

## Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

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### Summary and Keywords

Classroom management remains a serious concern for educators in both pre-service and in-service realms. A mostly white teaching force may struggle to teach students who are very different from themselves. These differences can make it difficult for teachers to understand cultural differences and conflicts as they emerge in the classroom, and students may suffer. Culturally responsive classroom management provides a framework for educators to build knowledge, mindsets, attitudes, dispositions, and practices necessary for academic and social success. Elements of classroom management to advance and support teaching practices that meet the needs of students are worthwhile to explore.

Keywords: culture, teaching, classroom management, learning, equity

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### Introduction

The construct, culturally responsive classroom management, is relatively new. A search of databases with the words “culturally responsive classroom management” yielded a total of 23 scholarly articles. While the connected construct culturally responsive classroom management had not been coupled until around 2003, researchers have examined issues of culture, responsiveness, and classroom management for many years. In this article, I focus on core themes and perspectives related to culturally responsive classroom management. I pay special attention to what I refer to as justice-centered issues throughout this article because of the following realities related to classroom management: (a) the disproportionate office referrals of students of color, those with learning differences, and those who live below the poverty line (Skiba et al., 2011; Girvan, Gion, McIntosh, & Smolkowski, 2017); (b) the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of these students (US Department of Education, 2016); (c) the lack of effective educational and learning experiences for teachers to understand and respond to the needs of their students (Milner, 2015); and (d) the low percentages of Black and Brown students referred to gifted and talented programs and the over-referral of Black and Brown students and those living below the poverty line to special education (Artiles, Klingner, & Tate, 2006).

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In addition to centering justice, I focus explicitly on issues of equity as they relate to classroom management. The idea of equity is that rather than receiving the exact same resources, practices, and interactions that can be conceptualized through an equality lens, students receive what they need as individuals to be successful in a classroom environment. Equity means developing environments and systems in ways that provide students with what they need based on careful and systematic attention to the particulars of their situation whereas equality is providing them with the same, standardized set of resources regardless of circumstances. Understanding culturally responsive classroom management requires that readers understand how practices must be equitable and attentive to the particulars of the context. This means, put simply, that practices cannot be developed and enacted synonymously across contexts, but should be based on the situational realities of the learning environment. In short, we should be working toward equitable practices that support student learning and student diversity.

In addition, it is important to note that homogenous communities do not exist, and schools must be acutely aware of and committed to teaching *with* the students in ways that are visible to them (Milner, 2010). In other words, students bring a broad wealth of knowledge, experiences, insights, perspectives, and learning opportunities into a classroom from which others must learn. In this way, teachers are not the only, nor the main, arbiters of knowledge (McCutcheon, 2002; Milner, 2007). Students are the experts of their experiences and should be placed at the center of teaching and learning practices in a classroom.

Student diversity is indeed intensifying within the US context and students' life experiences and cultural practices are diverse as well. Student diversity includes, for instance, race, socioeconomic status (SES), gender identity, and sexual orientation. Students' varied experiences and cultural practices include their religious practices, domestic and international travel, music and videogame engagement, and social media moves. These matters—in understanding students—are essential aspects of classroom management.

The convergence of classroom management and broad issues of diversity shape this article. These are two aspects of teaching that are repeatedly named as areas of concern among teachers, and especially new teachers (Melnick & Meister, 2008; Milner, 2006; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Monroe, 2006). The social context of teachers' work—that is, the type of learning environment in which they teach—also can serve as a critical area of concern for teachers. Consequently, teacher concerns about classroom management are sometimes exacerbated in urban settings, where students' languages, experiences, preferences, ethnicities, religions, and abilities may be highly diverse and may or may not be shared by the teacher (Milner, 2010). Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran (2004) reminded us that “the literature on classroom management has paid scant attention to issues of cultural diversity” (p. 26), and the literature on diversity has focused limited attention on classroom management. Our stance is that issues of classroom management, assessment, instruction, learning, and diversity are almost inseparable and should accordingly be considered in convergence.

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Three salient trends emerge in the literature that are essential for readers of this article to ponder:

1. the terms and constructs used to elucidate, study, and conceptualize classroom management and diversity vary;
2. the populations—that is, the racial and ethnic identities of students studied in this literature—extend beyond Black and White to include a range of culturally and racially diverse students; and
3. the contexts—that is, the locations in which these studies of classroom management and diversity take place—vary.

