IT'S ABOUT MORE THAN “JUST BE CONSISTENT”
OR “OUT-TOUGH THEM”; CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE
CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

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ABSTRACT

Until recently, research on the relationship between classroom management and culturally responsive teaching has remained distinctly separated. Researchers in each field of study have focused on issues pertinent to their respective areas of study. Missing is research that explores how teachers make sense of and come to understand issues of cultural diversity in their classroom management approaches. This qualitative research is based on case studies of the perceptions and interpretations of three White, female, middle school teachers. The participants were nominated as successful teachers of African American students and effective classroom managers by their principal and other teachers in the building. The purpose of the study was to examine and describe the influence of diversity on the teachers’ classroom management practices.

The increase in African American students in urban middle schools together with the low number of African American teachers means that the majority of students will be taught by White, middle-class, teachers. Although these teachers may have good intentions, they may not have the cultural background and dispositions to deliver the most appropriate classroom management approach to this group. Research indicates that teachers may lack cultural self-efficacy, cultural information, and cultural experience that may result in subjecting African American students to ethnocentric
attitudes, damaging communication, and culturally insensitive discipline and interventions. The cumulative effects of poverty, racial segregation, low expectations, and misinformation about the cultural background of African American students have placed them in an exceptionally high-risk category for school disciplinary consequences. While many reasons can be attributed to the high suspension and expulsion rates experienced by this population, the fact that African American students infrequently share the cultural framework of their teachers may be a factor in the creation of the racialized discipline gap in public schools.

There is a critical need to identify reform initiatives that can reduce disciplinary inequity and increase educational opportunities for African American students. This research examines teachers’ sense-making about classroom management and culturally responsive pedagogy and the relation between them in their practice. Data was analyzed using constructivists, sociocultural, and critical race theory. The following themes emerged: (a) developing personal relationships based on respect, trust, and caring; (b) teacher confidence and cultural efficacy; and (c) intervention as guiding, mediating, and scaffolding.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to Joseph and Delois Hubbard

The work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives and the dream shall never die.
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So many of our dreams at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable; and then, we summon the will, they soon become inevitable. (Reeve, 2003)

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when decisions are being made about the life opportunities of African American boys
and girls. Stay strong.
VITA

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CHAPTER 1

STUDYING UP: MOVING BEYOND THE MYTHS
OF MANAGING STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Introduction

Teachers have the responsibility to recognize cultural differences and establish, within the framework of these differences, an environment that encourages all of their students. Teachers who are ill prepared to meet these challenges may inadvertent establish differential expectations and discipline patterns that are actually discouraging and detrimental to some groups of students. (Dixon, 1997, p. 67-70)

In my twenty years of working and teaching in urban schools, first as a college student in an early experience course, then as a teacher, program coordinator, principal, and researcher, I have crossed many boundaries between the worlds of students, teachers, and parents. Throughout this time, I have maintained a clear understanding of my purpose for being in schools: to protect, promote, and enhance the educational opportunities available to children. As an African American child, schooling was promoted as an essential purpose in our household. There were only two grades acceptable: A or B, a C or below would result in a reprimand and the loss of privileges. I was continually reminded of the importance of getting an education. A favorite quota of my mother was “Get your education because it is the one thing they can never take
away from you.” The “they” in this quote was white people. My mother and father grew up during one of the most difficult times of race relations in this country. They each experienced horrific racial bigotry, hatred, and violence. Yet, they never communicated racial intolerance towards whites; their focus remained on learning and reinforcing the idea that you had to “be a credit to your race.” Racism was never accepted as a reason for personal failure.

During my years of working in schools, I have never apologized for my concern for the welfare of African American children. After the courts reversed desegregation plans, most of the students I had contact as a building administrator were Black. This reality further accounted for my insistence that teachers, parents, and colleagues never underestimate who I cared about the most – the children. I firmly believe that adults have resources they can use to protect themselves, teachers have unions to promote their interest, and the schools as institutions are largely self-perpetuating. Therefore, the only members inside of schools who were without resources, viable means, or the wherewithal to protect themselves are the students. Despite being certain that adults could make mistakes in their attempts to help children, which includes the work of classroom teachers, support staff members, custodians, and cafeteria employees, I have insisted that the focus of their work remain on protecting and improving the status of children.

This belief has been tested repeatedly in my work in public schools. This is particularly the case given the reality that various disciplinary policies and practices are detrimental to the educational progress of African American children. The cumulative
affect of these policies and practices (e.g., zero tolerance policies, maximum security-like procedures, mandatory suspensions, and a “take no prisoners” approach to discipline) alienate students from teachers and turn schools into a resemblance of a Para-military experience (Civil Rights Project, 2000, p. v). This creates the motivation for children to escape or get punished. This type of schooling exasperates the delivery of large percentages of African American males to the punishment industry (i.e., prison) and females to a life of dependency (i.e., public assistance) and despair (Wald, 2003).

While this characterization appears drastic, it is reflective of the schools in which I have been a teacher and principal. I was constantly reminded of the fact that if education reflects the way society passes out life chances, then the upward mobility of all children must remain the creed of teachers. The work of teaching and administrating the business of the schools goes beyond handing out diplomas, attendance ribbons, and well-wishes to students. This work is about connecting children to a future; hopefully, a future with promise.

In light of these beliefs, there was a particular incident one year that challenged and changed my views on classroom management and the importance of teachers being able to know about and understand student diversity. I offer this vignette because it captures critical questions about the relation between classroom management and culture addressed in this dissertation.
The Case of Ms. Martin

It was second period when the first compliant arrived regarding a disruption in room 315. This was becoming a daily concern and what distinguished this compliant was that it originated from a classroom three doors down the hallway from the disturbance. Thunderous voices were heard shouting in the classroom, students raced blindly in and out of the room slamming doors and chasing each other in reckless abandonment. Desks were being thrown across the room crashing into other students and causing injury while one student held a broken CD disk to a classmate’s neck and threaten to cut him. Within this deafening menagerie of chaos the constant metallic shrill of a whistle being blown repeatedly could be heard…it was the teacher’s whistle.

She is a middle age white female, fourteen years of teaching experience, and a graduate from a highly reputable teacher education program. The teacher is cordial, friendly, reform-minded, and open to suggestion…but she is lost. Since transferring into this middle school her classes have been the site of continuous student disruption. Every lab table in the room had been broke, patched, or discarded. The floor was covered with dirt, water, and paper by the end of each day and students referred to her simply by the initials of her name. She could not articulate why her classes were so dangerously out-of-control since she writes a number of behavioral referrals daily (“they should be afraid of being sent to the office”). Her only defense when asked what was going on with her classes was that “there is a bad mix of children in the class.” This same explanation was offered even after a second reassignment of students in her classroom was conducted.
For months African American parents had quietly seethed about stories of disorder in the classroom, now bolstered by comments from other teachers. They confronted the principal: “My child is falling behind in that class, she is not learning anything, she is losing out on a year of her middle school education, I want her out of there now!” Only now it was not probable since over twenty other parents had requested removal of their child from the classroom. They were resentful that their children were being removed or suspended from school for insubordination, disruption and fighting in the classroom. The parents’ complained that their children were just protecting themselves and they were being unjustly denied their educational rights, while nothing in their estimate was being done about the teacher in room 315. They were right in both instances; their children were being denied an adequate education and little could be done about the teacher’s inability to manage her classroom given her contract and union affiliation. Tenure placed her outside of strict and stringent employee disciplinary actions, her due process rights protected her from being dismissed. Her improvement would have to be voluntary and self-initiated despite my intervention and documentation of her ineptness as the principal. But where would she start?

