

# TOWARD A CONCEPTION OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

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*Given the increasing diversity of our classrooms, a lack of multicultural competence can exacerbate the difficulties that novice teachers have with classroom management. Definitions and expectations of appropriate behavior are culturally influenced, and conflicts are likely to occur when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds. The purpose of this article is to stimulate discussion of culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM). We propose a conception of CRCM that includes five essential components: (a) recognition of one's own ethnocentrism; (b) knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds; (c) understanding of the broader social, economic, and political context; (d) ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies; and (e) commitment to building caring classrooms. In the final section of the article, we suggest questions and issues for future research.*

**Keywords:** *cultural diversity; classroom management; culturally responsive pedagogy*

Nicole was a European American woman in her first year of teaching. A product of an upper-middle-class family, Nicole was reared in a predominantly White middle-class suburban community in a large metropolitan area. . . . Her graduating class of 700 included no more than 3 African American students. Nicole graduated from a large university with a degree in English education. Again, during her college years she had limited contact with (and coursework on) culturally diverse populations.

Nicole's first teaching assignment contrasted dramatically with her background and preparatory experiences. She found herself in an urban school district, in a school with a majority African American, inner-city population. One day, after beginning her teaching duties, Nicole observed outside her classroom two African American male adolescents engaging in verbal repartee that appeared aggressive and contentious. Being a dutiful and responsible teacher, she immediately marched them to the principal's office to be reprimanded. Much to her surprise and dismay, the principal, an African American woman, criticized Nicole rather than the stu-

dents, complaining that Nicole had misread the situation and treated the boys prejudicially and unfairly.

What Nicole did not know and—with her limited experience and training—had no way of knowing was that she was observing a unique communication style of African American youth, particularly males. Nicole encountered what Irvine (1990) refers to as “verbal sparring,” also called “ribbing,” “capping,” “woofing,” and so forth. Essentially, these interactions are verbal battles characterized by Irvine as Black male rituals that are valued and generally conducted in an atmosphere of sport. (Cartledge & Milburn, 1996, pp. 2-3)

Nicole's story illustrates the kinds of misinterpretations and unnecessary disciplinary interventions that can occur when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds—a situation that is becoming increasingly prevalent. Demographic data indicate that more than one third of the children in our

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elementary and secondary schools are students of color (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996), 1 in 5 lives in poverty (Children's Defense Fund, 2001), and almost 1 in 10 has limited proficiency in English (Kindler, 2002). In sharp contrast, our teaching force remains overwhelmingly White, middle class, and monolingual English (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Approximately 90% of public school teachers are European American (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1993), and enrollment in schools, colleges, and departments of education is 86% White, 7% African American, and 3% Latino (Ladson-Billings, 2001). To compound the problem, most of these teachers come from White neighborhoods and attend predominantly White colleges of teacher education, where they are taught by White teacher educators (Howard, 1999).

A lack of multicultural competence can exacerbate the difficulties that novice teachers (and even more experienced teachers) have with classroom management. Definitions and expectations of appropriate behavior are culturally influenced, and conflicts are likely to occur when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds. European American teachers, for example, are generally accustomed to a "passive-receptive" discourse pattern; they expect students to listen quietly while the teacher is speaking and then respond individually to teacher-initiated questions (Gay, 2000). When some African American students, accustomed to a more active, participatory pattern ("call-response"), demonstrate their engagement by providing comments and reactions, teachers may interpret such behavior as rude and disruptive. Similarly, teachers who do not realize how strongly Pacific Islanders value interpersonal harmony may conclude that these students are lazy when they are reluctant to participate in competitive activities (Sileo & Prater, 1998). In addition, teachers may be shocked when Southeast Asian students smile while being scolded if they are unaware that the smiles are meant not as disrespect, but as an admission of guilt and an effort to show that there are no hard feelings (Trueba, Cheng, & Ima, 1993). As Geneva Gay (2000) observed,

While most teachers are not blatant racists, many probably are cultural hegemonists. They expect all students to behave according to the school's cultural standards of normality. When students of color fail to comply, the teachers find them unlovable, problematic, and difficult to honor or embrace without equivocation. (p. 46)

Despite the managerial problems that can occur when teachers lack multicultural competence, the literature on classroom management has paid scant attention to issues of cultural diversity. (Two exceptions are Grossman, 1995, and Powell, McLaughlin, Savage, & Zehm, 2001.) Management texts may give some attention to students who are culturally different (sometimes in a separate chapter on students with special needs), but there is virtually no recognition that European American students and teachers are also cultural beings. Moreover, conventional classroom management is presented as if it were culturally neutral, rather than a White, middle-class construction (Bowers & Flinders, 1990).