In regard to the terms and constructs employed in these studies, Monroe (2006) conceptualized a “discipline gap” (p. 164) in her discussion of classroom management and diversity. Moreover, she stressed the need for teachers to develop “culturally specific disciplinary techniques” (p. 165), particularly with culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Hammond, Dupoux, and Ingalls (2004) conceptualized what they called “culturally relevant classroom management strategies” (p. 3), while Weinstein, Curran, and Tomlinson-Clarke (2003) termed their construct “culturally responsive classroom management” (p. 269).

Regarding an emphasis on populations (the people), the Hammond et al. (2004) study focused on American Indian students, and researchers have attempted to capture effective classroom management strategies with Navajo middle school students (McCarthy & Bernally, 2003), as well as American and Korean students (Shin & Koh, 2007). It is important to note that I am strongly against a paradigm that would suggest that a particular strategy is more or less effective with any particular group of students. For instance, I do not believe that teachers should adopt a particular classroom management strategy based on the geography of their students, race or ethnicity of a student, or socioeconomic background. I have sometimes been asked by teachers and principals to provide them “a list” of characteristics of particular groups of students so that teachers are able to develop a generalizable list of stereotypes about students to inform their practice. I believe this is the absolute wrong approach to classroom management and effective teaching in general. Thus, I am hopeful that teachers and educators will read this article and learn about strategies that may be transferable to their practices in diverse spaces based on what they know, come to understand, and are able to learn in their particular locale with their particular students. Environments studied with a focus on classroom management include urban schools (Shin & Koh, 2007) and highly diverse settings (Milner, 2008). Researchers have also examined classroom management techniques in prisons with incarcerated adult students (Shobe, 2003).

# Referral Practices, Congruence and Dissonance, and Systemic Barriers

I am suggesting that practices in the classroom should be anchored to increase students' opportunities to learn. I do not believe that student learning should be approached as static; in addition, what students learn should not be developed in isolation. I hope readers develop in communion with their students, communities, families, and colleagues a set of learning opportunities in a classroom that creates a culture for students to grow. Thus, teachers should create the conditions for learning to take place, serve as facilitators who pose good questions, and get out of students' way in the process of their development and learning. Creating such spaces of learning—where students are able to build their learning identity—means that educators understand (1) punishment referral patterns; (2) teacher and student congruence and dissonance; and (3) institutional and systemic barriers. I focus on these three themes from the literature because they offer an expanded, well-conceptualized link between and among the varying systems at play when addressing classroom management. In other words, transforming practices for the benefit of students requires microlevel shifts (such as those that teachers can change in punishing students) as well as macrolevel changes (such as the elimination of zero-tolerance policies).

## Punishment Referral Patterns

I am using the language of *punishment* referral patterns instead of *disciplinary* referral to stress the important point that discipline and punishment are not the same (Duncan-Andrade, 2016). I am not suggesting that teachers should not be concerned about and committed to helping students develop strong disciplinary orientations. The point is that the way in which students are punished needs radical shifting, as the practices are not helping but hurting students.

The findings in the literature are straightforward; most punishment referrals originate in the classroom and more often than not the referrals are for students of color and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The literature suggests that there are some inconsistencies between the rules or the culture of power (Delpit, 1995) and some students' behaviors. Consequences of punishment referrals are reduced access and opportunities to learn. In other words, as students are being pushed out (Morris, 2016) of the classroom, they are not experiencing what could be learning opportunities. Davis and Jordan (1994), for instance, found a direct connection between and among classroom management, the curriculum, and instruction.

Davis and Jordan analyzed data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 administered by the National Center for Educational Statistics. The researchers employed a two-stage, stratified, random sample of 25,000 eighth graders in 1,000 schools across the country. Davis and Jordan reported a connection between discipline, classroom management, and Black male achievement in middle schools. The researchers explained that “the time teachers spend handling disciplinary problems is time taken away from

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instruction” (p. 585), and students’ achievement suffers. Instead of spending time on instruction, teachers spend much of their time attempting to punish and “control students.” Clearly, when students are not in the classroom because of practices that push them out of the classroom, such as (in school) suspension and expulsion, students suffer academically.

