

# Classroom Management in Diverse Classrooms

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## Abstract

Classroom management continues to be a serious concern for teachers and especially in urban and diverse learning environments. The authors present the culturally responsive classroom management practices of two teachers from an urban and diverse middle school to extend the construct, culturally responsive classroom management. The principles that emerged in this study included the importance and centrality of teachers' (a) understanding equity and equality, (b) understanding power structures among students, (c) immersion into students' life worlds, (d) understanding the Self in relation to Others, (e) granting students entry into their worlds, and (f) conceiving school as a community with family members. The authors conclude the discussion with implications for teachers and researchers.

## Keywords

classroom management, diversity, teaching, learning, urban, race, culture, equity, discipline

This study is shaped by the convergence of classroom management and diversity—two aspects of teaching that are repeatedly named as areas of concern among all teachers and especially new teachers (Melnick & Meister, 2008; Milner, 2006a; Monroe, 2006). The social context of teachers'

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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, ethnicities, religions, and abilities may be highly diverse and may or may not be shared by the teacher (Milner, 2006a, 2008). In this article, we present the classroom management approaches of two teachers from an urban and diverse middle school. We attempt to extend the construct, culturally responsive classroom management, considering the ethnic background of the teachers and students in the study as well as the context. We conclude the discussion with implications for future practice and research on classroom management and diversity.

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 to classroom management. Our stance is that matters of classroom management, instruction, learning, and diversity are almost inseparable.

We have observed three salient trends in the literature that has focused on diversity and classroom management:

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

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 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 & Benally, 2003) as well as American and Korean students (Shin & Koh, 2007). Contexts studied with a focus on classroom management include urban schools (Shin & Koh, 2007), highly diverse settings (Milner, 2008), and researchers have even examined classroom management techniques in prisons with incarcerated adult students (Shobe, 2003).

Indeed, what has become increasingly clear in this line of scholarship is that researchers do not necessarily agree on the constructs used to conceptualize classroom management. Moreover, the diversity of racial and ethnic populations studied implies that researchers believe that the identities of those in classrooms (teachers and students) are central to capturing the essence of complexity in classroom management. In addition, researchers seem to believe that attention should be placed on the contexts of classroom management because the settings provide important information for the kinds of experiences teachers and students have in their practices. The discussion shifts at this point to a more comprehensive look at the literature on classroom management and diversity.

## **Literature on Classroom Management and Diversity**

From our review of the literature, three important themes emerged regarding classroom management and diversity: (a) classroom management and referral patterns, (b) teachers and students' (dis)connections, and (c) institutional and systemic barriers to classroom management.

### **Classroom Management and Referral Patterns**

A first theme that has emerged from our review of the literature on classroom management and diversity focuses on referral patterns, particularly on patterns of those students from diverse<sup>1</sup> backgrounds. The findings in the literature are straightforward; most disciplinary referrals originate in the classroom and more times 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' ways of knowing and conducting themselves. Consequences of disciplinary referrals and the inconsistencies between teacher/school expectations and student behavior are reduced access and opportunity to learn. Students' academic achievement and opportunities to learn suffer when they are not in the classroom.

Davis and Jordan (1994), for instance, found a direct connection between and among classroom management, the curriculum,<sup>2</sup> and instruction. The researchers 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 instruction” (p. 585) and students’ achievement suffers. Instead of spending time on instruction, teachers spend much of their time attempting to discipline and “control students.” Clearly, when students are not in the classroom because of disciplinary approaches and policies that put the students out of the classroom, such as suspension and expulsion, students suffer academically.

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. 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 completely disrespectful and intolerable. 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.

Another example of how teachers’ subjective interpretations end in students’ referral occurs when Latino/a students joke 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. Teachers may find such behavior unacceptable and inexcusable—thus, an inaccurate interpretation is applied in the situation, and ultimately students suffer the negative repercussions. Teachers and students do not ascribe the same meanings and intentions to student behavior, and this inconsistency contributes to the alarming referral patterns discussed herein.

The Skiba et al. (2002) study pointed out that students of color, and particularly African American students, overwhelmingly received harsher punishments for misbehavior than did 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 2 years. Apparently, in the same district, weapons were used in a fight involving White students and less severe punishment was imposed on those students. Skiba et al. asserted,

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

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 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 of 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" (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. Indeed, students' "misbehavior" and "disruption" can need to be corrected for learning to occur. However, teachers may readily resort to office referrals for matters that they can (and should) be able to handle through responsive classroom management strategies 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 and social performance and achievement. Moreover, the teacher himself or herself may precipitate in the misbehavior. Too often students are looked on as the sole problem when teachers actually contribute to the conflicts that occur in the classroom; consequently, referrals persist.

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

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 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)

One can connect the referral patterns to Noguera's (2003) impressions of disciplinary practices in schools and prisons. He wrote,

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. (pp. 342-343)

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

## **Teachers and Students' (Dis)Connections**

A second theme that emerged from our review was that of disconnections between teachers and students as a major reason for many management conflicts that surface in the classroom. Such conflicts are often couched in misinterpretations that seem to be shaped by the socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and ethnic inconsistencies that exist between teachers and students. For instance, the demographic divide rationale is present in an important body of literature that attempts to understand and explain some of the complexities

inherent in the teaching and learning process (cf. 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. As White teachers and students of color, in some ways, possess different racialized and cultural experiences, and different repertoires of knowledge and ways of knowing both inside and outside the classroom, incongruence may serve as a roadblock for academic and social success (Irvine, 2003) and for effective classroom management in a classroom. However, as Gay (2000) asserted, "similar ethnicity between students and teachers may be potentially beneficial, but it is not a guarantee of pedagogical effectiveness" (p. 205), and we argue not a guarantee of classroom management effectiveness. However, 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 background can and should strive to be successful pedagogues and classroom managers with any and all groups of students. When the teachers possesses (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.

Teachers play enormous roles in how students conduct themselves in urban and diverse 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)

Teachers' not giving up on students, regardless of their "misbehavior" is very important and as Schlosser (1992) and Noguera (2003) 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 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 management desires 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 to correct student behavior.

Subconsciously teachers sometimes make decisions that can have lasting negative influences on students. Grossman (1995) explained that

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 often exhibit less than appropriate techniques when working with culturally diverse students in urban and diverse classrooms because they are not aware of their implicit pedagogical, curricular, assessment, and management decisions. As teachers typically have good intentions (Milner, 2006b), 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. As many teachers adopt colorblind ideologies in their work with students, pretending that they do not "see" or recognize color, these teachers are missing important features and dimensions of students' identity. As a result, teachers are attempting to manage fragmented, disconnected, and incomplete students. 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/researcher (Teel) and the students of color, mainly African American 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/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. 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. Teel was able to also help Obidah 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 decision making rather than assuming that the tensions that emerged in the classroom 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 disconnections 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 in classroom management and diversity.

## **Institutional and Systemic Barriers**

Institutional and systemic barriers can make it difficult for teachers to demonstrate their care for and to connect with students. Teachers are sometimes pressured and closely monitored by their administrators to follow a set frame of referral, discipline, and management, which can make it difficult for teachers to employ culturally responsive classroom management. 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, the teachers are attempting to negotiate "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.

Institutional and structural barriers also can play a role in the curricular and instructional decision making of teachers. 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 feel 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). As these teachers did not want to feel “ganged up on” in their classrooms, students were denied access to certain aspects of the curriculum. The 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 manage their classrooms in meaningful and responsive ways. 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 give 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 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 *can* occur 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), and these decisions can be motivated and shaped by institutional and systemic pressures far beyond teachers' control. With a review of the literature established, the discussion shifts now to the theoretical framework.

## Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the theory of culturally responsive classroom management. Building from the literature on culturally responsive teaching (cf. Gay, 2000; M. R. Brown, 2007), Weinstein et al. (2004) conceptualized several principles that shape culturally responsive classroom management when they introduced the theory in an article published in the *Journal of Teacher Education*: (a) recognition of teachers' own ethnocentrism; (b) knowledge of students' cultures; (c) understanding of the broader social, economic, and political systems in education; (d) appropriate management strategies; and (e) 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. It is through the responsive nature of teachers that strategies can be developed and implemented that allow teachers to manage and facilitate classroom learning opportunities and reject attempts to control students. Teachers who aspire to become culturally responsive classroom managers have the mind-set to do so and realize that if they believe they are defeated in difficult classroom situations then they probably are.

Geneva Gay (2000) defined culturally responsive teaching as

using the 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. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming. (p. 29)

Among other effective classroom management strategies and approaches in urban and diverse classrooms, 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.

Grossman (1995) maintained that “classroom management techniques that are designed by European American middle-class teachers for European-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). 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).

Since Weinstein et al.’s (2004) introduction of the construct, we were able to locate two studies that have been published grounded in culturally responsive classroom management (see, for instance, Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007; Brown, 2003, 2004). In addition to culturally responsive classroom management, Bondy et al. (2007) grounded their research in theories of psychologically supportive classroom environments and building resistance. Through videotaping and interviewing, the authors studied three effective novice teachers during their first 2 hours of the 1st 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. 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 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.

Bondy et al.’s (2007) study extended Brown’s (2003, 2004) study by observing/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 through 12 from 7 different cities

across the United States. The study was designed to 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)

Thus, this theoretical framework—culturally responsive classroom management—guides this study. We turn now to discuss the research methodology and research methods employed in the study.

## **Method**

The first author has been conducting research at Bridge Middle School for 2 academic years, approximately 19 months, and the second author conducted research there for 1 academic year. This research at Bridge began in September of 2005. The teachers in the study were nominated by the principal in the school. We wanted to learn about, study, and hear the stories of teachers at Bridge Middle School and to understand and describe how and why teachers succeeded there. Also, we were interested in their struggles; what issues did the teachers experience that could shed light on the complexities of teaching and learning in an urban and diverse school? Moreover, we were interested in how the teachers managed their classrooms, how they were able to get parents involved, and how (in terms of pedagogy and curriculum) the teachers were able to provide optimal learning opportunities for

students. To try to understand the participants' experiences in the school, we conducted context observations (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) in the teachers' classrooms as well as other contexts, analyzed documents and artifacts, and conducted interviews with the teachers.

For instance, throughout the study, we attended and observed the teachers' classes, attended other school-related activities, events, and spaces such as assemblies for the Honor Roll, the library, and the cafeteria. We wanted to learn as much as possible about the nature of the school to provide rich and deep details about the context and those in it. We wanted to know what life was like for teachers and students not only in the classroom but also in other locations in the school.

Typically, at least one of us was in the school for half a day once per week. On some occasions, we observed in the school for 2 days. Also, there were days when we were in the school for an entire day but were usually there for half a day. Our visits were fairly consistent although there were a few weeks when we did not visit the school; for instance, there were weeks when we were out of town at professional conferences. In early January 2007, Milner had an ankle injury that prevented his visitation for several weeks. Still, teachers shared their plans, worksheets, and other materials with us in our absence to help us gain an understanding and knowledge base relative to their work and thinking in the context. Although we participated in some of the classroom tasks, we were more observers than participants. In some cases, we participated in group discussions or commented on themes as they emerged in a particular literature passage, for instance. Most of the time, however, we observed and recorded field notes in our field notebooks. Finally, typically only one of us observed in a classroom at a time, though on a few occasions we observed a classroom together.

Each teacher was interviewed 2 to 3 times individually. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed, and we conducted countless informal interviews with the teachers where we recorded notes in our field notebooks. These semistructured interviews (Fetterman, 1989; Merriam, 1988) lasted 1 to 2 hours, and they typically took place during the teachers' lunch hour or planning block. Data were hand coded. Analysis followed a recursive, thematic process; as interviews and observations progressed, we used analytic induction and reasoning to develop thematic categories. As findings were based largely on both observations and interviews, the patterns of thematic findings emerged from multiple data sources, resulting in triangulation (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). For instance, when teachers repeated a point several times throughout the study, this became what we called a *pattern*. When what the teachers articulated during interviews also

**Table 1.** Students at Bridge Middle School 2006-2007

African American	White	Hispanic American	Asian American	American Indian	Total No. of students
59.8%	31.6%	5.6%	2.8%	0.3%	354

**Table 2.** Teachers at Bridge Middle School, 2006-2007

Ethnic background	Percentage
African American	45%
White	55%

**Table 3.** Free and Reduced Lunch

2002	Increase	2006
64%	15%	79%

became evident in their actions or in their students' actions, this resulted in what we called a *triangulational pattern*.

### *Bridge Middle School*

Constructed in 1954, Bridge Middle School is an urban school in a relatively large city in the southeastern region of the United States. According to a Bridge County real estate agent, houses in the community sell for between US\$120,000 and US\$175,000. There also are a considerable number of rental houses zoned to the school. Many of the neighborhood students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and who are zoned to Bridge attend private and independent schools in the city rather than attend Bridge Middle School.<sup>3</sup> A larger number of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds attend the school. Bridge Middle School is considered a Title I school, which means that the school receives additional federal funds to assist students with instructional and related resources. During the 2006-2007 academic year, Bridge Middle School accommodated approximately 354 students. The most recent data available regarding student demographics (2005-2006) indicated that 59.8% of the students at Bridge were African American, 5.6% Hispanic American, 31.6% White, 0.3% American Indian, and 2.8% Asian American, a truly diverse learning environment. The free and reduced lunch rate increased

over the last 4 to 5 years, between the 2002 and 2006 academic years: 64% to 79%, respectively. In 2006, there were 27 teachers at the school; 45% of the faculty members were African American and 55% were White. Seven of the teachers were male and 20 were female. Tables 1, 2, and 3 capture and summarize these data.

We selected Bridge Middle School because it was known in the district as one of the “better” middle schools in the urban area—relatively speaking. For instance, Milner asked practicing teachers enrolled in his classes at the university to nominate (Ladson-Billings, 1994) “strong” and some of the “better” urban schools, and Bridge Middle School was consistently nominated. People in the supermarket would also mention Bridge as one of the “better” schools in the district on Milner’s queries. When he met with a school official at the district office to gain entry into a school, the school official also suggested Bridge as a place to conduct research.

Bridge Middle School is known for competitive basketball, wrestling, track, and football teams. The school building is brick, and windows at the school are usually open during the summer and spring seasons. There is a buzzer at the main entrance of the school. Visitors ring the bell, are identified by a camera, and are let in by one of the administrative assistants in the main office. When we visited the school, we signed a logbook located in the main office and would proceed to the teachers’ classrooms, to the cafeteria, or to the library. During his 1st month of conducting this research (September 2005), one of the hall monitors insisted that Milner go back to the main office to get a red name badge, so he could be identified as a visitor/researcher. They were serious about safety at the school. The floors in the hallways were spotless. There was no writing or graffiti on the walls. Especially during the month of February of 2006 and 2007, Black history/heritage/celebration posters and bulletin boards occupied nearly all the wall space in the hallways.