Statement of the problem

This incident highlights several important concerns about classroom management that fails to be student-centered or culture-centered. The teacher in this vignette was more concerned with controlling the behavior of students than understanding it or being
able to guide and mediate it in a more feasible manner. Also highlighted in this example is the underlying fear of the teacher that she could not be successful working with this “mix” of students, the anxiety and frustration of parents disappointed with the school’s response, social justice concerns about fairness and the academic preparation of students, and finally, the seemingly inappropriate suspension of students.

Working with this teacher challenged many of my previously held beliefs about classroom management. It refuted the myth of “just be consistent” with students. Given the diversity in this classroom, the teacher could not treat different students the same way. Next, the “I can out-tough them” idea proved to be wrongheaded in managing the classroom. This macho, heavy-handed technique did not work with students from tough, urban experiences, with their histories and cultural backgrounds. Student compliance only got more difficult as the teacher simply exhausted her range of consequences and rewards. The students’ anger, rage, and hostility became even more violent as meanness and spiritedness on the part of the teacher and myself were perceived as the expected response students could anticipate from adults.

Similar short-lived results are found in other classroom management techniques that rely primarily on mainstream sociocultural norms. As an experienced principal I recognized that this teacher’s classroom management situation was not unique to her classroom. My work with student discipline had brought me in contact with many teachers experiencing similar problems. I began to accept the idea that classroom management approaches that did not take student diversity and cultural backgrounds into consideration may present barriers to effective management in an urban context.
The majority of the classroom management approaches used in urban schools are norm-referenced to White, middle-class, students who simply are not present in these schools. The teacher in this vignette did not recognize the influence of culture on students’ behavior and her attitudes reflected a deficit model assumption that the students’ culturally influenced behaviors needed to be fixed. It was apparent that this teacher’s classroom management actions were grounded in her cultural background, history, and lived experiences, which were dissimilar to the students.

Consequently, I decided to examine more closely the practices of successful white, female, teachers in urban middle schools. I wanted to explore the influence that students’ culture had in their considerations of how to handle classroom management problems. Most of all I wanted to know their sense-making understandings of cultural diversity in their classrooms. How did they deal with issues related to diversity in their classroom management approach? What attitudes, dispositions, and approaches helped them? In short, to what extent was there a relation between the students’ culture and their classroom management approach?

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe teacher knowledge and practice of classroom management by focusing on the tasks and challenges of classroom organization in an urban middle school. The case studies explored teachers’ perceptions, interpretations, problems, and thinking about the orchestration of instruction, management, and knowledge of students’ cultural backgrounds. Although
there is no single definition of culture, for the purposes of this study it is defined as “the shared beliefs, values, customs, and meanings” that distinguished the students (Merriam & Mohamad, 2000, p. 45). Culture was “the glue” that gave meaning to the students’ lives and was seen in the artifacts, beliefs, values and learned behavior patterns they demonstrated. The teachers in this study learned how to observe the meanings ingrained in the hand gestures of the students, their particular way of walking, talking, dressing, and relating with each other and adults. The research was designed to examine the extent to which there was a relation between the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy and classroom management.

The underlying assumption was that as culturally responsive practices increased in how teachers related to students, classroom management problems would decline. The goal of the project was to explore, describe, and examine how the findings of previous researchers and theorists on culturally responsive pedagogy and classroom management might explain practices of effective teachers and their work with African American students. Specifically, how these three white teachers as reflective practitioners continually evaluated their management choices and demonstrated actions that embraced, affirmed, and extended culturally socializing behaviors with African American students. As classrooms become increasingly more diverse, urban educators need proactive management skills and dispositions that acknowledge and respect differences that might impact on the delivery and receipt of instruction. Consequently, this investigation examined what might have been overlooked or not noticed in the
teaching and learning interactions of these teachers. The study place specific teaching
encounters, events, and understanding of culture and management within the context of
daily teaching activities.

In this study I asked the teachers questions about their background, stance on
classroom management, diversity, and what brought them back each day to what many
consider a difficult career. It was important to ask about their interpretation on the
influence of students’ culture on their day-to-day decision making about behaviors. I
considered what got recognized, rewarded, or earmarked as a concern for later attention.
The intention was clear: how and when did you “get it” in successfully teaching and
managing your classroom? I wanted to understand the fit between purpose, approach,
and theory.

Research questions

The questions salient to this inquiry examined why the practices of effective
White teachers in urban middle schools is worth knowing. By exploring knowledge
embedded within the teachers’ practice, more sophisticated pedagogical reasoning could
be explored about the understandings that guide their practices. The research questions
explored the knowledge, predispositions, and performances of these teachers: how they
articulated their management decisions and made adjustments to enhance social
relationships and what they discovered about student motivation and engagement in
productive classroom work.

The research questions were not designed to result in a list of “how to” answers in
managing an urban classroom. Instead a premise from culturally responsiveness theory,
that teaching in diverse classrooms is more a frame of mind, disposition, and teaching stance than a set of strategies and procedures. Teachers, from this point of view, have to be interested in taking an activist stance in promoting the social justice concerns of students as it related to classroom management. Hence this research study was not a guided tour of the day-to-day decisions of the teachers. There are enough textbooks and on-line chat groups to address this need. Instead, the investigation looked at the teachers’ ideas and conceptions that guide and inform their practice and their stories about how they came to understand their students and their behavioral needs.

The following research questions guided this investigation:

1. How do experienced White female teachers make sense of and deal with issues of cultural diversity in their classroom management approach?
   • What are the teachers’ beliefs on authority and what practices do they use to gain their authority in the classroom?
   • What meanings do the teachers construct about their students, themselves, classroom communication, and management? How do these meanings shape and inform their management practices?

2. How do these teachers develop a well-grounded classroom management framework that uses students’ experiences, cultures, community values, and cultural norms? When did these teachers feel that they “got it” in creating productive, well-managed classrooms?
3. What influence does the teachers’ situatedness (i.e., culture, identity, interpretations, and knowledge – who I am, what I believe, and what experiences I have had) have on their classroom management decision-making?

**Significance of the study**

This study proceeded from the clear-eyed assumption that student learning cannot occur in a chaotic environment. The intention was to bring together cultural responsive pedagogical theories with classroom management practices that hold the promise of helping urban teachers rethink the persistent but little understood challenge of centering student diversity in order to promote learning. The plan was to explore understandings of the role of gender and ethnicity in these processes and the implications this has for teacher education and professional development. Management in urban classrooms continues to represent a serious challenge for many teachers. The significance of this is that it provides case studies of White, middle class, female teachers who are particularly successful and culturally sensitive in their approaches to classroom management.

The study provides systematic insights into how our best teachers honor the integrity and strengths each student brings to the classroom; while still teaching the academic and social skills necessary to become contributing members of their multiple communities and society. Given that research has found that effective classroom management is a powerful influence on student achievement, greater than students’ general intelligence, home environment, motivation, and socioeconomic status, (Wang,
Haertel, & Walberg, 1994, p. 78) it was necessary to understand teachers’ explanations for why and how their classroom management practices worked. Therefore, this study was designed to articulate and make explicit the understandings of these teachers, how they situated themselves – who am I, what I believe, what experiences I have had – inside their practice and the influence of this knowledge had on insights gained in their management approaches.