In another study, Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) analyzed disciplinary records of 11,001 students in 19 middle schools in a large, urban Midwestern public school district during the 1994–1995 school year. Skiba et al. (2002) reported a “differential pattern of treatment, originating at the classroom level, wherein African American students are referred to the office for infractions that are more subjective in interpretation” (p. 317). In other words, if an African American student “talks back” or “mouths off” to a teacher, the teacher may interpret this behavior as “disrespectful” or “rude,” which is a subjective interpretation. The student may be behaving in this way due to peer pressure—not wanting friends to see him or her as weak. Disrespect or malice may not be the impetus for the student’s actions. Rather, the student may be trying to “survive” and not engender ridicule from his or her classmates. But the behavior can be interpreted in a way that warrants punishment.

Another example of how teachers’ subjective interpretations can result in students’ punishment referral occurs when a Latinx student jokes with a teacher after the teacher has attempted to correct some behavior; the teacher may misinterpret that behavior as being defiant or rude. The student, however, may use a joke at home with his or her parents to show that “there are no hard feelings” on this student’s part. The teacher may find such behavior unacceptable and inexcusable—thus, an inaccurate interpretation is applied in the situation, and ultimately the student suffers negative repercussions. Teachers and students do not always ascribe the same meanings and intentions to student behavior, and this inconsistency can contribute to the alarming punishment referral patterns discussed herein. Of central importance is what happens when teachers get it wrong. In other words, how do we create spaces where students and teachers learn and develop over time together in order to construct the kinds of learning communities that propel all in the community to be whole and to reach their full capacity (students and teachers alike)?

The Skiba et al. (2002) study pointed out that students of color, and particularly African American students, overwhelmingly received harsher punishments for the same behaviors and actions as their White counterparts. As an example, the authors described a fistfight at a high school football game in Decatur, Illinois, that resulted in the superintendent’s recommendation that all seven of the African American students involved be expelled from school for two years. Apparently, in the same district, weapons were used in a fight involving White students, and a less severe punishment was imposed upon those students. Skiba et al. (2002) explained that

Fear may . . . contribute to over-referral. Teachers who are prone to accepting stereotypes of adolescent African American males as threatening or dangerous

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may overreact to relatively minor threats to authority, especially if their anxiety is paired with a misunderstanding of cultural norms of social interaction. (p. 336)

Similarly, Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) reported the findings of two studies in two Midwestern cities. One study was conducted across several middle schools, and the other in a single school. The researchers analyzed archival disciplinary referral data in order to determine the reasons reported for referrals, the circumstances under which the decision was made, the various disciplinary responses, and the rate of suspension, in addition to other issues surrounding the disciplinary incident. In both studies, the results revealed that office referrals were not a consequence of a threat to safety but “those that indicate noncompliance [insubordination] or disrespect. . . about 40% of all students receive at least one office referral in the middle school during the school year” (p. 295). Moreover, these two studies (as reported by Skiba et al., 1997) showed a pattern of disproportionality “in the administration of school discipline based on race, SES, gender and disability” (Skiba et al., p. 295).

Students were not referred because they caused a threat to themselves, the teacher, or their classmates. This point is not to suggest that when students are not causing harm or threat to safety that they are not jeopardizing learning opportunities in the classroom. An important point is so much of the punishment referral is a consequence of noncompliance—students not following rules such as dress code violations. Teachers may readily resort to office referrals for matters that they can (and should) be able to handle in the classroom without denying students’ access to learning opportunities because, again, when students are not in the classroom, they are missing important learning opportunities that will undoubtedly influence their academic performance. And the teacher may precipitate the misbehavior. Too often students are looked upon as the sole problem when teachers actually contribute to the conflicts that occur in the classroom; consequently, punishment referrals persist. When will we rethink and reimagine who “controls” and “owns” the classroom space?

Skiba et al. (1997) summed up their findings, suggesting the following:

Both of the current studies found overrepresentation of low SES students, males, and special education students in terms of both school referrals and rate of suspension . . . even in a district with a high proportion of African American students, African Americans were referred to the office significantly more frequently than other ethnic groups. . . these data provide further evidence of disproportionality in the administration of school discipline [punishment] based on race, SES, gender, and disability, and raise serious concerns about the use of exclusionary discipline at the middle school level. (pp. 313–314)

In discussing practices in schools, Noguera (2003) described an incredible link between punishment referral practices and those of the broader society, which leads to incarceration of many Black and Brown bodies:

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disciplinary practices in schools often bear a striking similarity to the strategies used to punish adults in society. Typically, schools rely on some form of exclusion or ostracism to control the behavior of students . . . the assumption is that safety and order can be achieved by removing “bad” individuals and keeping them away from others who are presumed to be “good” and law abiding. Not surprisingly, *those most frequently targeted for punishment in school often look—in terms of race, gender, and socioeconomic status—a lot like smaller versions of the adults who are most likely to be targeted for incarceration in society* (emphasis added).