### *The Participants*

In the next section of this article, we share two teachers’ culturally responsive classroom management practices, respectively: Mr. Hall and Mr. Jackson. Mr. Hall is a White science teacher who had been teaching for 3 years at Bridge Middle School. Mr. Jackson is an African American mathematics and science teacher who had been teaching for 7 years as a certified teacher but had been working in the district for 10 years as an assistant or substitute teacher. It is important to note that Mr. Jackson transferred to another school in the district at the beginning of the 2nd year of this study. Accordingly, we construct his practices based on 1 academic year of evidence.



The two teachers represented an important range of diversity. For instance, they represented a range of years in the teaching profession—novice and middle career, and they represented different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Indeed, as Ladson-Billings (1994) maintained, teachers from any ethnic and racial background can and are successful teachers of African American and other racially and ethnically diverse students. We argue that more research is needed to help elucidate the classroom management practices of teachers in urban and diverse learning contexts. Consistent with Weinstein et al.'s (2004) assertion that culturally responsive classroom managers possess a mind-set to conceive and implement a set of responsive practices, we focus on these teachers' conceptions, philosophies, and ideologies around their culturally responsive classroom practices instead of exclusively focusing on a set of strategies and practices that they developed and enacted in their classrooms. What was the nature of the teachers' culturally responsive classroom management practices? What were the teachers' conceptions of their students and their thinking about managing the learning opportunities available in the classroom? And how were the teachers able to understand the complexities of their students and to develop classroom management ideologies and practices that met the needs of all their students? We attempt to answer these questions and to extend what we know about culturally responsive classroom management for the benefit of researchers and practitioners.

### **Mr. Hall's Culturally Responsive Classroom Management**

Mr. Hall always dressed in blue jeans or khakis and a polo-style shirt. Throughout our 2 years of study at Bridge Middle School, neither of us ever saw, witnessed, or observed Mr. Hall taking a "break." During his planning block, he was in his classroom preparing for the next class: cleaning lab supplies, grading papers, or writing on the board. During an assembly that Milner attended, Mr. Hall sat with his class and was constantly making sure that students were being respectful to their classmates while other teachers seemed to take a bit of a break. Below, we focus on four recurrent themes that seemed to capture Mr. Hall's culturally responsive classroom management: (a) equity in practice: never give up; (b) building and sustaining relationships; (c) dealing with the (for)ever presence of race; and (d) a family affair.

## *Equity in Practice: Never Give Up*

Quite often, the terms *equity* and *equality* are used interchangeably. When teachers define and practice equality in education, they are often attempting to provide *the same* educational opportunities, experiences, curriculum, and instruction for all students in different learning environments. Equality, in a sense, can mean that individuals, policies, principles, and procedures aspire to and work toward the same for all. Equity can take on much more complex meanings and practices. For instance, equity in education may mean that teachers are attempting to provide students, regardless of their racial, ethnic, cultural, or SES background with what they need to succeed—not necessarily the exact same goals and visions across the board. In this sense, equity does not necessarily mean sameness but means that what is necessary for successful classroom management in one school, district, or with one student may be quite different from another. Mr. Hall’s philosophy was a bit different in this respect from Mr. Jackson’s. As will be explained in a subsequent section of this article, Mr. Jackson’s approach was to be “fair, firm, and consistent” with all his students. Mr. Jackson seemed to adopt a sameness approach to his management where he was consistent with all his students regardless of the situation.

Mr. Hall appeared to understand the difference between equity and equality and worked to build solid and sustainable relationships with each of his students as individuals as well as in the collective. In an interview, he stated,

I think that you have to develop a relationship with *each student*. Every kid that you have has a different story and if you show interest in what they’ve [*sic*] gone through, they’re going to show interest in what you’re trying to convey to them. Then they will show interest in what you’re doing [*italics added*].

Mr. Hall was known for providing students with multiple opportunities for success. In other words, he did not want to place students’ destinies in the hands of another (Monroe & Obidah, 2004), such as in the hands of an administrator who had the power to suspend or even expel a student from school.

Still, such an approach, where Mr. Hall attempted to respond to a student’s needs based on his or her situation, could cause some to question whether he is being equitable when he deals with the student based on the particular situation and rejects a “one-size-fits-all approach.” How was Mr. Hall able to be responsive to each student as an individual? When asked how he responded to people who questioned the “equity/equality” of such practice, he explained,

Well I'd ask: who hasn't gotten a second chance in life? I mean everybody messes up and not everybody messes up at the same time. So I mean *it's a different situation for everybody*. I mean, I know there are times in my job that I said the wrong thing, did the wrong thing, and . . . alarms didn't go off, and the SWAT team didn't come in . . . People, my peers—people above me pulled me aside and said: 'Hey, you know, we don't do it this way.' You know I wasn't terminated on the spot . . . You know I'm not going to [give them failing] grades or hurt their self-esteem right there on the spot just because they did it wrong that time . . . Everybody's different, you know . . . We are not robots . . . we can't all just crank out the same stuff every time. It's going to take one kid five times to get it . . . and it's going to take one kid one time. [italics added]

Thus, Mr. Hall cared deeply about ensuring that each of his students was able to master the information he was presenting (whether it was subject matter or rules about ways of conducting themselves) and that the students remained in the classroom. This means that he regularly allowed his students multiple opportunities to turn in work and that he would explain a concept repeatedly to make sure his students were learning:

Maybe that's bad—[that] I give so many second chances—that I care about them too much, but I think it works for me. And I wouldn't know how else to do it. And I couldn't be one of those who say: "uh oh Timmy you didn't get your homework done, well that's your fifth zero." You know I couldn't be like that.

Mr. Hall's comment, "I think it works for me," speaks to his attention to his own individuality and identity as well as his students'. He makes no claims that all teachers should behave as he does, but for himself and *his particular students, his actions seem to work and offer each student an opportunity for success*. The students meant a great deal to Mr. Hall, and this showed up in the curricular, instructional, and management decisions he made. However, there were times when Mr. Hall had conflicts with his students who did not want to do their work. It would be misleading to suggest that Mr. Hall (as well as other teachers in my study) did not encounter conflicts with students. For example, as Mr. Hall shared,

[There was a student]—He was a foot and a half taller than me, a big old guy. He wanted to chitchat and talk about sports and basketball and

stuff, and he didn't like me [*sic*] coming up to him telling him "get on task," "get on task" every five minutes. And one day he stood up to me and just went off. And I went off [too]—you know—it's like two brothers fighting. He let me know what he was thinking. And I let him know what I was thinking, and we went our separate ways . . . it took us about a week but one morning he just walked up to me, and said, "We're cool now." It was almost like, "I didn't know what happened." I was cool from the minute he walked out the door. That's just me: I am going to tell you how I feel, what I didn't like, and I am done.

Mr. Hall explained that he had to constantly set the parameters in the classroom so that students realized that he wanted and expected them to do their best work at all times while he also was being open to his students and providing them multiple opportunities for success. At the same time, he was not willing to negotiate learning for nonsense in the classroom. As Mr. Hall demonstrated a level of care that the students could sense, the students were willing to "work with" him—that is, to give him a second chance as well. The principle of equity was ingrained in Mr. Hall's culturally responsive management practices. He was deliberate in his decisions to deal with each student where he or she was and to be responsive to the needs of the individual student based on the situation. Consequently, Mr. Hall had developed some powerful relationships with his students.