This study of today’s urban teachers is important, given that African American children represent one of the fastest growing segments in the United States school population. These students account for approximately 40% percent of all school-age children enrolled in public schools. These statistics support the argument that teachers must be better prepared to understand the influence of diversity on their teaching and management practices. Increasingly, White teachers in urban districts “must get used to the idea, certainly get used to the practice, of being around others, day in and day out, who are unlike [them]” (Powell, McLaughlin, Savage, & Zehm, 2001, p. 4).

The dismantling of desegregation plans and the exodus of White families to suburban districts has resulted in city schools that are more segregated by race and income than before the 1960s (Orfield, 2001). As predicted by Justice Thurgood Marshall in the Millken v. Bradley case, when the Supreme Court rejected desegregation across school board lines, “the central cities, many of them largely minority before desegregation, will become overwhelmingly nonwhite, overwhelmingly poor, and show the highest levels of segregation by century’s end” (Orfield, 2001, p. 2).
This separation by race and income is typically characterized by staffing patterns where only 7.3% of the teachers are African American, while 90% are identified as being “European Americans, middle class, female, English only, and suburban or small town residents” (Gay, Dingus, & Jackson, 2003, p. 52). These teachers grew up in monocultural society where sameness in economic incomes, religion, food, values, and home life was the norm. Given the cultural differences between white teachers and African American students, the likelihood of cultural misunderstandings and misinterpretations increases. Student behavior which is highly cultural influenced has become a contested point of racial and cultural tension. Therefore, understandings the storied experiences of successful white teachers who “got it” in creating classrooms that support effective academic and social skills outcomes among African America students could provide significant knowledge.

Limitations of the study

In this study, I examined selected teachers’ perceptions of their experiences and classroom management practices in an urban middle school. The findings of this inquiry are not generalizable, but specific to this group of teachers. Particular aspects and general themes emerging from the study were constructed from the meanings, interpretations, and experiences of the teachers, and thus may be transferable to other contexts.

While the study focused on the practices of urban teachers, it is limited by virtue of the use of purposeful sampling in developing the case studies. The case study method
was selected because the research asked descriptive questions about what happened in these classrooms and the explanatory question of how or why these teachers made certain decisions. Finally, since I wanted to get an in-depth, first-hand understanding of effective teachers’ perceptions of classroom management, the number of study participants had to be contained.

The inclusion case study selection criteria included number of years teaching, perceived effectiveness in helping African American children achieve success in school, and the absence of sustained behavior problems in their classrooms. The study defined “effective” teachers as individuals who consistently demonstrated an understanding of the central concepts, tools of inquiry, structure of the subject they taught, and had confirmed ability in promoting the academic and social skills achievement of African American students (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1999). As a consequence, there are gaps or failures in understanding the classroom experiences of other teachers who did not fulfill one or more of the inclusion criteria.

Another limitation of the information collected in the study was the reliance on teachers’ recollections, reflections, and perceptions. Although classroom observations were used to triangulate teachers’ statements with actual practice, no student perspectives on the classroom management practices of the teachers were collected.

Definitions of key terms

Culture: “The ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldviews shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors
that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion. Thus, it includes not only such tangibles as foods, holidays, dress, and artistic expression but also less tangible manifestations such as communication style, attitudes, values, and family relationships” (Nieto, 1992, p. 111).

Cultural deficit theory: “When teachers form low expectations of students based on a perceived lack of intellect or cultural sophistication, these expectations become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, and student performance falls. Cultural deficit theory assumes that some students cannot achieve because of their culture, ethnicity, language, or race” (Villegas, 2002, p. 40).

Cultural identity: “Cultural identity is based upon personal traits and values learned as part of an individual’s membership in various microcultures such as ethnic or nation origin, religion, gender, age, class (socioeconomic status), primary language, geographical region, place of residence (urban, suburban, or rural), and exceptionality” (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 22).

Cultural knowledge: “Cultural knowledge is the collective memory of a people. When speaking of African American cultural knowledge, the emphasis is on African and knowledge. Knowledge is a socially constructed system of meanings and understanding, a philosophy, if you will, that frames our living, values, worldview, and belief system. It is a collective wisdom that gives guidance about living, seeing, and being in the world” (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 23).

Culturally responsive classroom management: “Culturally responsive classroom management is a frame of mind, more than a set of strategies or practices, that guides
the management decision that teachers make. Five components essential to CRCM: (a) recognition of one’s own ethnocentrism and biases; (b) knowledge of students’ cultural backgrounds; (c) understandings of the broader social, economic, and political context of our educational system; (d) ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate classroom management strategies; and (e) commitment to building caring classroom communities. Culturally responsive classroom management is classroom management is the service of social justice (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, Curran, 2004, p. 27).

Culturally responsive pedagogy: “Culturally responsive teaching can be defined 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 through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming” (Gay, 2000, p. 29).

Classroom management: “Classroom management refers to actions taken to create and maintain a learning environment conducive to successful instruction (arranging the physical environment of the classroom, establishing rules and procedures, maintaining attention to lessons and engagement in academic activities” (Brophy, 1999, p. 43).

Disciplinary interventions: “Actions taken to elicit or compel changes in the behavior of students who fail to conform to expectations. These interventions are especially necessary when misbehavior is salient or sustained enough to disrupt the classroom management system” (Brophy, 1999, p. 43).
Student diversity: “The idea of diversity includes gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, biographical experiences, parents’ occupations and values, and learning disabilities” (Powell, McLaughlin, Savage, & Zehm, 2001, p. 5).

Student socialization: “Actions taken to influence students’ personal or social attitudes, beliefs, expectations, or behavior, especially those actions designed to help the students fulfill their student role responsibilities more effectively” (Brophy, 1999, p. 44).
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT IN THE SERVICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE:
CULTURAL RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

What does it mean to create an inclusive, supportive, and caring classroom environment in an urban middle school? What does it mean to be cultural responsive in a teacher’s approach to classroom management? Why is it necessary to consider culture in the perception, interpretation and intervention of classroom behaviors? What social justice issues are associated with how teachers’ conduct their classroom management practices? To answer these questions, I reviewed several bodies of literature on classroom management, culturally responsive teaching, and cultural competence and these provided the background for this study. These constructs were examined for their influence on organizing urban classrooms for powerful learning opportunities.

The discussion presented in this chapter examines various theories and conclusions found in the literature on classroom management and culturally responsive pedagogy. These deductions have far reaching application for how teachers decide to operate their classrooms. For example, the logic that a teacher doing culturally
responsive practices, will have higher degrees of classroom management effectiveness rest upon two assumptions: (1) that culturally responsive teachers do certain things in their classroom management practices that other teachers do not; and (2) that effective classroom managers are teachers who are culturally competence practitioners. These two assumptions underlie the emergent design of this study which explores how successful white female urban teachers’ make sense of students’ cultural diversity as an important part of their classroom management practices.

The literature reviewed in this chapter was used to closely examine the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy and classroom management to provide a context for the study. It was designed to demonstrate why this study is important and timely. The purpose is to situate the researcher in interpreting later findings from the data and to inform any conclusions drawn. The observations and ideas of various theorist and researchers in classroom management and culturally responsive pedagogy are explored for their contributions and understandings about concepts like cultural capital, classroom organization, motivation, and social justice.

