



*Disproportionate discipline – what if it's less about race than religion?*

Besides the obvious lesson of the tremendous power of non-violence to change hearts and minds - and public policy - there was another lesson to be learned at Mother Emmanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina. It's one that could be especially helpful to educators who are addressing disproportionate referrals of African American students.

Activity:

1) Watch a three minute segment of [President Obama's eulogy](#) for Reverend Pinckney, one of nine church members murdered. Start at 15:50.

2) Knowing that people in attendance were among the most highly respected clergy in the country, the occasion was one of the most solemn, the speaker held the highest office in the land, count how many times clergy and members of the congregation:

- call out of turn
- stand up
- clap, stomp, or shout

Reflection & Discussion

1) How many participants called out without being called on? How many stood up and stomped or shouted out, whenever they felt moved to? How is their behavior similar to what frequently lands African American school students in detention?

2) Would you agree that, far from being disrespectful, attention of participants at Reverend Pinkney's funeral was riveted? That the response was whole-hearted, emotionally expressive and fully embodied?

3) If this behavior happened while you were speaking in your classroom or school, how would you label it? Disruptive? Defiant? Or Attentive? Engaged?

4) Now consider if this funeral service were in a Presbyterian Church for members of that congregation. In a Buddhist temple? A Catholic Church? A Muslim Mosque? A Jewish temple? Which group's religious style might be the best match for the behavior expected in your school environment? How do school discipline practices support or contradict that kind of cultural learning?

Summary

As we grow increasingly diverse as a society, we educators need to deepen our awareness of how external factors like culture and religious traditions shape students' behaviors, our own expectations, and school culture. This short exercise can be a productive conversation starter for professional development in a PLC or staff meeting setting. Please continue this reflection and discussion and share it with your colleagues and students in the weeks ahead.