### *Building and Sustaining Relationships*

Mr. Hall had encountered students who would not put forth effort and who were not interested in learning, as is the case among students in schools from different learning contexts across the country. For instance, Mr. Hall said,

I had a kid named John, and last year, he was one of the biggest troublemakers that I had. I couldn't get him to do homework. I couldn't get him to study for a test or anything. And this year he made the basketball team and made the football team. And every week I was asking him, "Hey, how you doing [with basketball]? Did you score a basket?" What did you do in the game?"

As for the relationship between Mr. Hall and John, it took some serious work—relationship building—to increase John's engagement, participation, and ultimately learning in Mr. Hall's science classroom. Mr. Hall took an

interest in John outside of the school (in athletics) to build a (better) relationship with John. Mr. Hall stated,

I've gone down to a couple of basketball practices and played one-on-one against him [with John], and he missed two assignments the whole year in homework. And his grade—average wise last year is up about fifteen points. He's gone from being a C student in my class to being an A student. He's just one example of how you show interest in a kid and how their output goes up in your class.

Mr. Hall clearly credits his student's (John) increased participation, grade, and engagement in the classroom to the building and maintenance of a solid relationship with the student, one that demonstrated an interest in the life world of John in basketball and also football. Moreover, Mr. Hall took some responsibility for John's lack of engagement in his class, and he worked to circumvent this by building a relationship with John. In other words, Mr. Hall realized that in some cases, he would have to go *beyond* the walls of the classroom to build a meaningful relationship with students to connect with/to the students *in* the classroom. As for Mr. Hall, he attended John's basketball practices and played against him one-on-one. The idea is that John probably began to see Mr. Hall as a real person who could shoot basketball and also who demonstrated enough care for him to take time out after school to play him in basketball.

Mr. Hall talked about how when he first became a teacher at the school, the students "didn't know" him. In his words,

[The students would say:] "I don't care who you are, I don't know you." And then after year one you've had half of them . . . And they're like okay well I know he's going to do this if I do this. So they start telling the seventh graders, Mr. Hall is going to get you if you do this . . . And then year three, you have more of them. And your reputation has now spread down to the sixth graders.

As Mr. Hall explained, students were less likely to learn from the teacher or to become engaged in the learning opportunities in the classroom if they feel that they "did not know" the teacher and if they did not feel that their teacher knew them as students with multiple and varied identities. Based on observations and even in conversations with students in other classes and in other contexts in the school such as in the cafeteria, Mr. Hall was a teacher whom

they felt like they knew, and they respected him. Of course, this coming to know and establishment of respect took time. Mr. Hall had to facilitate opportunities for the students to get to know him. For instance, in the cafeteria, when asked if they were taking a course from the teachers in our study, students would tell us what was on their minds about the teachers, both positive and negative. As for Mr. Hall, the students saw him as “cool” and a “good teacher.” At the same time, they perceived his class as “hard” but “fun.” The students would comment on how Mr. Hall always watched the Discovery Channel, and the students had developed an appreciation for the channel as well. In class, students quite often would reference a recent episode from the channel, and Mr. Hall was right there with them. They had found a television channel that was a *bridge* to learning in the classroom. Moreover, Mr. Hall shared personal stories with them about his family—namely his wife and children. He shared stories with the students about when his wife was pregnant and some of the experiences he had with his children. The students always perked up during these times and would pose question after question to Mr. Hall about the particulars of the narratives he shared. Indeed, Mr. Hall granted students entry into his life as a father and husband, for instance, and was building relationships and allowing the students opportunities to get to know him.

In essence, Mr. Hall acted as an “other father” to the many students with whom he taught throughout the day. He wanted what was best for the students, and he demonstrated this by building caring relationships with them but also by being strict enough to not allow them to get away with things that would be destructive or disadvantageous to or for them:

One thing I try to let kids know this year is that I really do care about them, you know, whenever I see them. You know, I love you. I want to see you play basketball. I want graduation invitations. You know, that’s not going to happen though, if you don’t straighten up in class. And I’ve tried to be more expressive, but at the same time, stay on them.

In addition, Mr. Hall explained that developing and sustaining positive relationships with students meant that teachers did not hold grudges against students. Mr. Hall explained that when students walk back into the classroom after a misunderstanding or a classroom management conflict with him the previous day, he did everything in his power to move forward and not to hold the previous day against the student. He stated, “If I get upset at you or if you screw up . . . tomorrow is going to be new. I’m not even going to mention it . . . unless you do the same thing . . . , every day is a new slate.” The idea is that teachers allow students another chance for success and do not expect the

student to “make up” for their shortcomings and mistakes in the past. Each day, for Mr. Hall and his students, is a new day with new possibilities for success in the learning context. At the same time, the reality was that matters of race were consistently present in the learning environment, and Mr. Hall and his students had to confront and deal with those matters associated with race.

### *Dealing With the (For)Ever-Presence of Race*

One of the most admirable qualities of Mr. Hall was his ability to engage issues of race. He seemed to be working to understand the importance of race in his classroom management and his teaching as some of his students were persistent in reminding him that they did not share the same racial and ethnic background. Not acknowledging the prevalence and pervasiveness of race could have resulted in disconnections and barriers to success in the classroom. Mr. Hall shared experiences when he was called a racist by some of his students:

Just coming from a rural country [town] and coming into the urban areas, the first couple years here, if I got onto some of the “harder” African American kids, you know, who are really into rap . . . because I don’t listen to rap . . . They’d say “you are racist;” they’d walk out the door saying: “you’re racist, you’re racist.” I’ve got nothing against them, you know, I come here to do one job and that is to teach science . . . I think some people have it in their minds that because I am up here, I get on you, I am attacking you personally. That is one of the hardest things to get across to children, is that I am not attacking you; I am attacking your behavior.

To move past this incident and to use it as a learning experience, Mr. Hall explained that it was critical for his students to learn more about him and for them to understand some of the commonalities that existed between and among them for them to embrace the issues that separated them. In his words,

I mean, I grew up in rural West Tennessee, and I’ve told a couple of kids, I said: I grew up poor, and we didn’t have anything, you know? I told them I didn’t know what real money looked like until I was about fifteen and had my own job because I didn’t know my family bought food with food stamps . . . I thought all money was purple and green and brown. I didn’t know what real money looked like.

Mr. Hall believed that it was essential to help students see him as a “real” person. Once students realized that “you [as a teacher] have had some difficult times similar to their experiences,” the students are more likely to engage the teacher and to participate in learning opportunities and activities in the classroom:

I haven’t brought that [childhood SES] out to everybody but every once in a while you’ll get a couple of attitudes, and you know you just kind of sense that [the students are thinking]—You don’t know where I’m coming from . . . You don’t know what it’s like to live here . . . you know? I told them it’s like living in the woods is similar to living in a tough neighborhood. The house I grew up in for about three years didn’t have indoor plumbing. It was an outhouse. We went outside to go to the bathroom. And a lot of them find that kind of amazing . . . because even they have never not had a toilet [*sic*].

Mr. Hall’s personal story influenced his ability to address race and his teaching.

Mr. Hall explained that it was the *situations of struggle* that often helped the students in his classes connect with him and realize that he was not a racist. In attempting to explain difficulties related to the human experience, Mr. Hall stated,

The struggle of being a human being is that every day is not going to be sunshine and roses—that’s what I told them . . . I said every day is not sunshine and roses; some days it clouds up; some days it rains; but hey there’s always tomorrow. So don’t worry about it.