In this sense, the review is structured and provides a coherent overview of previous conclusions and findings, but it does not establish a set of hypotheses concerning the specifications or anticipated outcomes of the research. Rather it is part of an emergent qualitative design interested in the unique conceptual structures, uses, and problems of classroom management and students’ cultural backgrounds.

Culturally responsive classroom management, as revealed in the literature, is a “frame of mind more than a set of strategies or practice” that guides a teacher’s decision
making processes (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004, p. 27). This management style rests upon a set of dispositions and affirming attitudes towards student diversity and the teachers’ understanding of self, the student, teaching and profession. Teachers who embrace this approach to classroom management are “intentionally disposed to act in particular ways” that best facilitate the delivery and receipt of a quality education for culturally diverse students (Green, 1965, as cited in Darling-Hammond, Wise & Klein, 1999).

**Organization of the literature review**

This review begins with a discussion of the intersection of teachers’ and students’ cultural norms in the classroom and identifies the need for new competencies in urban classroom management. Then social justice concerns are situated within a discussion of the discipline gap — a “tendency for African American students to be sanctioned more frequently and severely than their peers” (Gordon, Della Piana, & Keleher, 2000, p.1). This gap highlights the inequities of disciplinary consequences and the subjective nature of culturally based misinterpretations of students’ behavior.

After this, I shift attention to research on classroom management. The section on classroom management synthesizes key principles and actions taken to create a positive learning environment. It is a synopsis of what is known about management and the empirical base of this area of study. It examines research on existing knowledge of classroom management and best practices to “maximize student engagement” (Brophy, 1998). The chapter then explores culturally responsive pedagogy, focusing on the
concept, application, and relevance to understanding and working effectively with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Finally, I reflect on what needs to be done to facilitate teachers’ understanding of management in an urban context and make several suggestions about the confluence of classroom management and culturally responsive teaching.

The intersection of culture and conflict

The literature reviewed in this chapter probes two conditions in teaching that influence how classroom management is conducted: (a) isolation in practice and accountability – “don’t ask and don’t tell” and (b) limited attention given to serious and sustained teacher learning about students’ culture and its influence on behavior (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). These two conditions are magnified in practice by taken-for-granted assumptions conveyed in conventional classroom management ideology that it is “culturally neutral, rather than a White, middle-class construction (Weinstein, et al., 2004, p. 26).

This lack of appreciation and tolerance for cultural differences is often found in teachers’ management practices that discount race or assume a colorblind approach to it (McIntyre, 1992). The literature suggests that teachers commonly expect that students will adopt majority culture behaviors (i.e., compliant, docile, and responsive to authority) in place of their own cultural practices to “make it” in society (Grossman, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). These misconception resonances in King’s (2000) critique of her twelve years as a teacher educator working with white pre-service
teachers; she states that the majority of her students believed “that their mission as
teachers was to help these diverse ‘others’ to be like them” (p. 1).

Similar finding were observed by McIntyre (1997) who in the “white talk” of her
pre-service teachers found that they described themselves as members of the ideal race,
living the norm, dominating ‘others,’ feeling entitled to receive and maintain racist
values, attitudes and opportunities based on Whiteness. These teachers could not
imagine why any racial group would not want to emulate them and their lifestyle.
Unfortunately, teachers who are influenced by these culturally-based beliefs are at risk
of over simplifying the culturally determined behaviors of students and consequently
viewing the behaviors as counterproductive, disrespectful, threatening and
inappropriate.

Middle school and teacher conflict

The statement regarding the oversimplification of students’ culturally informed
behaviors seem especially applicable in situations were intense teacher/student conflict
is a strong possibility. For instance, middle school years, the focus of this study, are a
particular challenging time for students and teachers. Not simply because it is a period
of intense physical, emotional, and psychological development for young adolescents;
but also because it is a difficult time for adults also given the fact that our culture has a
hard time dealing with young adolescents (Mizell, 2002). Even a cursory glance at
topics on teenagers reveals a litany of problem descriptors: troubled, rebellious, angry,
difficult, and problematic. This fact is seen in television shows, advertisement, music and folklore: teenagers are considered almost a human anomaly.

Adults often react negatively to the thought of teenagers and the behaviors associated with them. Middle school teachers are no exception to these less than favorable opinions about adolescents and a visit to a teachers’ lounge reveals the attitudes of some teachers towards this age group. In discussions about middle-age children, adults can be heard to make audible sighs, clench their teeth, and make pejorative statements like “they’re crazy, wacky, out of their living minds…just walking hormones, or all they need at that age is a firm hand and a kind heart” (Mizell, 2002; Middleweb, 2005).

These opinions and comments have gained acceptance in the discourse on middle school children and can generally be said without being challenged. These statements reflect a premonition of dread and condemnation about working in middle schools; it portrayed as a task best avoided by teachers. This trepidation can be further exasperated when the students are young black urbanites and the teachers are white middle-class females. While the teachers may be well-intentioned individuals, they typically do not have any prior cross-cultural or multicultural experiences to work with urban communities or their middle-age children.

**Discipline in middle schools**

According to Freiberg, Stein, and Parker (1995), middle schools appear to have the greatest difficulty becoming disciplined communities. In Freiberg’s study of a
urban middle school a total of 894 referrals to the office were made in the month of October alone. Skiba, Peterson & Williams (1997) found similar indication of volatility, revealing that 17,045 office referrals from two urban school districts were made during the school year on middle school students in their study. These figures exemplify the challenge in urban middle school teaching – the need to maintain a disciplined learning environment and the demand for greater learning outcomes for the public. Teachers must either develop a more proactive approach to management that uses the cultural capital that students bring to school. Or they will confront students’ behavior expectations, demonstrations of exuberance, playful aggression and exaggerated forms of bravado with increasing levels of authoritative control in the classroom (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992; Monore in press).

The central question is how do middle school teachers develop the tools to study their practice, promote serious conversations about management and culture, and become more familiar with the lived experiences and cultural backgrounds of their students? The critical question is how can teachers improve their ability to center student diversity as an important aspect of her management practices? What must they do and more importantly where do they start in answering the question: “What do I have to do to get students to apply themselves to their work and stop fooling around and being disruptive” (Saphier & Gower, 1997, p. 105)? To merely state that there is a “bad mix” in the classrooms or that “I refer them to the principal’s office and shouldn’t they be afraid of being sent there” is an inadequate response to the question of how to
improve management in the classroom. This is a response that situates the problems of management in the laps of the students – not as a responsibility of the teacher.

In other words, teachers who take this position do not “get it” about establishing a caring and productive classroom. Until teacher begin to make sense of the issues of student diversity, culturally appropriate responses to behavior, and how to implement more meaningful ways to conduct classrooms, learning will not take place and student failure is predictable. To state that students should be afraid of the principal suggest a cultural assumption that confrontation with authority should be avoided and leadership is related to position, credentials, or experience. These assumptions, however, are based on Eurocentric values and beliefs. As Irvine (1990) contends African Americans’ beliefs about leadership are diametrically opposed to those of Europeans; leadership is likely to be challenged in schools since it is believed to be derived through “attributes of strength, forcefulness, persuasiveness, and generosity” (p. 151). In essence, a cultural mismatch is present between the beliefs and actions of teachers and those of students.