In reciprocal fashion, the literature on multicultural education has tended to ignore issues of classroom management. Numerous educators (e.g., Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001) have called for *culturally responsive* or *culturally sensitive pedagogy*, but they have primarily focused on curriculum content and teaching strategies. Although there has been some discussion of how culturally responsive teachers foster connectedness, community, and collaboration (Nieto, 2000) and how students and teachers perceive disciplinary conflict (Sheets, 1996; Sheets & Gay, 1996), other issues of classroom management (e.g., organizing the physical environment, defining and teaching expectations for behavior, preventing minor conflicts from escalating into major confrontations, and communicating with families) have not been thoroughly explored. This omission is not surprising because the primary goal of culturally responsive pedagogy is explicitly academic—namely, to improve the achievement of low-income students and students of color (Banks, 2000). Yet classroom management is also a powerful influence on student achievement—greater than students' general intelligence,

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home environment, motivation, and socioeconomic status (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993/1994).

Teacher educators and researchers interested in classroom management must begin to make cultural diversity an integral part of the conversation. We need to ask whether diversity requires different approaches to classroom management, to examine the kinds of cultural conflicts that are likely to arise in ethnically diverse classrooms, and to consider the best ways to help preservice teachers become multiculturally competent. As Powell et al. (2001) wrote, there is a “pressing, unprecedented need for a kind of management that could be described as culturally responsive. What the shape of this management might be, however, is illusive and clearly difficult to define” (p. 254).

The purpose of this article is to stimulate discussion on the shape of culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM). The ideas we share here grow out of our discussions about how best to infuse culturally responsive pedagogy into our teacher education program and the relationship between culturally responsive pedagogy and classroom management. These discussions reflect our personal and professional backgrounds. The three of us are native English speaking, middle-class academics. Carol is a European American woman who specializes in classroom management; Mary is a European American woman who lives in a bicultural family and focuses on ESL and world language education; and Sandra is an African American woman with expertise in multicultural counseling.

We begin our consideration of CRCM by describing the experiences of Cynthia Ballenger, a White, middle-class teacher and author of *Teaching Other People's Children* (1999). We then suggest five components essential to CRCM: (a) recognition of one's own ethnocentrism and biases; (b) knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds; (c) understanding of the broader social, economic, and political context of our educational system; (d) ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate classroom management strategies; and (e) commitment to

building caring classroom communities. In the final section of the article, we delineate questions and issues for future research.

Underlying our discussion is the premise that CRCM is a frame of mind, more than a set of strategies or practices, that guides the management decisions that teachers make. Culturally responsive classroom managers recognize their biases and values. They reflect on how these influence their expectations for behavior and their interactions with students. They recognize that the ultimate goal of classroom management is not to achieve compliance or control but to provide all students with equitable opportunities for learning. In sum, they understand that CRCM is classroom management in the service of social justice.

## TEACHING OTHER PEOPLE'S CHILDREN

Cindy Ballenger, an experienced preschool teacher, expected to have little difficulty with her class of 4-year-old Haitian children. To her surprise, however, her usual repertoire of management strategies failed to create a respectful, orderly environment. Ballenger (1999) reported:

I tried many of my standard practices. I would praise a child who happened to be doing what I wished in the hearing of others. This, however, would often lead to the singled-out child's becoming extremely uncomfortable. I repeatedly offered explanations and consequences for their behavior. Although there were exceptions, on a typical day I had very little sense of being in control. (p. 31)

Because her colleagues—all Haitian—were experiencing no difficulty with classroom management, Ballenger had to conclude that the problem “did not reside in the children” (p. 32). She began to explore her own beliefs and practices with respect to children's behavior and to visit other teachers' classrooms to examine their “control statements.” During one visit, Colette, a Haitian teacher, was heard reprimanding children who had been making a lot of noise while she was trying to give directions:

Colette: When your mother talks to you, don't you listen?

Children: Yes.

Colette: When your mother says, "go get something," don't you go get it?

Children: Yes.

Colette: When your mother says "go to the bathroom," don't you go?

Children: Yes.

