now two Tongans and two Samoans. Is this fine for everyone?' The group in a low voice said 'O kay'...

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3. Different reactions to the same behaviour

Teachers seemed to react to the same behaviour differently based on who was the actor.

Jane's Year 8 Class (Female, Pākehā, Exp. 1 years)

...She interacted with Kevin (Southeast Asian, Autism, Average) only once during the period. It was when he was playing with his pencil at his desk opposite to the teacher's seat. While working with the others, teacher stopped and warned him, 'Stop making that noise'. However at the same time and following her warning to Kevin, Fred (Pākehā, Above Average), who was in the small group of three that the teacher was working with, was also making a similar sound with his pen continuously. It was not loud but it was in a repeated fashion and could be heard by the teacher because Fred was sitting just opposite the teacher at the same table. Kevin was sitting further away, behind Fred at his own desk...

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3. Different reactions to the same behaviour

Carol's Year 9 ESOL Class (Female, Pākehā, Exp. 35 years)

"...at the beginning of the period Lex (Boy, Chinese, Average, Teacher's comment: *Attitude lets him down*) was late and the teacher with a serious face asked him, 'Where were you? Why are you late?'. Without waiting for a response, firmly she showed him where to sit and added: 'You will sit here'. Soon after, Luna (Girl, Chinese, Very Well Above Average, Teacher's comment: *Maths and language skills well developed*) entered the class. The teacher did not ask Luna why she was late or where she was. Instead, she just said 'You're wet' and smiled at her."

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Conclusion

Teacher differential behaviours were evident in every classroom
Teachers portrayed bias through:

- differential nonverbal messages
- differential instructional practices and behavioural management decisions,
- differential reactions in the same situations

Who was unfavoured varied by teacher (ethnicity, gender, special needs etc.)

In some classes, there were favoured and groups teachers were indifferent towards

In some classes both unfavoured and favoured students were evident

For some secondary teachers, bias could be observed through their differential interactions with different classes

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Thank you!!