(Noguera, 2003, pp. 342–343)

At the core of many of the conflicts that emerge in the classroom and that often result in “prison-like” consequences for students appears to be tensions, incongruence, mismatches, and disconnections between teachers and students—the focus of the next section of this article.

### Teacher and Student Congruence and Dissonance

A second theme that emerged from our review was the centrality of relationships between teachers and students. Clearly, teacher–student relationships were outlined in the research literature as one of the most essential elements to classroom cultures that promote student learning (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010). Teacher–student disconnections have been cited as a major reason for many conflicts that surface in the classroom (Irvine, 2003). Such conflicts are often couched in misinterpretations that seem to be shaped by the socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and ethnic inconsistencies that may exist between teachers and students. For instance, the demographic divide rationale is present in the literature that attempts to explain some of the complexities inherent in the teaching and learning process (Gay & Howard, 2000; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). These demographic divide data include gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background. In terms of race, teachers are predominantly White and students are increasingly non-White (they are more racially and ethnically diverse than ever in the past).

Figure 1 details percentage distribution of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools, by race and ethnicity in fall 2002, fall 2012, and fall 2014.

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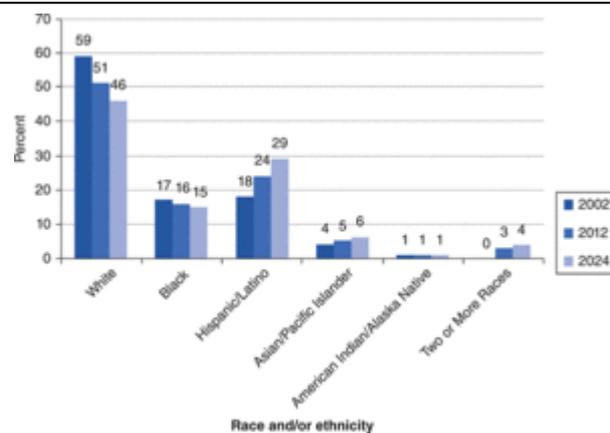


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools, by race and ethnicity. Adapted from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), *The Conditions of Education 2015*. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Prior to 2008, separate data on students of two or more races were not collected. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Data from 2014 are projected.

Figure 2 captures the teaching racial demography. While not a direct correlation between student racial demography and teachers', these data point to the fact that teachers remain largely White while student diversity increases.

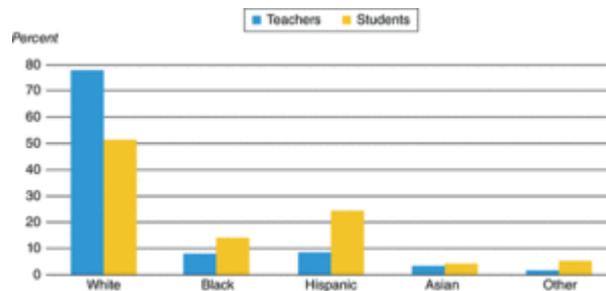


Figure 2. How does teacher diversity compare with student diversity? Adapted from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," 2002-2003 and 2012-2013; and National Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Projection Model, 1972 through 2014. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2014*, table 203.50.

Because White teachers and students of color possess different racialized and cultural experiences (Milner, 2015), incongruence may serve as a roadblock for academic and social success (Irvine, 2003). However, as Gay (2000) explained, "similar [race and] ethnicity between students and teachers may be potentially beneficial, but it is not a guarantee of pedagogical effectiveness" (p. 205), and I am not arguing a guarantee of classroom man-

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agement effectiveness. Demographic inconsistencies between teachers and students should not be used as an excuse for ineffective or inequitable classroom management policies, decisions, and practices. Indeed, teachers from any and all ethnic, cultural, or racial backgrounds can and should strive to be successful teachers with any and all groups of students. When teachers possess (or have the skills and opportunities to acquire) the knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, beliefs, and skills necessary to meet the needs of and be responsive to their students, equitable classroom management and learning opportunities for all students are possible. But teachers still must be mindful of the ways in which their race, racialized backgrounds, and racial experiences can influence their practices and connections with students who may be racially and ethnically different from them.