Colette: You know why I'm telling you this. Because I want you to be good children. When an adult talks to you, you're supposed to listen so you will become a good person. The adults here like you, they want you to be good children. (p. 34)

Comparing Colette's reprimand and those of the other Haitian teachers with her own way of speaking to students, Ballenger was able to identify several key differences. Although Haitian teachers stress the fact that they care for the children and have their best interests at heart (e.g., "The adults here like you, they want you to be good children"), Ballenger—and European American teachers in general—frequently refer to children's internal states (e.g., "You must be angry"). Moreover, European American teachers stress the logical consequences of children's behavior (e.g., "If you don't listen, you won't know what to do"), whereas Haitian teachers articulate the values and responsibilities of group membership and stress less immediate consequences, such as bringing shame to one's family.

Having identified these differences in control statements, Ballenger made a deliberate effort to adopt some of the Haitian discourse style. Not only did order in her classroom improve significantly, but also the children seemed to feel more secure and protected. This was made clear during the following interchange, in which Ballenger was reprimanding the children for crossing the parking lot without her:

Cindy: Did I tell you to go?

Kids: No.

Cindy: Can you cross this parking lot by yourselves?

Kids: No.

Cindy: That's right. There are cars here. They're dangerous. I don't want you to go alone. Why do I want you to wait for me, do you know?

Although Ballenger used Haitian discourse style (rhetorical questions with "no" responses), her socialization as a European American still led her to expect an answer citing logical, immediate consequences (e.g., "We can

get hurt because cars are dangerous"). Instead, children perceived Ballenger's reprimand as an expression of caring. They understood why Ballenger wanted them to wait. It was, as Kenthea responded, "because you like us."

## COMPONENTS OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Ballenger achieved a more culturally appropriate management style with the help of Haitian colleagues and parents, as well as a teacher-research group to which she belonged. Because this kind of support is lacking in most school settings, we cannot assume that our teacher education graduates will develop CRCM on the job. Instead, we must infuse multicultural issues throughout the preservice curriculum (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and, in particular, incorporate cultural diversity into courses on classroom management. To guide this effort, we propose a conception of CRCM that includes five essential components derived from the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy, multicultural counseling, and caring. Our discussion builds on this body of work by making explicit links to issues of classroom management.

Our conception of CRCM is also consistent with and expands recent discussions of classroom management that eschew behaviorism in favor of an approach that emphasizes the importance of self-regulation, community building, and social decision making. (See Freiberg, 1999, for a comprehensive discussion of this paradigm shift.) In other words, we believe that the goal of classroom management is to create an environment in which students behave appropriately, not out of fear of punishment or desire for reward, but out of a sense of personal responsibility. Although we believe that teachers need to function as authority figures who are willing to set limits and guide students' behavior, we believe that an emphasis on external control does little to teach students to make good choices about how to act and is incompatible with current thinking about curriculum and instruction (McCaslin & Good, 1992, 1998). We also believe that most problems of disorder in classrooms can be avoided if

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teachers use good preventive management strategies. We distinguish between classroom management—ways of creating a caring, respectful environment that supports learning—and discipline—ways of responding to inappropriate behavior.

### **Recognition of One's Own Ethnocentrism and Biases**

Multicultural competence is directly related to an understanding of one's own motives, beliefs, biases, values, and assumptions about human behavior. Yet most of our White teacher education students are bewildered when we ask how they have been affected by their identity as European Americans. Having experienced what Banks (1994) called "cultural encapsulation," they are unaware of their own racial identity or the pervasiveness of Whiteness. They consider their own cultural norms to be neutral and universal and accept the European, middle-class structures, programs, and discourse of schools as normal and right.

Teacher preparation programs need to help students explore the concept of Whiteness itself, the many facets of "White privilege" (McIntosh, 1988), and their own White ethnic histories. We need to articulate and examine taken-for-granted assumptions of a western, White, middle-class worldview, such as an emphasis on individual achievement, independence, and efficiency. This is the inner work of culturally responsive teaching—the missing piece in the preparation of White teachers (Howard, 1999). By bringing our implicit, unexamined cultural biases to a conscious level, we are less likely to misinterpret the behaviors of our culturally different students and treat them inequitably. (It is important to note, of course, that examining cultural biases and ethnocentric tendencies is not the inner work of White teachers alone. All teachers need to become aware of their unconscious assumptions.)