The fact that Mr. Hall acknowledged and engaged the race issue with his students served as a bridge in terms of building relationships with his students which appeared to be critical for culturally responsive classroom management. Moreover, Mr. Hall talked about how important it was for the students to understand his socioeconomic status growing up. He explained that because many of the students experienced financial turmoil and are growing up in “tough” neighborhoods, they looked at him as somewhat of an outsider. He explained that he had to share with some of his students that, indeed, he understood struggle and that there were more commonalities between them than what the students probably could imagine. Since his experience where he was called a racist earlier in his career, Mr. Hall perceived his teaching as a family commitment. He saw his students as people who were literally



related to him, and this showed up in the responsive nature of his management and teaching.

## **A Family and Community Affair**

While there are important characteristics, experiences, and issues that can separate students from teachers, teachers from students, students from each other, and teachers from each other, Dillard (2000) reminded us of the necessity of people in education to connect to common experiences that unite all in the classroom. In reality, Mr. Hall stressed that teachers often have to assume different roles for their students:

For some kids you are going to be mama, daddy, brother, auntie, uncle, grandmother, and granddaddy. I mean you're going to be the one person who they're going to tell everything to. Some of them it's going to be almost like a big brother. They're going to do what you do. Now if you're modeling good behavior, they're going to act like you, almost like a younger sibling would.

Mr. Hall asserted that teachers have to model "appropriate" behavior at all times because students are often watching them, and the students see (some) teachers as role models. There are multiple family roles that successful teachers must play in the urban and diverse classroom. Mr. Hall embraced the idea that his students were like his family. He explained that family members care about each other and are not willing to let them fail. The "family" affair approach allowed him to recognize the positive attributes of his students. Mr. Hall was able to see the potential in his students, even those who others had given up on. Family members do whatever is necessary—"whatever it takes" for their family to succeed:

I like the family aspect because I mean if family's not important to you, then what [or who] is? I mean family should be the thing that's most important to everybody. And I mean that for some people it's not, so hopefully in here they kind of get that aspect . . . I care about everybody; I love them all . . . just like I would my own . . . If I holler at you it's because I know you can do better. And if I get on to you, I know that you're slacking; you're not pulling your weight.

Mr. Hall explained that family and community are established not only with the students in a teacher's classroom at present. Rather, he was able to

develop and sustain strong family and community relationships in the larger school community in other ways:

Another thing [I] started doing last year is we had a couple of new teachers who were on the first floor. And during my planning time I'd just walk in and check on them. So kids who I didn't even have [in my class], they were seeing me. And if they were acting crazy, I was taking them, and we were coming up here, and we were doing sixth grade science in my room. And I think just to gain that reputation now, you know, you might not teach them that year—but you're always watching them. And if you're around they'd better be acting right. So the school is the community.

Thus, Mr. Hall developed a relationship and reputation with his colleagues and with students who were not even in his classroom. He was a culturally responsive classroom manager in other teachers' classrooms, in a sense, as well. He also was establishing meaningful relationships with new teachers in the school and setting the tone for the kind of teacher he would be when students enrolled in his class in the future. The idea was "we are family and a community, and we must work together." Clearly, Mr. Hall believed that "If you quit caring about what you're doing, that's when you stop improving. You [can't] quit caring about the kids." Mr. Hall took his teaching responsibility quite seriously. He believed that when he was teaching he was "fighting" for the lives of his students:

You've got to fight against everything else in their life for their attention for that one hour. And if you can win the battle you've won the child for that one hour, and 99% of the time they are going to remember the important things you talked about.

Mr. Hall's point here is consistent with Ladson-Billings' (2000) idea that successful teachers and classroom managers in schools across the country are actually fighting for the lives of students. Mr. Hall had a mission to teach his students because he realized the possible risks and consequences in store for the students if he did not teach them about the culture of power and if the students did not learn. An undereducated and underprepared student from an urban and diverse school (and possibly any school) could possibly fall into destruction and obliteration (drug abuse, prison, or—even worse—death).

## **Mr. Jackson's Culturally Responsive Classroom Management**

Unlike Mr. Hall, Mr. Jackson always wore a shirt, necktie, and most of the time a suit jacket. He wore glasses and could be found standing in front of his door between classes. He often reminded students (those whom he had taught as well as others who were not enrolled in his classes) to “be mindful of the time” as he warned them not to be late for class. He had a deep love and appreciation for music, and this love and appreciation filtered down into his teaching. Mr. Jackson enjoyed jazz, pop, rhythm and blues, classical, and hip-hop music; music was almost always playing softly during his mathematics and science classes. Below, we focus on three recurrent themes that seemed to capture Mr. Jackson's culturally responsive classroom management: (a) targeting power among students, (b) immersion in students' world(s), and (c) the role of teachers' racial and ethnic background in classroom management and teaching.

### *Targeting Power Among Students*

Mr. Jackson recognized that there were power structures among the students at Bridge Middle School. In some schools, the student athletes are at the top of the hierarchy. In other schools, the valedictorian could be considered the cool, popular, and powerful student in the context. At Bridge Middle School, according to Mr. Jackson and based on our observations, the athletes and cheerleaders were often held in the highest esteem among their peers. Mr. Jackson worked to “get” these students, those considered popular and cool on his “side” in the classroom and to engage them in the learning of the classroom. In a sense, Mr. Jackson was culturally responsive to the students' conceptions of who was “cool” and “hip” and who the students looked up to. The idea was if he was able to get the popular students engaged and on track, then the other students would follow.

Mr. Jackson believed that targeting certain students was critical from the very beginning of the school year (the very first day of school), and it was necessary to use such power as an anchor for engagement and learning. Thus, Mr. Jackson adopted a learner role in his classroom to gauge the students in his classroom who were the most “powerful” in terms of popularity, admiration, and respect (often the student athletes and cheerleaders). He wanted to get the popular students to embrace his vision for the class so that other students would follow their lead:

I try to target the coolest. I try to target the toughest. I try to target the most popular students, and I get them to understand and follow my vision. And once I get them, the rest of the class usually follows.

Interestingly, Mr. Jackson reported that he wanted students to follow his vision, and he seemed to believe that it was his responsibility to set the vision without a lot of input from students. He may have adopted this philosophical approach because, developmentally, he may not have believed the students could really make that much of a contribution to building a vision for their courses—a point we disagree with.

Still, Mr. Jackson could not stress enough the power and influence that students have on each other. In many respects, students' peers are more important to them than their teachers or even their parents. In terms of the success of his culturally responsive management strategies, Mr. Jackson thought that the most popular students at the school had a great deal of power and influence, and he understood that he had to get those students on his side for the sake of learning in the classroom. He shared, "You have to get the people who have the most influence—the peer influence is very big in their world, very big. So if you get the toughest kids, the strongest kids, the most powerful kids, you get them to buy in, then you have got it [for the entire class]." In class, it was obvious that Mr. Jackson had gotten the buy-in from the entire class—even the students who were considered the most popular and/or the toughest.

Mr. Jackson stressed the importance of consistency in working with his students, from the most to the least popular students. In fact, he considered consistency as an important feature of successful teaching in the urban and diverse school context:

I don't care what your [power] status is—you are going to get consequences. I don't care if you are the big linebacker bully in the school, or if you are the quiet little girl who is eighty pounds and never does anything. I want you serious about your work [engaging in the learning]. So, you have to be careful not to let some people off because kids are watching you do that.

Mr. Jackson was pointed to issues of image and perceptions between and among students as well as between the teacher and the students. He believed that students were watching what happened in the classroom, how he handled situations—whether he was being "fair, firm, and consistent" with all the students or if some students were receiving harsher punishments than others.