Urban middle school teachers would do well to reflect on the cultural bases of their behavioral expectations of students and their own ethnocentric beliefs, values, and dispositions on leadership and authority (Sue & Sue, 2003). Investing time in gaining an understanding of the salience of culture and its influence on students’ behaviors is a next step in avoiding the imposition of one’s own values and standards on students – an action that could be perceived as “cultural oppression” (Sue & Sue, 2003, p.19). Finally, an attempt to learn and value cultural knowledge of the students, their community and the school context would enhance teachers’ development and practice of appropriate,
relevant, and responsive classroom management interventions (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004). These suggestions form the bases of this study, which was undertaken to expand the knowledge base of classroom management dispositions that impact the delivery and receipt of a quality education in urban contexts (Townsend & Webb-Johnson, 2002).

The need for a new approach to classroom management

Teacher preparation curricula on classroom management and commercial products touting “100 guaranteed ways to eliminate behavior problems,” tend to ignore or give only token recognition to sociocultural factors such as the students’ cultural heritage, life experiences, race/ethnicity, social class and gender (Weinstein, 1998, p. 49). There are perhaps several paragraphs or a designated section on diversity (ex., learning disabilities and language barriers). However, these safe or race-neutral discussions have been debunked by the daily practice of urban teachers (Brown, 2002). Incidents such as students arguing loudly with teachers, laughing when being disciplined, using inappropriate or vulgar comments towards teachers and students, and engaging in physical fights are not discussed in most of the literature on classroom management (Payne, 1999).

Classroom management that is based on traditional Eurocentric beliefs, values, and assumptions about student behavior simply does not match or offer realistic solutions to the dynamic, complex and highly interactive environment of big city schools. Instead of promoting fairness and trust, conventional approaches to classroom
management reflect the broader patterns of inequities, exclusionary discipline policies, and unacceptable rates of student failure (Noguera, 2003; Jackson, 2001). The adage: “We teach the way we have been taught” is a truism that is inappropriate and wrongheaded in city schools; especially if the way teachers structure choices, conduct behavioral analysis and participate with students is confined within the realms of the dominant culture (Freiberg, 1999, p. 5). According to Ladson-Billings (1994), classroom management practices that are culturally appropriate have a greater likelihood of connecting specific students more directly to the content being taught.

Traditional ways of thinking about classroom management (e.g., power over, teacher-centered, compliance and obedience) have given way to constructivist ideas directed at improving student learning that promote shared responsibility, self-discipline, and cooperation in the classroom. The “one-size-fits-all” approach to management is flaunted for several reasons; primarily because the imaginary student it was designed for – white, well-fed and privileged – is no longer in urban classrooms. These classrooms have become highly segregated spaces of concentrated poverty, race, and failed social policies supposedly designed to close the gap between whites and “others.” Expanding sociocultural dissimilarities and vast economic differences between teachers and students have become the norm in urban classrooms (Monroe & Obidah, 2004).

Managing any classroom would certainly be easier if all of the students were similar to the teacher and they shared equivalent values, home life, needs and wants. The literature, however, on changing demographic trends in America’s public schools is
replete with accounts of the growing population of children of color and poverty. This influx of students will place new demands on schools as an institution and teachers as cultural agents and brokers; teachers will need to be knowledgeable about both mainstream and their students’ minority culture (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2001 cited in Cooper, 2003; Gay, 1993).

Schools are not culturally neutral and the overwhelming dominance of middle class beliefs, values and dispositions will not exempt teachers from their moral imperative to act in the best interest of children – all children, not just some (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). As the educational system seeks to adjust to the anticipated reality of previous minorities groups becoming the majority in schools; the infusion of new curriculum and pedagogical methods that embrace the goal of pluralism and help teachers to “know themselves and critically examine their social world” have become a necessary part of preparing prospective teachers (Buendia, Meacham & Noffke, 2000, p. 165). Classroom management will also need to be rethought and redesigned to be applicable to the challenges and promise of urban classrooms and students (Gregory & Mosely, 2004).

*Classroom competencies in the new millennium*

In response to this broadening perspective on classroom management various educational theorists have called for a more responsive approach to organizing classrooms. For example, Skiba, Michael & Nardo (2000), in a report on the records of 11,001 middle school students found evidence of the likelihood of systematic and prevalent bias in disciplinary polices in an urban school district. The researchers
concluded that reducing discrepancies between black and white suspension rates would require teacher “training in appropriate and culturally competent methods of classroom management,” further contending that this preparation is likely to become the most pressing need in addressing racial disparities in school discipline (p. 17).

While in another review of research on disproportionate discipline, Townsend (2000) extends the call for culturally responsive management, maintaining that reducing the cultural discontinuity students experience in school settings may prevent rising school exclusion and improve the success of African American students. Townsend (2000) identifies a number of components that may reduce the discontinuity which includes relationship building strategies, teachers gaining knowledge of linguistic or dialectic patterns of African American youth, increased opportunity for participation in a range of school activities, and family and community partnerships. These approaches are characterized as a “culturally responsive approach” to classroom management.

In their research on classroom management Powell, McLauglin, Savage & Zehm (2001) claim that:

Little doubt remains that in today’s classrooms there is a pressing, unprecedented need for a kind of management that could be described as culturally responsive. What the shape of this management might be, however, is illusive and clearly difficult to define” (p. 254).

They argue that being a culturally responsive classroom manager involves competencies such as: (1) negotiating with students (i.e., negotiate-then-manage is a prerequisite to manage-then-negotiate); (2) mingling cultural values and practices – teachers accepting that classroom management is shaped by cultural values and practices; and (3)
acknowledging the construct of caring – developing a caring approach to behavioral management that begins with students’ lives instead of content, process or outcomes. The research concluded that teachers should be encouraged to help students feel like they belong and that someone genuinely cares about them.

More recent research conducted by Weinstein, Tomilinson-Clarke & Curran (2003, 2004) describes further the conceptual components of culturally responsive classroom management which include: recognition of one’s own ethnocentrism and biases, knowledge of students’ cultural background, awareness of the broader social, economic, and political context, ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies and commitment to building caring classroom communities. Weinstein et al. (2004) recommendations build on earlier work done by Villegas & Lucas (2002) which describe several prerequisites to becoming a culturally responsive teacher that are applicable to developing certain dispositions about classroom management, they include (1) gaining sociocultural consciousness, (2) developing an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds, (3) learning about students and their communities; and (4) cultivating culturally responsive teaching practices (p. 26). Taken together these prerequisites form a lens that informs teachers’ practice related to student diversity in how they conduct their instructional and management practices.

While discussions continue on the design and components of culturally responsive classroom management, one thing is clear: the need. A number of scholars have described a phenomenon in disciplinary practices conducted in schools called the
discipline gap. This phenomenon is significant within the boundaries of this study since
it begins to contextualize the decision-making environment in which classroom
management is being conducted. The advent of zero tolerance – the “take no prisoners”
approach to safety and order in schools, the criminalizing of African American youth
and expanding cultural differences and conflict between teachers and students deeply
influence how classroom management is handled (Civil Rights Project, 2000, p. 3).