We can see evidence of inner work in Ballenger's (1999) case:

The process of exploring my own behavior and beliefs . . . was a crucial part of this piece of research. I had been trained to handle behavior in certain ways,

but this training was based on deep cultural assumptions. This process helped me perceive the behavior of the Haitian teachers, who at first seemed to me to be too strict and without empathy or connection, as sensible and full of moral value and intentions; on the other hand, what had seemed familiar and natural to me—my own values and practices—became subject to examination. (p. 40)

Creating a safe climate is a prerequisite for helping our students to develop awareness of ethnocentrism. Within this learning environment, personal and professional assumptions and biases can be challenged, and cultural content can be explored. Tomlinson-Clarke and Ota Wang (1999) proposed a cultural competency training model that consists of three elements. First, didactic coursework provides an initial introduction to cultural awareness and knowledge. For example, we ask our students to read texts that help raise awareness about individual and societal values, assumptions, and beliefs (e.g., Peggy McIntosh's, 1988, *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies*). Second, experiential elements build on awareness and knowledge through systematic examination of how group affiliation influences one's sense of self in relation to others. This in-depth level of training is needed to move away from simplistic views of culture and experience to a deeper and more integrated understanding of oneself in relation to issues of diversity. When teaching a multicultural education course, for example, one of the authors had her students engage in a classroom simulation exercise. The students had read *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (Fadiman, 1998), which describes a cultural clash between a Hmong family and the Western medical community. As a follow-up activity, the students were immersed in a classroom in which the instructor and some students spoke only the Hmong language. Afterward they were given the opportunity to reflect on this experience and discuss its implications for their future teaching of students for whom English is an additional language.

Finally, practice allows the application of CRCM strategies. During their student teaching semester, for example, our students evaluate their cooperating teacher's or their own class-

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room management plans in terms of cultural responsiveness. In addition, one of the authors engaged her students in role-play activities that highlight issues of diversity within classroom management dilemmas.

### ***Knowledge of Students' Cultural Backgrounds***

Although awareness of ethnocentrism is certainly a necessary ingredient of CRCM, it is not sufficient to enable European American teachers to work effectively with culturally different students (Sheets, 2000). Teachers must also have knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds to develop skills for cross-cultural interaction. Sheets and Gay (1996) commented:

Teachers need to understand the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, how they sanction behavior and celebrate accomplishments, and their rules of decorum, deference, and etiquette. They need to understand the value orientations, standards for achievements, social taboos, relational patterns, communication styles, motivational systems, and learning styles of different ethnic groups. These should then be employed in managing the behavior of students, as well as teaching them. (p. 92)

It would appear unarguable that cultural responsiveness requires cultural content knowledge. Ballenger (1999), for example, had to study the control statements of Haitian teachers and identify the ways they differed from her own discourse patterns before she could adopt a more effective way of interacting with her students. Yet educators are sometimes reluctant to talk about cultural characteristics for fear of essentializing differences between groups (McLaren, 1995) and ignoring heterogeneity among group members. Indeed, Courtney Cazden (1999) worried that

such information, transmitted in readings and lectures about disembodied 'others' may do more harm than good. . . . With the best of intentions, it may reinforce, even create, stereotypes and lower expectations, and the information transmitted may make teachers less observant of their students rather than more. (p. vii)

Cazden's fear will be well founded unless teacher educators emphasize the fact that core cultural characteristics are not exhibited by all

group members and certainly not in the same way or to the same extent. The display of cultural characteristics is influenced by variables such as gender, education, social class, and degrees of cultural affiliation. As Gay (2000) pointed out, descriptions of culture are merely "approximations of reality" (p. 12). Moreover, the categories by which we classify people are constantly evolving, overlapping, mixing—even opposing each other (Scholl, 2001). Identity is not a "fixed essence lying unchanged outside history and culture" (Hall, 1989, p. 72); rather, identity construction is an ongoing, lifelong process.

Given the complex, multifaceted nature of cultural identity, the large number of cultures represented in our schools, and a finite amount of time, preservice teacher education programs cannot possibly provide prospective teachers with all the cultural content knowledge they need for multicultural competence (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Nonetheless, prospective teachers can develop an understanding that cultures vary in terms of their emphasis on the collective or the individual (Franklin, 2001). They can begin to appreciate the importance of conducting home visits and consulting with parents and community members. They can read books such as Angela Valenzuela's (1999) *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring* and discuss her thesis that Mexican youths must feel "cared for" before they can "care about" school. Such discussions can sensitize them to the possibility that cultural values and norms underlie behavior that, on the surface, looks like a lack of interest in school.

