1.

In my elementary school, teachers had an obvious preference for white children over children of any other race. The school that I attended for elementary school, being a conservative protestant school, held in high regard white children from WASP backgrounds. This demographic only made up about 30% of all students, but the high expectations that were imposed upon them by teachers was strikingly different from the rest of the racially and ethnically diverse students. There were several possible sources for the teachers’ high expectations for white children. White children that attended my school (a private international school in Japan) almost always came from high SES backgrounds. The role that race and ethnic identifiers played in the creation of high performance expectations for white children goes without saying. Oral language patterns also had a great deal to do with teachers’ expectations, for in the school students were expected to speak formal English as used in academia, but the only children capable of speaking fluent, unflawed formal English were those who were from white families whose parents spoke in that manner. These factors and many more contributed to the establishment of high expectations and high standards for white children, which naturally induced them to push themselves and work hard towards meeting those expectations. In addition, since the white children were predominantly Christian, as was the faculty, they tended to be better behaved and more docile and accepting of the values and religious doctrine that teachers were constantly trying to entrench in the students. The outcome of these expectations on white children was that white children grew more and more closer to the stereotypical model of a WASP, and their individuality seemed to wane in the process.

I wrote earlier that in elementary school the highest teacher expectations were placed on the white kids. This carried on in middle school, but in middle school the kind of expectations placed on white children became less academic and gravitated more towards the behavioral. Instead, a new class of students were expected to excel in academics, and this class was the wealthy Asians. Many things, including but not limited to SES, readiness (Asian students usually had an abundance of academic and educational experience outside of school), and halo effect (because of rich experience in studies and academics, they performed well on tests) contributed to the high expectations that were placed upon wealthy Asian students by their teachers. Moreover, the profound effect that racial and ethnic identifiers had on teachers’ expectations must not be dismissed. Following the stereotype of Asian students, the rich Asians in my school were expected to perform well in mathematics and the sciences, and almost all of them were placed in advanced science/math programs. This is especially remarkable given that in the Japanese high school I attended, where the vast majority (close to 100%) of students were Asian, there were very few students as good at mathematics and science as the Asian students from my middle school. This indicates that such skills are not hereditary or racial but are a product of the social environment. The rich Asian kids were fulfilling the roles imposed on them by the culture of the school and the students. Ultimately, this resulted in their academic success, with many of them getting deeply involved in advanced scientific studies and disciplines and moving on to prestigious research facilities.

2.

In high school there was a group of female rebels in my grade that were constantly challenging the rules of the school and teachers’ authority. Their every move was characterized by a lack of conformity and complete disregard for the entire school system. The social dynamic that governed their lives was quite simple: might makes right. They frequently skipped school, boycotted classes and opposed every teacher who confronted them by violently lashing out and carrying out physical and verbal attacks against teachers and fellow students. Naturally, they held an acute feeling of contempt for the school and possessed a counter-school culture of their own, where they rewarded each other for deliberate acts of defiance. Teachers held them in very low regard but didn’t dare accost them directly for their misdemeanors. It was obvious that the teachers did not expect the students to succeed academically, and their actions made this quite clear. They didn’t bother to enforce rules surrounding deadlines or urge the students from the group to turn in assignments and participate. The group members spoke extensively about their sexual interactions. Teachers would occasionally join to hear them boast about their numerous affairs, and they would always proceed to talk about finding the right husband. The teachers didn’t expect the girls to go to school and land a stable job but presupposed that they will be living dependent on their lovers. This suggests that sex was a contributing factor to the low academic expectations placed on the girls. Furthermore, negative comments about the children from both teachers and students seem to plant an unpleasant image of the group in the eyes of new teachers or teachers not directly acquainted with the students, prompting them to set their expectations very low. Readiness was also an observable source of low expectations. The group of girls, having been adamantly against school and education in their earlier years of high school, were completely forsaken by the teachers in senior year when all the students were starting to look for universities and other places of education to move on to after graduating high school. The teachers, judging by their academic record, decided that the students would never find even marginal success academically and abstained from providing the support and encouragement necessary for getting into university. From what I know, none of these students entered university and many of them work now. It’s doubtful that teachers’ expectations had nothing to do with this outcome.

Going back a bit to middle school, teachers had very low expectations for non-native English speakers and students who spoke broken English, slang English or other variations of the English language that deviate even slightly from the “proper” form of English accepted by the school. The source for this lack of expectations is to be found in the oral patterns of the students, to an extent racial and ethnic identifiers, and readiness. The oral patterns of the students worked against them since the school only accepted a very formal kind of speech and regarded anything else as wrong and in need of improvement. Racial and ethnic identifiers also played a part in that white children who didn’t speak fluent English were often not regarded in the same way as non-white children with flawed English. Readiness was also a factor because students who spoke proper English without any trouble usually had very American or western educational background, while other children did not have that. The expectations that the teachers had for the students was reflected in how non-English students constantly under performed in Language Arts and distanced themselves from books and academic disciplines that dealt primarily with language. (1166 words)