*The discipline gap: Between black and right*

Just about everyone – principals, parents, teachers, and the general public – are of
the opinion that many of America’s schools have a discipline problem. It is a concern
evident in the alarming number of students suspended and expelled from schools. For
instance, during the 1998 school year 3.1 million students were suspended, while
another 87,000 were expelled (Civil Rights Project, 2000). These numbers were up
from the estimated 1.5 million students suspended or expelled in 1993 (Mendez &
Knoff, 2003, p.31). It seems that students are often out of control, rude, inattentive and
sometimes violent towards teachers and principals. As a result, exclusion from school
has increasingly become the response of administrators within the continuum of various
disciplinary options available to them. Public concern regarding school safety has
mandated a more stringent approach to perceived threats to the orderly operation of
school. This apprehension has manifested itself in the adoption of “zero tolerance”
policies (Dohrn, 2001).
According to a recent national poll by Public Agenda, a non-partisan policy group, topping the list of causes for behavior problems is parents’ failure to teach their children discipline (82% of teachers and 74% of parents agreed). Second on the list is disrespect: “disrespect is everywhere in our culture – students absorb it and bring it to school” according to 73% of the teachers and 68% of the parents’ surveyed (Public Agenda, p. 3). While the majority of participants in the poll, a national random sample of 725 middle and high school teachers and 600 parents, agreed that school discipline is a problem research on who gets suspended and expelled from schools indicates that African American children nationwide receive the blunt of school removals, suspensions and expulsions (Gordon, Della Piana & Keleher, 2000; Skiba, Simmons, Staudinger, Rausch, Dow & Feggins, 2003).

Triple disadvantaged: Social justice issues of who gets excluded from schools?

The rate of suspension and expulsions for African American students has soared to exorbitant levels over the past decades. Nationally, black students are 2.6 times as likely to be suspended as white students and in 2000 they represented 17% of the student population but 34% of those suspended (Wald, 2003, p. 10). The advent of zero tolerance policies in public schools has further aggravated a historic trend where black students are disciplined at (a) disproportionately higher rates than other racial groups and (b) more frequently and severely for minor offenses (Ayers, Dohrn & Ayers, 2001; Morrison & D’Incau, 1997).

The establishment of zero tolerance policies has situated exclusionary practices at the zenith of concerns about African American students being triply disadvantaged by
discipline policies: “unjustly accused, unfairly silenced, and unnecessary punished” (Sheets & Gay, 1996, p. 89). Regardless of the rationale underlying the adoption of these policies, repeated exclusion from school is linked to a range of negative effects on student performance including: grade retention, drop-out, academic failure and negative attitudes regarding schooling (Mendez & Knoff, 2001; Noguera, 2003). These outcomes are particularly devastating to African American students who have traditionally been underserved and marginalized in the public school system.

The racialized disparity in disciplinary practices is actually an old problem. It was first documented in the 1970’s by the Children’s Defense Fund (1975). Several studies, starting with the Children’s Defense Fund, suggested the possibility of bias in the suspension and expulsion rates of African American students (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997, Wu, Pink, Crain & Moles, 1982). Most notably Skiba, Michael, & Nardo (2000) argued that “disproportionate representation of African Americans in office referrals, suspensions and expulsions is evidence of a pervasive and systematic bias that may well be inherent in the use of exclusionary discipline” (p. 1). The working definition of bias is a pre-conditioned or inclination to take certain actions; in school practices this translates into teachers referring black students out of the classroom more frequently and for less severe offenses than whites, while administrators who decide school cases demonstrate a statically predisposition to impose strict disciplinary consequences on students of color.

The Applied Research Center (2000a, 2000b, 2001) documented in several reports that a racial “discipline gap” continues to exist in virtually every major urban school
district in the United States. In fact, these researchers were unable to find any examples of districts where black students were disciplined at proportional rates to their representation. In yet another report, The Department of Education’s report, The Conditions of Education (1997 cited in the Civil Rights Project report, 2000), revealed that 25% of all African American students were suspended at least once over a four-year period. Finally, The National Center for Education Statistics (2003) revealed that in 1999, 35 percent of all black students in grades 7-12 had been suspended or expelled, compared to 20 percent of Hispanics and 15 percent of whites. At the core of these statistics is a complex web of reasons given for disciplinary actions. Nevertheless, what is clear is the correlation to race, culture, and socioeconomics as factors in who is removed, suspended, and expelled from school.

**Identifying the discipline gap in city schools**

Coinciding with these studies is a series of well publicized investigative reports initiated by newspapers to examine local racial disparities in school discipline rates. For example, The Seattle Post-Intelligencer (2002) reported that black students were 2.6 times more likely to be suspended or expelled, even when a statistical analyst controlled for race, non-traditional home life and poverty (three reasons given by teachers and school administrators when asked about the increased suspension rates). The reporter concluded that while the assumptions make intuitive sense, and in many cases they do have some effect on the discipline gap, they are not as influential as individuals believe.
The Cincinnati Enquirer (2004) found that in three-fourths of 40 Southwest Ohio school districts African American students were 2.0 times more likely to be disciplined at higher rates than whites. They reported that city schools gave blacks out-of-school suspensions at triple the rate of whites, citing the local superintendent’s comment that, “Our response should be colorblind when kids get into trouble at school, but for some reason it’s not” (p. 1).

The Columbus Dispatch (2004) established that black students in all but four of the 35 central Ohio districts were disciplined more frequently than whites at a rate 2.0 times greater. The report included a local high school principal who stated, “People are much more tolerant of their own race and culture; we don’t understand diversity the way we should” (p. B2). The news article also describes a disturbing trend in suburban and rural districts in central Ohio, where racial disparities in suspension rates were even higher than those reported for city schools; citing a 4-to-1 and 6-to-1 difference in how the districts disciplined black students. Differences between black and white students in some suburban districts ranged as high as 5-to-1 (Bridgman, 2004).

**Blaming the victim**

In a review of research on local urban districts, Brooks, Schiraldi & Ziedenberg (1999) indicate that in Phoenix, Arizona, African American students were suspended or expelled 22 times more often than Whites; in Austin, Texas, they were suspended 4 times as much; in San Francisco, the rate was 3.7 times that of Whites; and in Denver, the rate was 3.2 times that of White students. When teachers and principals were asked
about the excessive levels of suspensions and expulsions they asserted that rising violence in schools is the main reason for the increase (Kelleher, 2004). They tell compelling stories about “what do you do when a child hits another with a brick, or what do you do with a child who beats up children all the time because they saw their father beat to death, or how do you discipline a child who uses intimidation and gang violence to solve problems because they were born into a gang due to their mother, father or uncle’s affiliation and retaliation is expected” (Kelleher, 2004, p.1).