Prospective teachers can also learn what questions to ask about students' family backgrounds, educational experiences, and cultural norms and values. Some of these questions are listed here (Grossman, 1995; Kottler, 1994; Sileo & Prater, 1998):

1. Family background and structure: Where did the students come from? How long have the students been in this country? What is the hierarchy of authority? What responsibilities do students have at home? Is learning English a high priority?
2. Education: How much previous schooling have the students had? What kinds of instructional strategies are they accustomed to? In their former schools,

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was there an emphasis on large group instruction, memorization, and recitation? What were the expectations for appropriate behavior? Were students expected to be active or passive? Independent or dependent? Peer oriented or teacher oriented? Cooperative or competitive?

3. Interpersonal relationship styles: Do cultural norms emphasize working for the good of the group or for individual achievement? What are the norms with respect to interaction between males and females? What constitutes a comfortable personal space? Do students obey or question authority figures? Are expressions of emotion and feelings emphasized or hidden?
4. Discipline: Do adults act in permissive, authoritative, or authoritarian ways? What kinds of praise, reward, criticism, and punishment are customary? Are they administered publicly or privately? To the group or the individual?
5. Time and space: How do students think about time? Is punctuality expected or is time considered flexible? How important is speed in completing a task?
6. Religion: What restrictions are there concerning topics that should not be discussed in school?
7. Food: What is eaten? What is not eaten?
8. Health and hygiene: How are illnesses treated and by whom? What is considered to be the cause? What are the norms with respect to seeking professional help for emotional and psychological problems?
9. History, traditions, and holidays: Which events and people are a source of pride for the group? To what extent does the group in the United States identify with the history and traditions of the country of origin? What holidays and celebrations are considered appropriate for observing in school?

### ***Awareness of the Broader Social, Economic, and Political Context***

Teachers also need to understand that the educational enterprise reflects and often perpetuates discriminatory practices of the larger society. We need to become aware of the ways individual prejudices based on the norms of dominant groups become institutionalized. We must understand how differences in race, social class, gender, language background, and sexual orientation are linked to power. We need to recognize that the structure and practices of schools (e.g., rigid tracking, unevenly distributed resources, standardized testing) can privilege select groups of students while marginalizing or segregating others. Katz (1996, 1999), for example, wrote poignantly about the ways that a middle school in San Francisco promoted

the achievement of Asian Americans and Whites, while it criminalized poor Latino youngsters.

With regard to classroom management, we need to reexamine the ways that current practices and policies may reinforce institutional discrimination. If we look at which children are being disciplined most often (namely, African American boys), we can determine if there are patterns of racial or gender profiling. We can also reflect on which behaviors are targeted as needing disciplinary attention. Lipman (as cited in Nieto, 2000), for example, described a case of an African American male who was given a 10-day in-school suspension for wearing the straps of his overalls unsnapped (a common fashion trend among African American males). At the same time, White students with holes cut in the thighs of their pants (also a fashion statement) were not even reprimanded.

We can also reexamine incidents of student resistance (e.g., students who appear to sleep during class) and ask whether the behavior is actually an “expression of voice” (Macedo & Bartholomé, 2000, p. 118) in a social institution that denies some students outlets for authentic expression. As Katz (1996) suggested, being a “bad kid” is one way that students can feel a degree of control in a system they find oppressive. Similarly, Valenzuela (1999) argued that “psychic and emotional withdrawal from schooling are symptomatic of students’ rejection” of a system that “dismisses or derogates their language, culture, and community” (p. 162)—in short, schooling that actually subtracts resources from Mexican youth, leaving them vulnerable to academic failure.

Prospective teachers can reflect on this thesis and consider ways that caring teachers have been able to overcome the resistance by listening to students’ voices and building connections. Valenzuela told the story of Mr. Chilcoate, for example, an English teacher whose students were uncooperative. In an attempt to understand what was going on, Mr. Chilcoate asked students to write down a criticism of the class. He read them aloud, and together the class discussed how to improve the classroom situation. When students’ behavior changed dramati-

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cally, Mr. Chilcoate attributed it to the fact that they had been given an opportunity to have some control over their own learning and to communicate their “desires, concerns, and wishes” (p. 236)—an all-too-rare occurrence.

Critical reflection will also lead us to question some of our assumptions regarding classroom management and discipline. For example, a Spanish teacher reported to one of the authors a conversation that took place in a middle-school faculty lounge. The conversation concerned the difficulties and frustrations experienced by a monolingual, English-speaking teacher who believed that some of her bilingual English/Spanish boys were teasing a girl in Spanish. To eliminate the problem, she had asked the faculty to consider banning Spanish in the school. Recounting the conversation, the Spanish teacher recalled how, growing up in Texas, he had been punished for speaking his native Spanish. It had taken him many years of study to regain his mother tongue. Incredulous, he commented, “I can’t believe they are still saying ‘ban Spanish.’” Examination of incidents such as this can help our students to see how the desire to ban Spanish reflects a fear of the “other.” Such a position also reflects the discriminatory language policies of colonialism that have informed the English Only movement and current debates over bilingual education.