Teachers play enormous roles in how students conduct themselves in classrooms. In her ethnographic study of 31 culturally diverse students identified by the school as potential dropouts, Schlosser (1992) discovered that teachers must avoid distancing themselves from their students by developing knowledge about the students' home lives and cultural backgrounds and by developing knowledge about adolescents' developmental needs. In her words, "the behaviors of marginal students are purposive acts . . . their behaviors are constructed on the basis of their interpretation of school life . . . relationships with teachers are a key factor" (p. 137). Moreover, as Noguera (2003) declared:

Students who get into trouble frequently are typically not passive victims; many of them understand that the consequences for violating school rules can be severe, particularly as they grow older. However, as they internalize the labels that have been affixed to them, and as they begin to realize that the trajectory their education has placed them on is leading to nowhere, many simply lose the incentive to adhere to school norms. (p. 343)

Understanding teacher-student congruence and incongruence allows teachers opportunities to empathize (not sympathize) with their students and attempt to understand them. Teachers' not giving up on students, regardless of their "misbehavior," is very important. As Schlosser (1992) and Noguera remind us, the relationships teachers and others in schools establish with students to bridge disconnections are central to academic and social success not only in the classroom but also in the larger school community as well. Students recognize when there is unnecessary distance between themselves and their teachers, and such disconnections shape students' actions. The students often question: "Why should I adhere to this teacher's expectations when she or he does not really care about me?" In this respect, students see their misbehavior as a way to distance themselves from uncaring and disrespectful teachers, and the cycle seems to continue in spite of teachers' desires.

Centering issues of racial incongruence are essential as subconsciously or implicitly teachers may make decisions that can have negative influences on students. Grossman (1995) explained that

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teachers praise African-American students less and criticize them more than European American students. The praise they give them is more likely to be routine, rather than feedback for a particular achievement or behavior. And when teachers praise them for specific behavior, it is more likely to be qualified (“Your work is almost good enough to be put on the board”) or, in the case of females, more likely to be for good behavior than for academic work. (p. 142)

Teachers may exhibit less than ideal practices when working with students in urban classrooms because they are not aware of their implicit pedagogical, curricular, assessment, and management decisions. Because teachers typically have good intentions, the differential treatment that teachers display is located in their subconscious, and they are not able to critically examine these conceptions and consequently behaviors because they are not necessarily aware that they exist.

Because many teachers adopt color-blind ideologies in their work with students, pretending that they do not “see” or recognize race, these teachers are missing important features and dimensions of students’ identity. As a result, teachers are attempting to co-develop learning communities populated with students who the teachers perceive in fragmented, disconnected, and incomplete ways. In other words, teachers are not seeing the whole humanity or lived experiences of their students when they adopt color-blind orientations to their practice. As an example, teachers who adopt color-blind ideologies may fail to recognize “ignored discriminatory institutional practices toward students of color such as higher suspension rates for African American males” (Johnson, 2002, p. 154).

Obidah and Teel (2001) described cultural and racial (behavioral) conflicts between the White teacher and researcher (Teel) and the students of color, mainly Black students. Initially, Teel characterized the student behavior in her urban classroom as

unfamiliar expressions; the need to save face in front of peers; a demand for respect from peers and the teacher; vocal and honest expressions of dissatisfaction with the class; and a tendency to test [Teel] as a person of authority. (p. 48)

After engaging in critical, reflective, and meaningful dialogues with her colleague, Obidah, the Black teacher and researcher, Teel began to rethink her beliefs about the students in her classes. The researchers, and particularly the White researcher, began to realize that the problem was not with the students but mostly with her as the instructor. Obidah was able to help Teel examine some of her management and curricular decisions. For instance, Obidah explained some of the racial and cultural tensions embedded in some of Teel’s instructional activities. Obidah was able to also help Teel think deeply about her connections with students and why such connections with the African American students seemed so profound. Ultimately, Teel changed her expectations and management: Teel explained that she began to really listen to her students; she negotiated and redefined inappropriate behavior; and she learned to investigate the root causes for disruptions. Instead of thinking that she already had everything figured out, Teel actually listened to her students’ perspectives on issues, and she worked to change some of her own decisions and practices rather than assuming that the tensions that emerged in the class-