These statements are mainly ascribed to big-city urban districts where African American children are racially isolated, high levels of concentrated poverty exist, school failure is rampant, and marked cultural differences exist between the teachers and students. Undoubtedly, many of the details in these accounts are true. Yet, some researchers dismiss the implications of these arguments by asserting that they represent isolated events and have an ulterior purpose. For instance, Cross (2002) suggest that these statements (a) protecting teachers and administrators from sustained criticism about educational failure, (b) drawing attention away from the excesses in the use of exclusionary practices skewed by racial markers (c) serve to maintain public confidence that schools are doing something about violence, and (d) excusing funding of city schools at levels substantially below those of neighboring suburban districts. Furthermore, these statements regarding student violence in city schools focus public and individual attention on negative racial stereotypes, traits, and assumptions about students’ behavior rather than on problems in how classroom management procedures take into account culturally informed behaviors.
In addition, Skiba et al., (2000a, 2000b, 2003), the Applied Research Center (2000a, 2000b, 2001), and the Harvard Civil Rights Project (2000) argue that these localized statements about violence in the schools, while persuasive, are not substantiated in the literature. These researchers contend that instead of student violence being the cause for the rise in disciplinary rates, the most egregious disparities in discipline actions “appears to be higher rates of referral of black students for less serious and more subjective offenses such as disrespect” (Civil Rights Project, 2000, p. vi). Studies conducted by these groups of researchers suggest that when all socioeconomic indicators are held constant, African American students are still suspended and expelled at higher rates than other racial groups. These researchers did not find wide-spread episodes of gang violence or random violence in the schools. They also did not find justification for “maximum-security” prison-like conditions in schools, zero tolerance policies, or a “take no-prisoners” attitudes toward African American students (Johnson, Boyden, & Pittz, 2001, p. 14). Nor could they substantiate claims of classrooms were teachers were regularly assaulted as portrayed in rhetoric about urban schools.

To the contrary, what these researchers found was misconceptions about the prevalence of youth violence in urban schools. Despite fear of a post-Columbine type of incident, statistically schools remained among the safest places in America for its children. The reports “peeled back the veneer of hot-tempered discourse” which surrounds discussions of African American students and schooling. Violence in schools is very real and frightening; however, what these findings on the discipline gap indicate
is that student violence may not be the most salient cause for the large racial disparities in disciplinary referrals and subsequent actions to remove, suspend, and expel African American students.

Instead, as Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson & Bridgest (2003) suggest teachers’ misunderstandings of and overt response to African American students’ culturally conditioned behaviors can lead to misinterpretations of their actions and result in inappropriate behavioral interventions. Tatum (2004) extends this argument by noting that white educators might not have any idea about the need for black adolescents to develop affirming racial and ethnic identities during adolescence. She maintains that black adolescents actively explore their identity in “styles of dress, patterns of speech, music, who they talk to and who they don’t sit with” (p. 49). Tatum contends that white teachers have a particular hard time understanding this type of identity exploration since they have never given much thought to their own identities or personal history.

What these findings denote is that white teachers still have difficulty distinguishing between students’ culturally informed behaviors, identity exploration, and emotional disabilities that may warrant special education placement (Neal et al., 2003). These discussions about the discipline gap and cultural incongruence highlight the context in which decisions are made about approaches to classroom management. The dialogue begins to situate teachers’ actions at the classroom level, inside their personal practical knowledge that is either gained or absent in how they choose to work with African American students. Teachers’ dispositions towards classroom management and student diversity reflect willingness to extend patience, persistence and validation to
students who are culturally dissimilar to themselves or if they will conduct themselves and their management style with impatience, intolerance, dictations and control (Gay, 2000).

*Classroom management dispositions: toward self, the learner, and teaching*

Classroom management remains one of the toughest challenges confronting teachers – new and experienced. Every teacher has thought about it, planned for it and designed alternative lessons to compensate for anticipated management concerns. Also, most teachers accept the conventional wisdom that management is the teacher’s ability to “maximize time spent engaged in worthwhile academic activities and to minimize time spend waiting, making transitions, doing nothing, or engaged in misconduct” (Brophy, 1998, p. 1). This fact is particularly true in middle schools were the requirements of content and instructional purposes must be balanced against young adolescents’ need to understand who they are and how they relate to the world around them. Developing strong and trusting relationships with key adults in their lives and forming positive attitudes toward concepts of fairness and justice are two key developmental needs of middle-age students (Mizell, 2002).

These needs are sharply influenced by how teachers establish a viable classroom management approach that entails how they organize the physical environment, define and teach expectations for behavior, communicate with families, and use appropriate interventions to prevent conflicts in the classroom (Brophy, 1999). These are complex tasks that involve more than just knowledge, skills, and techniques. Indeed, over reliance on techniques has a tendency to create a “template” response to students’
behavior that can easily be perceived as pretentious, arbitrary, and lacking respect (Sheets, 1996). Therefore, creating a learning environment that encourages positive social interactions among students, self-regulation of socializing classroom behaviors, and active engagement in learning requires certain teaching attitudes and dispositions.

Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein (1999) contend that preparing prospective teachers to manage classrooms is much more than learning techniques or the acquisition of skill in how to teach. Accomplished teaching involves developing dispositions toward the learner, the profession, teaching, and the self (p.171). According to these educational theorists, effective classroom managers care about their students and demonstrate this in how they support individual learning styles and gain knowledge of students’ cultural backgrounds. Teachers do this because they are aware that “classroom management is problem prevention rather than problem solving” (Freiberg, 1999, p. 82). It involves proactive attempts to orchestrate curriculum, instruction, and socializing skills to enhance the learning opportunities available to students. In order to accomplish this objective, effective teachers make commitments to the continuous development of students; they probe understandings of their own cultural strengths, needs, values and beliefs while attempting to develop a mature sense of cultural efficacy in their work with students.

Teachers who fail to develop these dispositions and commitments can be drawn into a reductionist trap of seeking quick solutions and gimmicks to complex social and cultural problems (Slee, 1999). Instead of focusing on major teaching concerns like curriculum, instruction, and motivation the tasks of management conducted without a
guiding frame of reference (i.e., lens) can monopolize a teacher’s attention and cause them to become concerned more with controlling student behaviors than mediating and directing them. In the next section, we examine contextual factors found in urban schools that influence how this lens is formed and what distortions can manifest in how it is used in classroom management decision making.

The urban context and classroom management

The concerns of urban schools are no different than those confronting all schools; they involve decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, administration and the engagement of parents and community stakeholders in the educative efforts of the school. What is different for urban schools is the context in which these concerns manifest themselves (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2000). Harsh pictures of life in urban schools reflect a sociopolitical context that includes “unequal funding, lack of access to high-status knowledge, inadequate or stereotypical depictions of diversity in the curriculum, low expectations of students who embody differences, rigid tracking and discriminatory disciplinary and counseling practices” (Nieto, 2001, p. 7). These sociopolitical factors along with public-ignited apprehension of violence can shape a teacher’s cultural and pedagogical lens for understanding behavior and establishing a fair-minded approach to classroom management.

For teachers who are unfamiliar or inadequately prepared for the so-called “reality shock” of urban schools the tasks of classroom management can extract a terrible toll on their personal morale, sense of teaching efficacy, and the academic performance of their students (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). Children in urban schools, unlike those within
the monocultural boundaries of suburbia, can come from a variety of places and understandings about the world (Sue, 2001). They come from working-class families and single parent households; many arrive from the homes of their grandparents or from homeless shelters; some come from toxic families were parents or older siblings are directly connected to some kind of addiction or physical abuse; while others can be suffering from mental illness or undiagnosed learning disabilities (Powell, Zehm, & Kottler, 1995). Few are unscathed from the hardships of poverty even when parents love and care deeply for their children.

New teachers prepared in university programs which have primarily placed them with strong mentor teachers located in suburban setting may find students and school contexts that have little resemblance to them or their worldview. As discussed in Nieto (1999) the challenge for these teachers is to keep “the light in their eyes,” to protect students and themselves from despairing and dismissive discourse about their chances for success and to keep stressing the promise, rather than the pitfalls, to be aware of the danger, but not give way to the decline in expectations of how these children can learn and behave in classrooms.