### ***Ability and Willingness to Use Culturally Appropriate Management Strategies***

With awareness of our own taken-for-granted assumptions, knowledge of our students’ cultural backgrounds, and understanding of the broader context, we can begin to reflect on the ways that classroom management practices promote or obstruct equal access to learning. This is an ongoing, possibly uncomfortable process, in which cultural diversity becomes a lens through which we view the tasks of classroom management. These tasks include creating a physical setting that supports academic and social goals, establishing and maintaining expectations for behavior, enhancing students’ motivation, organizing and managing instructional formats, working with fami-

lies, and using appropriate interventions to assist students with behavior problems. (For a more complete discussion of these tasks, see Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003.) Here, we consider three particular challenges that an understanding of cultural diversity poses for teachers.

First, we need to monitor our behavior in terms of equitable treatment (Nieto, 2000): Are we more patient and encouraging with some? Are we more likely to chastise others? Do we use hairstyle and dress to form stereotypical judgments of our students’ character and academic potential? Do we recommend corporal punishment and suspension for African Americans and in-school suspension for European Americans (McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992)? Do we hold misbehaving White students by the hand when we march them down the hall, but hold misbehaving African American students by the wrist (Hyland, 2000)? Do we use reprimands similar to those of Ms. Gutman (Katz, 1999), a high school science teacher, who warned her Latina students that if they did not pay attention they would end up as prostitutes on one of the major streets in the barrio?

Second, like Ballenger, we need to question traditional assumptions of “what works” in classroom management and be alert to possible mismatches between conventional management strategies and students’ cultural backgrounds. For example, because Latino culture emphasizes the importance of contributing to the group, singling out individual achievement may be embarrassing and punishing, rather than reinforcing. Chastising Filipino American students for a lack of independence can be futile, if they have been brought up to depend on adult authority. In addition, reprimanding Chinese American students for not being willing to express their opinions may conflict with their parents’ directive to listen and learn what the teacher tells them.

Third, we need to consider when to accommodate students’ cultural backgrounds and when to expect students to accommodate (Grossman, 1995)—what Nieto (2000) called *mutual accommodation*. In mutual accommoda-



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tion, teachers accept and build on students' language and culture but also equip students and their families to function within the culture of the school in key areas needed for academic progress and order (e.g., attendance, homework, punctuality). For example, if students feel uncomfortable in competitive situations, teachers can reasonably substitute cooperative activities. They are less likely to accommodate students who come late to class because their cultures view time as flexible and do not value punctuality. Teachers are least likely to accommodate students who have been taught to settle their differences by fighting rather than seeking nonviolent solutions.

Deciding when to accommodate and when to require students to accommodate can be difficult. For example, do we forgo the use of "politeness formulas" (Manke, 1997) and indirect discourse strategies (e.g., "Sally, would you like to sit down?") with African American students accustomed to more straightforward directives from authority figures (Delpit, 1995)? If an authoritarian stance seems compatible with students' expectations, do we still follow Ladson-Billing's (1994) suggestion that culturally responsive teaching requires the use of managerial strategies that promote social decision making, democracy, and social justice? These are thorny questions, and answering them will require considerable dialogue and reflection.

To prompt these conversations, we have found it helpful to have prospective teachers read, discuss, and then role-play scenarios that reflect the kinds of conflicts that can occur when home and school cultures collide. In one such scenario (adapted from Cary, 2000), the Mexican father of a kindergarten boy expressed his disapproval of his son's domestic play in the housekeeping area and requested that the teacher prohibit his child's play there. In another scenario (also from Cary), a Muslim father asked his daughter's fifth-grade teacher to ensure that the girl is never seated next to a boy.

When prospective teachers conclude that student accommodation appears necessary (e.g., coming to class on time), instruction in school norms should foster students' critical thinking

skills and heighten their awareness of the behaviors that carry weight in our society. Teachers should help students to articulate their own cultural assumptions and values and to compare them with the assumptions and values of the school and the dominant culture. In other words, instead of emphasizing compliance with externally imposed demands ("You need to be here on time, or else"), teachers can make the accommodation explicit and visible (explaining, for example, that "cultures have different perspectives on time"). By couching the discussion in terms of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1991), teachers can explain the reasons for (and advantages of) accommodating. The goal is to help students become proficient and critical at the same time.