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room were a direct result of her students' misbehavior. It was only after Teel began to negotiate and balance some of her authority and ways of knowing that her relationship with students improved. Clearly, teachers being knowledgeable about themselves and their students can serve as a foundation for building connections. In addition to the theme of congruence and incongruence between teachers and students as a cause for conflicts in the classroom, a third theme that emerged from our review was the salience of institutional and systemic barriers.

### Institutional and Systemic Barriers

Understanding the complexities of issues of justice, equity, and diversity as they relate to classroom management must involve examining the ways in which structural and systemic—the macro—influence what happens in classrooms. Institutional and systemic barriers can make it difficult for teachers to demonstrate their care for and to connect with students. Teachers are sometimes being pressured and closely monitored by their administrators to follow a set frame of referral, discipline, and management approaches, which can make it difficult for teachers to employ and enact the kinds of practices that support students into maximizing their capacity. For instance, teachers can experience less than ideal support from administrators; consequently, their students may believe that the teachers “forget to care” about them. In reality, teachers may be negotiating “structural conditions within the school, such as tracking and high teacher turnover, that preclude caring relationships with students” (Katz, 1999, p. 809) or teachers appear more concerned about their students' test scores than the students themselves (Milner, 2012).

Ennis (1996) examined issues of confrontation and classroom management of 10 urban high schools that enrolled approximately 110,000 students from lower- to middle-class families. Her findings revealed some possible outcomes when teachers felt unsupported by their administrators. Ennis discovered that some 50% of the teachers in the study reported that they did not teach certain content topics “because of the confrontations that such topics generate with specific students” (p. 145). Because these teachers did not want to experience conflict in their classrooms, students were denied access to certain aspects of the curriculum. Teachers in the study avoided teaching content that “they believed students were disinterested in learning . . . students refused to learn or to participate in learning, or . . . [curriculum that] generated discussions that the teachers felt unprepared to moderate” (p. 146). The teachers in the study were, in a sense, granting students permission to fail (Ladson-Billings, 2002), mainly because the teachers did not possess the knowledge, skills, and ability to acquire the skills to build the kinds of relationships with students that centered a diverse curriculum. Teachers in Ennis' study reported that a lack of administrative support was a central cause and concern for their avoidance of certain curriculum topics. The teachers did not feel supported and adopted survival mechanisms to essentially get through the day.

In such classrooms, teachers gave information (Haberman, 1991), and students have little (if any) voice and perspective in the learning environment. This approach can result in a vicious cycle that is tantamount to Freire's (1998) notion that students are often passive

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participants in their own learning, with teachers constantly attempting to pour knowledge or information into “empty vessels.” Haberman (1991) explained that student resistance takes many forms—students sometimes interrupt lessons with jokes, feign illness to be removed from the class or excused from assignments, and disagree with teachers just for the sake of disagreement.

The systemic and institutionalized nature of teachers’ work in urban and diverse schools seems to follow several layers. The administration, taking their cues from the superintendent who is interpreting national and state guidelines, for instance, has a set of policies and expectations about how teachers’ classes ought to run (e.g., quietly, orderly), which creates a dilemma for teachers. Optimal learning often occurs without students seated in silence. Teachers, in turn, in their attempts to meet institutional expectations, develop and implement management strategies that reify systems of oppression and voicelessness among students. Students, in turn, resist these systemic parameters, and chaos, disconnections, and (mis)management result. The desire for order and control (Noguera, 2003) on the classroom level can be connected to teachers’ goals to improve test scores. Teachers prepare students to follow directions and to “obey” orders for the world of work (Anyon, 1980). These decisions can be motivated and shaped by institutional and systemic pressures far beyond teachers’ control.

With discussion established of three interrelated themes as essential for understanding classroom management from the empirical literature to inform practice (punishment referral patterns, teacher and student congruence and dissonance, and institutional and systemic barriers), the discussion shifts to some conceptual framing of this article. I next define and discuss notions of culturally responsive teaching and what is known in the literature as culturally responsive classroom management.