Mr. Jackson was ever mindful of this and worked to make sure his students had a positive image of him and what was going on in the classroom. In Mr. Jackson's classroom, culturally responsive classroom management meant that he was consistent with all the students and that he did not show one student favoritism over others in terms of his expectations or the "consequences" that he implemented. Mr. Jackson adopted a "sameness" approach in his classroom management practices. While Mr. Hall dealt with students based on their individual circumstances, Mr. Jackson's approach and thinking was to be "consistent" with his students so that students would not feel that he was being "unfair" or inequitable.

Indeed, Mr. Jackson was ever cognizant of the students' image and perception of him and the systems he had in place were framed with image in mind. Mr. Jackson explained that the students talked to each other and would let others know what was happening in the classroom, and image and perception were central to the decisions he made. In addition, image and perception likely played a role in his wearing of shirt and neckties each day. His life story—his experiences with other more advanced teachers in other schools—led him to believe that his dress was an important part of his "image" as a teacher as well as for his students. The students were watching him. In Mr. Jackson's words, "Teachers should dress for where they are going not necessarily where they are currently." It was this statement that really connected to one of the missions of his teaching: *He wanted his students to envision life beyond their current situations.* Mr. Jackson aspired to become a principal at some point, and he was dressing for where he was going, not necessarily where he was presently. This same idea permeated Mr. Jackson's milieu; that is, he would tell the students that they needed to act like the doctors and lawyers that many of them aspired to become. In addition, while Mr. Jackson was always thinking about students' futures, he immersed himself in his students' present worlds, and this immersion was evident in his success as a teacher and culturally responsive classroom manager.

### *Immersion in Students' World(s)*

Perhaps the most admirable aspect of Mr. Jackson's culturally responsive classroom management approach was his deep level of interest in, knowledge about, and connections to the life experiences of his students. Mr. Jackson was conscious of what was going on in the students' lives both *inside* and *outside* of the classroom, and he worked very hard to make sure he "remained current" in what was happening in the students' worlds. His immersion in the students' worlds was important to the responsive nature of his classroom management. For instance, he was able to communicate with the students in

ways consistent with the students' more casual conversation with each other. There were important communicative connections made and relationships established because, in part, Mr. Jackson and his students were immersed in similar kinds of engagement—in terms of music, movies, and video games—outside of school.

Mr. Jackson was able to stay current with what was happening with the middle school students with whom he worked. He was able to quote versions of hip-hop songs, list off names of the most popular professional athletes, and had an idea of the latest movies that were out—he was, in a sense, immersed in pop culture. Mr. Jackson explained why he believed he was so connected to the world of his students:

The reason I know what is happening in their world is that I live in their world. I have a fourteen-year-old; I have an eleven-year-old; I have an eight-year-old. I know the world they came from with my eight-year-old, and I know where they are with my eleven-year-old . . . I know where they are going with my fourteen-year-old. Because I teach in middle school, I am right around eleven- and twelve-year-old range [students] . . . And I am a D.J.—I like the rap music myself. I play rap music. I feel like a kid at heart sometimes, so I kind of stay in touch with them in that way too . . .

It is important to note that Mr. Jackson did not believe that it was impossible for other teachers to immerse themselves in students' worlds—even if they did not have children around the same age as the students at Bridge Middle School. To the contrary, he believed that teachers could learn about the world of their students and use what they learn to enhance the learning that took place in the classroom:

You have to immerse yourself in their world in some form or fashion. I am just lucky to come from the world that I teach in. I came from that world. I truly live in that world, so I am immersed already in my natural life, so if I were in a system where the students came from a different world, I would just have to immerse myself in their world.

Again, an important feature of Mr. Jackson's culturally responsive classroom management was inherent in the ways in which he connected with his students and was able to build relationships. He did not believe that teachers should make excuses for why they could not learn about and immerse themselves in the life worlds of their students. He asserted, "You have to

understand their desires, wants, and needs and dislikes . . . You have to implement that in your academics because if they are not interested, then they are not going to learn.” Clearly, for Mr. Jackson, there is a direct connection between the immersion of a teacher in the world of students and the learning opportunities that are available in a school.

### *The Importance and Unimportance of Same Race and Ethnicity*

Mr. Jackson shared his thoughts about the importance, relevance, unimportance, or irrelevance of his being a Black male teacher in the urban and diverse classroom. In other words, he explained whether he believed he had an advantage by being Black as the majority of students in his courses were Black. Mr. Jackson was able to get the students motivated, energized, and engaged in what was happening in the classroom; in fact, a student in a different classroom Milner had observed would be disruptive and disengaged from the beginning to the end of a class period and walk into Mr. Jackson’s classroom and act completely opposite. Mr. Jackson explained whether or not he thought his being Black gave him an added benefit or edge in the classroom:

Yes and no. I hate to be ambiguous like that but . . . yes, initially, because they can relate to me because of my ethnicity . . . Initially. *But the effectiveness comes from my style, how I teach and how I manage,* and any person of any race can do that [succeed] if trained properly. Any gender can do that. So, I say yes because initially they get attached to me, but that is only the start of the race. You can have another guy come in with the same ethnicity, and they may become attached to him at first but if he is not being consistent, if he is not being fair, if he is not doing everything you are supposed to do, [then] he is not going to be effective (our emphasis added).

Mr. Jackson provided several examples suggesting that shared ethnicity of teachers and their students may be important to their classroom management and instruction in the beginning but would not necessarily result in sustained success. It was the deeper connections, the “style,” and approaches of the teacher that sustained success:

. . . I have seen several men with the same ethnicity come in and couldn’t quite cut it. But initially “he was cool; he’s a good guy; he’s

cool,” but then—if you are not being fair, if you are not being consistent, and if you are not effectively managing the classroom, you are not going to be very effective to the whole—maybe a small group—but not the whole.

Thus, Mr. Jackson was unyielding in his position that teachers from any ethnic background can indeed be successful in the urban and diverse classroom. He explained, “If somebody comes in from a different ethnicity—even if they [*sic*] don’t feel like they have a sense of belonging with them—if they come in and be consistent and fair and stress everything, they are going to be successful, I believe.”

In the final sections, we attempt to expand the notion of culturally responsive classroom management based on this study, and we share some implications for researchers and practitioners.

## Discussion and Conclusions

What we have attempted to do in this article is to present the culturally responsive classroom management practices of two teachers from an urban and diverse middle school. A primary goal is to extend the notion of culturally responsive classroom management considering the ethnic background of the teachers and students and the context of the study. Weinstein et al. (2004) outlined several principles of culturally responsive classroom management: recognition of teachers’ own ethnocentrism; knowledge of students’ cultures; understanding of the broader social, economic, and political systems in education; appropriate management strategies; and development of caring classrooms. This research builds on and relates to these important principles. The principles that emerged in this study included, teachers’ (a) understanding equity and equality, (b) understanding power structures among students, (c) immersion into students’ life worlds, (d) understanding the Self in relation to Others, (e) granting students entry into their worlds, and (f) conceiving school as a community with family members.