### ***Commitment to Building Caring Classroom Communities***

Walter Doyle (1986) likened classroom order to conversation: It can only be achieved if both parties agree to cooperate. Similarly, Sheets (1996) observed that students are not "passive recipients" of teachers' actions (p. 171); rather, they influence classrooms events as much as they are influenced. Faced with directives from the teacher, they resist or cooperate, ignore or acquiesce—and the key factor determining which option they choose is often their perception of the teacher's caring.

Although efforts to reform teacher education have usually focused on teachers' subject matter competence and pedagogical knowledge, the critical need for teachers who care for and about students has been gaining recognition (Morris & Morris, 2002). Sheets and Gay (1996) called for "culturally responsive discipline," whose "ultimate purpose is for teachers to create caring and nurturing relationships with students, grounded in cooperation, collaboration, and reciprocity rather than the current teacher controlling-student compliance patterns" (p. 92). Gay (2000) wrote that "caring is a foundational pillar of effective teaching and learning, [and] the lack of it produces inequities in educational opportunities and achievement outcomes for ethnically different students"

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(p. 62). Rogers and Renard (1999) contended that “students are motivated when they believe that teachers treat them like people and care about them personally and educationally” (p. 34); and Cothran and Ennis (2000) asserted that students are more likely to cooperate with teachers who are caring and respectful.

Research supports these sentiments. Wentzel (1997, 1998), for example, has demonstrated that when middle-school students perceive their teachers as caring and supportive, they are more likely to be academically motivated, to engage in classroom activities, and to behave in prosocial, responsible ways. Similarly, a study by Davidson (1999) reveals students’ willingness to cooperate with teachers who communicate interest in their well-being. This reciprocity was particularly evident in the responses of students facing “social borders”—those whose home worlds were very different from their school worlds. Jamie, an African American female, put it this way:

[Ms. Rocke], she’s like another mother . . . I can talk to [her] about everything . . . like if I come to her and ask her, you know, how I feel about this guy and stuff.

We owe her something now . . . we can’t say “we don’t know this” . . . there’s no way. We can’t just say, “Oh Mrs. Rocke, we sorry,” this and that. No way we can say that! We gotta do it [our work], we owe her that you know. (p. 346)

Despite the fact that perception of teacher caring is critical to the success of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, the relationship between teachers and students is often strained and tense, even abusive. Students of color frequently perceive that their teachers (generally European American) fail to understand their perspectives, accept them as individuals, honor their cultural backgrounds, or demonstrate respect (Katz, 1999; Nieto, 2000; Sheets, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999).

Certainly, part of the problem stems from structural constraints on caring (Katz, 1999): too many students and not enough time, tracking, standardized testing, pressure to cover the curriculum. However, the adversarial relationship between teachers and students may also be due to teachers’ tendency to define caring in warm,

fuzzy terms. Our teacher education students express a strong desire to be caring. They envision classrooms characterized by harmony and good will and are disappointed and disillusioned when the students in their internship placements test the limits and begin to misbehave. That is when they return to campus and announce that “they want to be nice, but they have to be mean” (Weinstein, 1998). We have to help them to understand that effective classroom management—and CRMC in particular—demands a different conception of caring. Gay (2000) wrote:

Teachers have to care so much about ethnically diverse students and their achievement that they accept nothing less than high-level success from them and work diligently to accomplish it. . . . This is a very different conception of caring than the oft-cited notion of “gentle nurturing and altruistic concern,” which can lead to benign neglect under the guise of letting students of color make their own way and move at their own pace. (p. 109)

Our prospective teachers can learn about caring from portraits of effective Black teachers described in books such as *In Search of Wholeness: African American Teachers and Their Culturally Specific Classroom Practices* (Irvine, 2002). As Cooper noted (in chapter 3) and Irvine reiterated (in chapter 7), effective Black teachers tend to be “warm demanders” (Vasquez, 1988)—strong yet compassionate, authoritative yet loving, firm yet respectful. In contrast, White teachers tend to be less comfortable with the image of teacher-as-authority figure.

We also have to ensure that prospective teachers are familiar with strategies for creating a “caring community of learners” (Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Lewis, & Schaps, 1999) so that students feel respected, trusted, and supported by one another. From the very first day of school, teachers can set the tone by greeting students at the door with a smile and a welcoming comment. They can express admiration for a student’s bilingual ability and comment enthusiastically about the number of different languages that are represented in class. They can create group identity and build community by beginning each day with a “morning meeting”

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(Kriete, 1999), during which students greet one another by name and discuss upcoming lessons. They can be alert to hurtful comments and slurs and make it clear that such speech—even when used in a joking manner—is absolutely unacceptable.