## Classroom Management Is About Being Culturally Responsive

Grossman (1995) maintained that “classroom management techniques that are designed by White-American middle-class teachers for White-American middle-class students do not meet the needs of many non-middle-class non-European American students” (p. xvii). Moreover, Weinstein et al. (2004) explained that “definitions and expectations of appropriate behavior are culturally influenced, and conflicts are likely to occur when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds” (p. 26). Thus, classroom management is about teachers’ ability to develop culturally responsive practices that speak to the very humanity of students. Culturally responsive practices insist that teachers think carefully and deliberately about what they are teaching, why they are teaching the content, and how they are teaching in a sociopolitical context (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Milner, 2010). Such deep introspections about the what, the why, and the how allow teachers to keep students at the center of the work. Culturally responsive practices insist that teachers understand and draw on the cultural assets and vantage points of students, families, and communities. In short, culturally responsive practices stress that teachers *study their*

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*students* (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and use students' experiences as *cultural data sets* as they model instructional moves (Lee, 2007) to maximize students' opportunities to learn (Milner, 2010). A central dimension of culturally responsive practices is that of instruction. To be clear, when students experience instructional and learning opportunities that align with their interests and intellect, teachers tend not to have to worry about classroom management in the traditional sense.

Gay (2010) explained culturally responsive teaching as

Using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. [Culturally responsive instruction] teaches to and through the strengths of these students . . . [it] is the behavioral expressions of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning. (p. 31)

Culturally responsive teaching situates culture as central, not tangential to the teaching and learning exchange (Howard, 2010; Irvine, 2003; Milner, 2010). It allows students to see themselves as central to how the classroom operates, and it provides students opportunities to participate in the learning environment. Thus, I am stressing that an important aspect of effective classroom management is about teachers' capacity to understand and enact culturally responsive practices—especially teaching—in the classroom.

In framing the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, Gay outlined several conventions: (1) culture counts—in this way, the idea that culture should be viewed as an asset and complementary to the educational process is essential; (2) conventional reform is inadequate—Gay stressed that current efforts to reform schools have been underwhelming in terms of improvements for some of our most vulnerable students in schools. Thus, radical instructional reform (Milner, 2013) is necessary; (3) intention without action is insufficient—there is a strong practice, action, and implementation aspect to the ways in which Gay framed cultural responsiveness; (4) strength and vitality of cultural diversity—the idea is that there is important value in diversity: “cultural diversity is a strength—a persistent, vitalizing force in our personal and civic lives” (Gay, 2010, p. 15); and (5) test scores and grades are symptoms, not causes, of achievement problems—centralizing the reality that culturally responsive pedagogical approaches pose the kinds of questions that address underlying reasons for challenges students face and not look at test scores and grades as the only, nor the main datapoint in understanding and responding to student challenges.

Six tenets shape culturally responsive teaching, according to Gay (2010). These principles have real implications for the ways in which teachers should think about classroom management, especially in underserved schools and communities:

- Culturally responsive teaching is validating: These pedagogical moves affirm and acknowledge the cultural backgrounds, experiences, worldviews, ideas, ideals, and values of students and their families. Validation also means that teachers understand and

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merge outside of school realities with those inside of school and work *with* not against student preferences and interests. A central feature of validation is drawing from the assets and strengths of the communities of students. Drawing from the expertise of students and their families sends a real message to students about who matters in the space.

- Culturally responsive teaching is comprehensive: This approach and practice to teaching takes a holistic view of student learning and development. Teachers understand and attempt to build on and respond to students' "social, emotional, and political learning by using cultural resources to teach knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes" (p. 32). In other words, teachers need to understand that they are teaching complex, multifaceted beings and that must be understood fully in order to respond to and, as Paris (2012) would argue, sustain them.
- Culturally responsive teaching is multidimensional: Teachers understand that a range of their work has to be designed and redirected to address the multiple modalities of student learning. Teachers understand that responsiveness not only involves a rethinking and reformation of instructional practices but also shifts in cultural-centered "curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, classroom management, and performance assessments" (p. 33).
- Culturally responsive teaching is empowering: This approach and stance of teaching enables students to maximize their potential and to work toward excellence personally and with the community. It pushes students to excel. In many ways, this approach "grants" students permission to succeed (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and to reach their full capacity.
- Culturally responsive teaching is transformative: Instructional practices that are culturally responsive help students see themselves as community contributors—as change agents—capable of helping to improve the ethos of their experience inside and outside of school. For example, students are taught to "analyze the effects of inequities on different ethnic individuals and groups, have zero tolerance for these, and become change agents committed to promoting greater equality, justice, and power balances" (Gay, 2010, p. 37).
- Culturally responsive teaching is emancipatory: This stance of teaching facilitates a liberatory process of learning and development of students where they recognize the power of education and learning beyond satisfying predetermined sets of requirements in a classroom or school—such as passing a test. In other words, students develop an emancipatory worldview of their experiences that reject too much schooling (Shujaa, 1998) in favor of education. Indeed, in the journey to work for emancipation in their communities, students come to understand that it is difficult to press toward freedom for others until one is liberated himself or herself (West, 1993).

# Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

Building from the literature on culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Milner, 2010), Weinstein et al. (2004) conceptualized several principles that shape what they called culturally responsive classroom management when they introduced the theory in an article published in the *Journal of Teacher Education*: (1) recognition of teachers' own ethnocentrism; (2) knowledge of students' culture; (3) understanding of the broader social, economic, and political systems in education; (4) appropriate management strategies; and (5) development of caring classrooms. Weinstein et al. (2004) stressed that developing and implementing culturally responsive classroom management is a frame of mind more than a set of predetermined skills, actions, ideas, or strategies, which is why it is so essential that teachers develop a set of understandings, beliefs, and mindsets to advance equitable classroom management strategies. When teachers develop mindsets that allow them to negotiate power structures, they reject attempts to control students. Culturally responsive management frameworks "incorporate elements of students' home, personal, and community lives into the classroom" (Monroe & Obidah, 2004, p. 259). The teacher in Monroe and Obidah's study "drew on referents such as speech patterns, voice tones, facial expressions, and word choices that conveyed her behavioral expectations to students in familiar and meaningful ways" (p. 266).

Weinstein et al. (2003) stressed the importance of establishing expectations for student behavior, communicating with students in "culturally consistent ways" (p. 272), creating inclusive and caring classrooms, and working with families to build strong partnerships and relationships.

Bondy, Ross, Galligane, and Hambacher (2007) grounded their research in theories of psychologically supportive classroom environments and building "resistance" among students. Through videotaping and interviewing, the authors studied three effective novice teachers during their first two hours of the first day of the academic year. The authors found that the teachers developed positive relationships with their students and developed high expectations. The teachers "insisted" that the students would engage in the classroom, and the teachers adapted a culturally responsive communication style with their students. In essence, Bondy et al. (2007) focused on how the three teachers set the stage for a successful academic year and were able to develop community; the authors explained that the teachers in the study were deliberate in their practices of "earning respect rather than demanding it" (p. 328). Several important features emerged from Bondy et al.'s (2007) study. For instance, from the onset, the teachers worked to build relationships, establish expectations, and communicate in culturally responsive ways; the teachers also insisted that students were accountable and would meet the high expectations that were established.

The study of Bondy et al. (2007) extended Brown's (2003, 2004) study by observing and videotaping the teachers along with interviewing them. The results of Brown's study were based solely on interview data. Brown (2004) interviewed 13 urban teachers from grades 1-12 from seven different cities across the United States. The study was designed to un-

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Understand the relationship between the teachers' classroom management strategies they employed in their teaching and culturally responsive teaching. The teachers in Brown's study reflected and revealed several classroom management practices related to culturally responsive teaching:

development of personal relationships with students, creation of caring communities, establishment of business-like learning environments, use of culturally and ethnically congruent communication processes, demonstration of assertiveness, and utilization of clearly stated and enforced expectations. (Brown, 2004, p. 266)

Moreover, in describing some common characteristics of care among the 13 teachers in his study, Brown (2003) reported:

These 13 urban teachers create caring classroom communities by showing a genuine interest in each student. They gain student cooperation by being assertive through the use of explicitly stated expectations for appropriate student behavior and academic growth. And these teachers demonstrate mutual respect for students through the use of congruent communication processes. (p. 282)

Indeed, I am hopeful that readers of this article are able to draw important insights that are culturally responsive to the students with whom they are working. To strive for anything less than teaching to the very essence of students is to underexplore the pedagogical possibility of meeting the needs of every student in every classroom in the United States and beyond.

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