### *Understanding Equity and Equality*

One principle that surfaced in this study that seems to extend the conception of culturally responsive classroom management is the necessity for teachers to understand equity and equality. Ladson-Billings (2000) provided an important discussion about notions of “equivalent” and “analogous” that can help us think through the equity, equality, and sameness issue



in culturally responsive classroom management. When discussing some of her experiences with teachers, she wrote,

. . . discussants want to talk in terms of who has suffered most. However, when we understand the ways in which oppression has worked against many groups of people based on their race, culture, class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation, we must recognize that there may be analogous experiences that are not necessarily equivalent ones. (p. 207)

Ladson-Billings (2000) goes on to explain that “our understanding of the commonalities of oppression cannot wash out the particularities and specifics of each experience” (p. 207). Essential to Ladson-Billings’ points is whether equality and equity actually mean sameness. Thus, a question that is important to address when teachers manage their classrooms is whether they should implement *the same* classroom management strategies in every situation with every student. Rejecting the interchangeable nature of equity and equality, Walter Secada (1989) wrote,

There is a history of using terms like equity and equality of education interchangeably. Though these constructs are related, equality is group-based and quantitative. Equity can be applied to groups or to individuals; it is qualitative in that equity is tied to notions of justice. (p. 23)

Equity, according to Secada (1989), has to do with social justice and whether groups or individuals are actually being treated fairly. When we define and practice equality and equity in education, we are often attempting to provide the same educational opportunities, experiences, curriculum, and instruction for all students in different learning environments, regardless of the needs of those in the contexts. Understanding equity and equality as sameness can mean that classroom management policies and procedures aspire to and work toward the same for all students regardless of the circumstance. However, in analyzing policy-related matters focusing on desegregation, Ladson-Billings (2000) maintained that “rhetoric of equality means sameness tended to ignore the distinctive qualities of African American culture and suggested that if schools were to make schooling experiences identical for African Americans, we somehow could achieve identical results” (p. 208). Thus, equality, as Ladson-Billings has described, does not necessarily mean sameness and culturally responsive classroom managers

understand this and use this knowledge and understanding in their management decisions.

Secada (1989) wrote,

The essence of equity lies in our ability to acknowledge that even though our actions are in accord with a set of rules, the results of those actions may still be unjust. Equity goes beyond following the rules . . . equity gauges the results of actions directly against standards of justice. (p. 23)

The culturally responsive classroom managers in this study seemed to understand the difference between equity and equality. Although Mr. Jackson and Mr. Hall had different views on the concepts, they both understood that they needed to display equitable practices among their students and that they had to reject perceptions of inequality and inequity among their students in their classes. For Mr. Hall, he recognized that there were times when he would need to give students multiple opportunities for success because he did not want to send the students to a disciplinary administrator and risk the student being placed in in-school suspension, detention, or out-of-school suspension. Mr. Hall reflected on his own experiences of not being “perfect” and needing to be guided on “how things are done here” and thus used this frame of reference as a way to prepare his students for what Delpit (1995) called the culture of power.

Mr. Jackson, however, realized how perceptive students were of how teachers dealt with them and their classmates, and his responsive nature was to present practices that seemed “fair, firm, and *consistent*” among his students. In both classroom situations, Mr. Hall and Mr. Jackson were culturally responsive classroom managers and thus reiterated the reality that culturally responsive classroom management is about a frame of mind that works to meet the specific and collective needs of all students, even when teachers’ conceptions of responsiveness are different (as was the case for Mr. Jackson and Mr. Hall). Suggesting that a predetermined set of strategies will automatically result in culturally responsive classroom management would be misleading.

### *Understanding Power Structures Among Students*

A second principle that emerged in this study that seemed to extend culturally responsive classroom management is the importance of teachers’ understanding power structures among and between students. The work of Delpit

(1995) and her conceptions of “the culture of power” can help us think about power structures among the students at Bridge Middle School. Delpit described five aspects around power:

(a) issues of power are enacted in classrooms; (b) there are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a “culture of power”; (c) the rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power; (d) if you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier; and (e) those with power are frequently least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (p. 24)

Ideology around the culture of power seems to point to power structures between those who make rules and those who are expected to interpret and follow them. For instance, White men have historically developed the codes and rules of the culture of power; they carry a level of power based on their racial and ethnic background. This principle, however, attempts to extend notions of the culture of power to those among students. According to Mr. Jackson, for teachers to be responsive classroom managers, they must understand the power structures among students and use this understanding to recruit those in power into a posture, consciousness, and disposition of learning and engagement in the classroom.

To recap, Mr. Jackson used his knowledge of the most powerful students to his advantage as he managed the learning opportunities available in the classroom. In his view, because the students already had an idea of those participating in the culture of power, they would actually follow the student leaders (football players, cheerleaders, and so forth). Mr. Jackson was culturally responsive to the students’ conceptions and ideas about whom they considered “cool” and “hip.” Indeed, the students possessed social capital that needed to be taken into consideration as Mr. Jackson worked to develop culturally responsive classroom management. Recognizing the enormous role of peer perceptions, pressure, and power, Mr. Jackson was relentless in his quest of learning who the students saw as members of the “in” crowd and in using this knowledge as a way to support attitudes and dispositions of learning and engagement in the classroom. He understood the culture of power and the power structures among the students, and this understanding and knowledge were pivotal in his practice of culturally responsive classroom management.

### *Immersion Into Students' Life Worlds*

A third principle that extends the construct, culturally responsive classroom management, is teachers' willingness to immerse themselves in students' life worlds. As apparent in the previous section on understanding power structures among students, Mr. Jackson was also adamant about "knowing what the students know." As his biological children were around the same age as his students at Bridge Middle School, Mr. Jackson was at an advantage. However, he also explained that teachers without children around the age of their students can still immerse themselves into the life experiences of their students.

For instance, teachers attempt to understand what it means to live in the world of their students through music, sport, film, and pop culture. This means that teachers actually ask the students about their out-of-school interests, for example, their favorite radio stations, their favorite musical artists, their favorite sport, their favorite athlete, and so forth, and investigate these favorites by listening to the radio stations of these students or watching the shows they watch on television. Mr. Hall was able to immerse himself in the life world of one of his students by engaging the student in basketball contests and consistently posing questions to the student about his performance in basketball and football games. While Mr. Hall had some interest in basketball, he was more interested in soccer (he served as the soccer coach for the female team at Bridge Middle School). However, because he wanted to immerse himself into the life world of his student, he adopted basketball as a sport of interest. This immersion, of course, allowed Mr. Hall the opportunity to develop a stronger relationship with his student, which served as a conduit in Mr. Hall's management and instruction.

### *Understanding the Self in Relation to Others*

A fourth principle of culturally responsive classroom management is teachers' understanding of themselves in relation to others. Important here is that it is not enough for teachers to understand themselves; critical reflection of the Self is essential, but it is only a first step in developing culturally responsive classroom management. Teachers should strive to understand themselves *in relation to* their students, their students' parents, and their students' communities. Mr. Hall began to recognize the commonalities and differences between his students and himself. In fact, the students insisted that he get to *know* them and consider his own ways of knowing in relation to theirs.

The students reminded Mr. Hall that he did not "know" them, which seemed to surprise Mr. Hall. He had to reflect on his own life experiences and

his own status in the school and growing up to get a sense of some of the differences (and consistencies) between the students and him. Similarly, Mr. Jackson had to think about himself in relation to his students. He was constantly thinking about his world with his own children and likening those experiences with his students at school. He was questioning how his life related to the lives of his students in order to “hook” the students and to get them excited about learning. In this sense, issues of power are understood to be relational, and the teachers, especially Mr. Hall, came to understand the tensions inherent in their own experiences and beliefs in relation to their students’.

### *Granting Students Entry Into Teachers’ Worlds*

While it seems logical that teachers will develop practices and strategies to get to know their students and even that they would consider themselves in relation to their students, a fifth principle of culturally responsive classroom management is that teachers grant students professional entry into their worlds. As the students made clear to Mr. Hall, they needed to know him, and Mr. Hall worked to allow the students to get to know him. He shared stories with the students about his own biological children, his wife, his parents, and his siblings. When Mr. Hall first started teaching, the fact that the students did not “know” him seemed to serve as a barrier.