Sometimes, the curriculum itself provides opportunities for students to learn about their classmates and to develop empathy. For example, Linda Christensen (1994), a high school English teacher, had her students read literature that forced them to look beyond their own world and reflect on the experiences of others. In conjunction with the reading, Christensen paired her native English speakers with students who had emigrated from another country—Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Eritrea, Mexico, Guatemala, and Ghana. They interviewed their partner and wrote a profile of the student to share in class. Christensen describes her class's reactions:

Students were moved by their partners' stories. One student whose brother had been killed at the beginning of the year was paired with a student whose sister was killed fighting in Eritrea. He connected to her loss and was amazed at her strength. Others were appalled at how these students had been mistreated at *their* school. Many students later used the lives of their partners in their essays on immigration. . . . Besides making immigration a contemporary rather than a historical topic, students heard the sorrow their fellow students felt at leaving "home." In our "curriculum of empathy," we forced our class to see these students as individuals rather than the ESL students or "Chinese" students, or an undifferentiated mass of Mexicans. (p. 53)

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

We began this article with the story of Nicole, a European American teacher who responded punitively to African American students' verbal sparring, failing to recognize it as playful behavior consistent with their cultural backgrounds. Ironically, when the principal reprimanded Nicole, she too responded punitively to behavior that was culturally specific—that is, Nicole's European American interpretation of negative verbal statements as aggression. As Cartledge and Milburn (1996) observed, the

principal could have used the incident as an opportunity for learning and growth. Instead of berating Nicole for prejudicial treatment of the boys, she could have explained verbal sparring, suggested books on the topic (e.g., *Black Students and School Failure*, Irvine, 1990), encouraged Nicole to engage in discussions with her colleagues, and urged her to make communication style a part of her English curriculum. In short, she could have helped Nicole develop multicultural competence and become more culturally responsive.

Nicole's story underscores the sensitive, emotionally charged nature of issues related to classroom management, discipline, and cultural diversity. This is dangerous territory, especially prone to accusations of racism and prejudicial treatment. It is also the aspect of teaching that beginning teachers in culturally diverse classrooms are likely to find most problematic and challenging. For these reasons, it is critical that educators who study classroom management and those who study cultural diversity and culturally responsive pedagogy join in a serious dialogue on the questions and issues raised in this article.

It is also imperative that we set a research agenda focusing on CRCM. One set of questions should focus on ethnically diverse classrooms and the kinds of managerial practices that are most effective in such settings:

1. What types of cultural conflicts can arise in classrooms that might make it more difficult to have a safe, caring, orderly environment?
2. Do effective strategies vary depending on the particular cultural group involved? (For example, is effective management in classes of African American students different from effective management in classes of European American or Latino students?)
3. What approaches are most appropriate when students in one particular classroom come from a variety of cultural backgrounds? Is it feasible for teachers to vary their management strategies and ways of speaking to accommodate students from different backgrounds?
4. How do CRCM practices differ from conventional management approaches (e.g., those emphasizing explicit rules and procedures and clear consequences)? How do they differ from the more hu-

manistic, student-centered approaches advocated recently by Freiberg (1999) and others?

Still another set of questions we should ask is how we can best prepare teachers for organizing and managing the culturally diverse classrooms they will encounter: (a) How can we sensitize our (mostly White, middle-class) students to their own biases, assumptions, and stereotypes so that they undergo genuine personal transformation rather than simply learn to mouth the socially appropriate responses?; (b) How can we provide “cultural content knowledge”—knowledge about cultural differences in worldviews, communication patterns, and customs—without perpetuating stereotypes and essentializing cultural differences?; and (c) How can we provide opportunities for our students to gain awareness of the broader social, economic, and political context in which they, their students, and educational institutions exist?

As we pursue this dialogue, we must also ask who will teach our students about CRCM. Teacher educators who are as culturally encapsulated as their students are unlikely to be either effective or credible. Clearly, in addition to recruiting professors of color, schools, colleges, and departments of education will have to find ways of encouraging European American faculty to examine their own biases and assumptions, to learn about students’ cultural backgrounds, to develop pedagogical practices that respect and affirm diversity, and to model the caring that transforms instruction into real teaching. To borrow a phrase from Gary Howard’s (1999) book on White teachers and multiracial schools, “We can’t teach what we don’t know.”

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