Mr. Hall sensed tension from his students; the students had preconceived notions about who he must be. Thus, Mr. Hall decided to share with some of his students the fact that he grew up living in poverty. His sharing of this information seemed to be a link to the students. Mr. Hall explained that his parents used food stamps to purchase food and that his family did not have an indoor rest/bathroom facility at one point. His explanation or rationale for sharing this with his students was to allow them entry into what his life was like, especially when the students had difficult times. The students were able to see that their difficult situations were not identical to Mr. Hall’s but were indeed analogous. Similarly, Mr. Jackson allowed students’ entry into his world more in his actions than what he expressed to his students verbally. For instance, Mr. Jackson shared a wide range of music with his students. When students asked about a particular song that was unfamiliar to them, Mr. Jackson would tell them about when he first heard the artist, who introduced him to the artist, and so forth. Again, Mr. Hall and Mr. Jackson allowed students’ entry into their life world as they were allowed entry into their students’.

### *Conceiving School as a Community With Family Members*

A sixth principle that seems to extend culturally responsive classroom management is teachers' conceptions of school as a community with family members. Mr. Jackson was usually in the hallway between class sessions encouraging students to be mindful of the time and to make it to class on time—the majority of the students he encouraged were not enrolled in his classes but were in the school community. Mr. Hall would stop by other teachers' classrooms and correct students' misbehavior, especially teacher colleagues who were new to the school. When students were not on task, Mr. Hall would escort them to his classroom and have them do sixth-grade science.

Mr. Hall saw his colleagues and the students at Bridge Middle School as family members, and he perceived Bridge Middle School as a community. It did not matter if he observed students' off task behavior who were not in his classes—he would still correct the behavior. In his view, all the students at Bridge Middle School were his students, and he was attentive to them. Mr. Hall's approach allowed the students to get to know him before they enrolled in his eighth-grade class and also allowed him to build a reputation as a teacher who would not tolerate nonsense. Thus, Mr. Hall approached interactions with his colleagues and students at Bridge Middle School as a huge family working together in a community, an approach that was central to his ability to develop and practice culturally responsive classroom management. In Table 4, we have attempted to capture and summarize these six principles that seemed to be at the core of the classroom management practices of two teachers at Bridge Middle School. In particular, the six principles are summarized in the table to assist practitioners in thinking through their practices and hopefully transferring some of them into their own practices. We are hopeful that teachers working in all schools and particularly in urban and diverse schools will find the principles applicable and relevant to their work with students. Furthermore, researchers are charged with examining these principles in/with more depth and breadth. How consistent and inconsistent are these principles in other contexts, with different teachers, in other parts of the country? Which of these principles and others seem to be most powerful in ensuring student learning opportunities? Moreover, what might be some next steps in thinking about the complex roles of classroom management, instruction, curriculum, and diversity—especially in urban schools?

In conclusion, classroom management and diversity are about more than teachers' abilities to get students to behave in any certain way. They are about more than how teachers "control" their students. When observers walk down a hallway of a school and look into a classroom, the question should not be

**Table 4.** Principles of Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

Teachers . . .	
Understand equity and equality	Teachers understand the difference between equality and equity. They decide if they will incorporate the same management strategies for all students or adapt/respond to students based on the situation.
Understand power structures among students	Teachers understand that there are power structures among the students. Teachers recruit “popular” students to embrace the vision of learning and engagement in the classroom to get other students engaged.
Immerse themselves into students’ life worlds	Teachers attempt to understand what it means to live in the world of their students through music, sport, film, and pop culture. They incorporate this knowledge and understanding into their classroom management practices.
Understand the Self in relation to Others	Teachers understand points of intersection and convergence between their students, particularly as these similarities and differences exist related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender. They use this knowledge to build and sustain relationships in the classroom.
Grant students entry into teachers’ worlds	Teachers allow students to learn things about them and make connections to demonstrate the commonalities that exist between students and teachers. They share their stories with their students and allow students to share theirs with them to build community.
Conceive school as a community with family	Teachers conceive school as a community that is established by all those in the environment. Teachers allow students to have voice and perspectives in how the community will be defined. Teachers respect and care about those in the community as if they were family members.

whether the students are sitting orderly and silently in their seats, completing their worksheets, or listening solely to their teachers’ directives. On first glance, it may be tempting to see such classroom settings as productive and meaningful for students. To the contrary, the pressing questions should be whether significant *learning* is taking place in that classroom, why or why not, and by what means. Classroom management and meeting the needs of diverse learners is about students’ opportunities to learn in a context: teachers should work to manage student learning opportunities not to control students. The latter approach, where teachers spend their energy attempting to control students, reinforces hegemonic systems that can teach students to become amenable and

complacent rather than critically engaged citizens who work against oppression in the broader society.

To recap, by learning opportunities, we mean that culturally responsive classroom management should provide learning opportunities beyond (yet in addition to) that of subject matter; for instance, students should be prepared to think critically about issues both inside and outside of the school and to become agents for change when they encounter situations and systems that are inequitable. Students also should be provided opportunities to develop inquisitive dispositions about power structures and Delpit's ideas of the culture of power both among their classmates and in the broader political, social, racial, and economic context. In short, culturally responsive classroom management helps students understand and mitigate the culture of power (Delpit, 1995) in the classroom, in the school, and in society. It empowers students to participate in and critique the pervasive discourses in their classrooms that place them in a position of passive recipients of knowledge instead of agents with expertise, perspective, and insight in the process of knowledge construction and deconstruction. Thus, culturally responsive classroom management is about teachers' abilities to manage the classroom—namely learning opportunities, so that students can engage and participate in learning—regardless of the subject matter being taught.

Our point in this study was not to compare these two teachers but to demonstrate that, although different, teachers with different styles and approaches can be successful classroom managers in urban and diverse settings. The culturally responsive classroom managers in this study at Bridge Middle School were aware of students' cognitive needs, their social needs, their academic needs as well as their political needs. They had the mind-set to understand equity and equality and power structures among students. The teachers also immersed themselves in the students' life worlds and also understood themselves in relation to others. Moreover, the teachers granted students entry into their worlds and conceived school as a community with family members.

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## Notes

1. We understand that every person represents racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity, although White people usually are classified as the norm and others are considered diverse. We understand that there is a great deal of diversity among people from every racial, cultural, and ethnic background. However, for the purpose of this discussion and due to page restrictions, here we are defining racially, culturally, and ethnically diverse groups of people as those groups that are not White or European American.
2. Eisner (1994) keenly postulated several forms of the curriculum: (a) the explicit curriculum concerns student-learning opportunities that are overtly taught and stated or printed in documents, policies, and guidelines, such as in course syllabi; (b) the implicit curriculum is intended or unintended but is not stated or written down but is actually inherent in what students have the opportunity to learn; (c) a third form of curriculum, the null curriculum, deals with what students do not have the opportunity to learn. Thus, information and knowledge that are not available for student learning is also a form of the curriculum because *students are actually learning something based on what is not emphasized, covered, or taught*. What students do not experience becomes messages for the students themselves. For example, if students are not taught to question, critique, or to critically examine power structures, the students are learning something—possibly that it may not be essential for them to critique the world to improve it. What is *absent* is essentially *present* in student learning opportunities from Eisner's perspective.
3. The practice of students attending private and independent schools rather than their zoned school was very common in the district.

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