To manage their classrooms effectively these teachers must buffer themselves against distorted beliefs, myths, and clichés like “just be consistent, out-tough them or all they need is love” (Powell et al., 2001, p. 154). These trite remarks provide little solace or comfort when the door to the thirty-by-forty feet space of the classroom closes and inappropriate behavior or displaced angry begins to dismantle the thoughtful plans and idealized dreams of teaching. Urban teachers need more than well packaged
behavior management programs that disregard race and culture (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992; Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003).

Reality shock and compelling evidence has convinced teachers, educational theorist, and researchers that traditional ways of managing classrooms must be adapted to be responsive to the educational needs and tremendous challenges of urban classrooms (Grossman, 1995; Cartledge & Milburn, 1996; Gay, 2000; Townsend & Webb-Johnson, 2002). Race, ethnicity, class, and culture matter greatly in how these classrooms are organized in the contested space of urban America.

Conflict and student resistance

Young African American students are faced with unparalleled rejection by teachers and administrators, while witnessing the public approval of suburban districts in published comparison of proficiency test scores and graduation rates. By middle school-age they begin to question inequities in academic preparation and schooling outcomes. As national reports continue to document the lost of urban students future to economic and social tragedy such as high dropout rates, unemployment, prison, living in poverty, and not attending college, the prospects of home ownership, financial security, and prosperity widen as the gulf between the haves (teachers and society) and the have-nots (urban students and their families) is magnified (Orfield, 2004).

In research on students’ perception of disciplinary conflict in ethnically diverse classrooms, Sheets (1996) reported that students felt teachers exhibited “a lack of
respect, disinterest in them, and purposefully pushed them to the edge” of retaliation in classroom conflicts (p. 175). As urban schools become more racially isolated and less economic and class stratified, the need for teachers to create spaces for students to speak, represent themselves, connect, and “develop their multiple and varied identities,” is necessary in how classroom management is organized and conducted. Classroom management is more than discipline and intervention; it is how things get done and how learning opportunities are pursued.

Legitimate concerns about cultural mismatch, the lack of cultural solidarity (connectedness) between teachers and students, and expanding cultural incompatibility are issues that must be addressed in how schools and classrooms operate in urban districts (Foster, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Irvine, 1999; King, 1997). In search of some tentative answers to the connection between culture and classroom management, we now turn to a discussion of culturally responsive teaching focusing on this concept and its application to becoming better classroom managers.

*Culturally responsive teaching: Getting what we ask for*

The concept of culturally responsive teaching has become ubiquitous in teacher education literature in recent years. Books, journals or position papers published by educational agencies like the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future (NCTAF), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and teacher colleges all exhort the virtues of teachers pursuing culturally responsive teaching practices. Similarly, Gay (2000) urges teachers to become skillful practitioners in (1)
acknowledging the legitimacy of cultural heritage; (2) recognizing the influence of culture on students’ attitudes, dispositions, and approaches to learning; (3) using varied instructional strategies connected to different culturally-influenced learning styles; (4) promoting meaningful connections between home and school; and (5) incorporating multicultural information, resources and materials into the subjects and skills taught in school. The bottom line in these propositions for teachers is to develop a practice that can stem the precipitous academic failure of students of color.

For example, Orfield (2004) reveals that large urban school districts across the nation have become “dropout factories” for low income African American and Latino students. He found that less than half of incoming freshman beat the odds of graduating or completing their education on time. The numbers are staggering in their inclusiveness of African American students in ten urban school districts (ex., Chicago, Los Angles, Cleveland, Columbus, Boston). The economic and social impacts of this dropout crisis are too massive for the country to discount. Billions are lost annually to the nation’s gross national product as a result of wide-spread unemployment, underemployment and increased prison population.

Several studies have even suggested the existence of a “school-to-prison pipeline” that is aggravated by discursive school disciplinary policies and practices like zero tolerance and massive expenditures on security related equipment such as metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and uniformed police officers in schools (Johnson, Boyden & Pittz (2000). These measures are linked to the establishment of a “prison-like” atmosphere in big-city school districts that unfairly “profiles” African American
students. These studies are cause for concern in the black community given the astronomical levels of incarceration seen in adult offenders who now exceeds 800,000 men and 68,000 women (Wacquant, 2000; Wald, 2003; Noguera, 2003).

Cultural conflict and the need for validation

Although the reasons for these sociopolitical outcomes are varied and include high stakes testing, inadequate preparation, and a general disconnect with schools; the reality is unavoidable: too many students of color are not achieving in schools. An additional factor, examined in this study is that of cultural conflict and incongruence between classroom management practices and the culturally-informed behaviors of students. DeRidder (1990 cited in Monroe & Obidah 2004) suggest that one of the enduring consequences of reoccurring disciplinary action in the classroom may include “an increased likelihood of dropping out of school (p. 257). While there is no one-to-one correlation identified in the dropout phenomenon, how teachers and students build bridges of understanding is a significant factor in developing a smoothly functioning and equitable classroom. As the cultural face of teaching increasingly maintains its monocultural orientation the prospect of deepening interracial tension, cross-cultural miscommunications, and cultural conflict in the classroom increases in geometric progression. It is undeniable that how teachers choose to organized their classrooms and intervene upon student behaviors is culturally influenced. What culturally responsive teaching attempts to avoid is cultural hegemony or oppression being imposed on students.
Therefore, the prominence of culturally responsive teaching is reflected in ongoing work with practically every major ethnic group including First Nation, Alaskan Indians, Hawaiians, Chinese Americans, Hispanics and African Americans. These groups want to ensure, to whatever extend possible, that schools are attending to the educational and cultural well being of their children. The parents want their children to return home culturally-healthy. They also want the schools to maintain high standards in content and academic performance. These goals are not mutually exclusive and culturally responsive teaching offers a platform for accomplishing this undertaking.

Definitions of culturally responsive teaching

In recent years extensive research by various scholars has consistently documented the encouraging influence of culturally responsive teaching on curriculum content and pedagogy implemented to increase the academic performance of diverse groups. Specific attention has been given to African American children in the large urban districts (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Foster, 1995; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001). The ideas supporting culturally responsive teaching are similar to those underlying culturally relevant, sensitive, synchronized, congruent, mediated, contextualized and reflective pedagogies (Gay, 2000). This approach is established on the premise that making classroom instruction more consistent with students’ cultural orientation enhances academic productivity and socially acceptable behaviors (Townsend & Webb-Johnson, 2002; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995; Brown, 2000).

Most authors agree with Gay’s (2000) definition that culturally responsive teaching is “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” (p.29). This definition illustrates the complexity of this pedagogy which involves cognitive as well as affective changes in how teachers perceive and conduct their work with students from different cultural backgrounds. Consequently, culturally responsive teaching changes not only what is taught, but also the person teaching. It requires that teachers maintain an unwavering attention on the importance of schooling being linked with students’ worldview and experiences in significant ways (Education Alliance, 2002).

Due to the complexity of culturally responsive teaching it cannot be reduced to a series of steps or techniques a teacher can easily follow to increased instructional effectiveness with students. It does, however, involve specific strategies and understandings. The approach involves acquired dispositions by the teacher towards student leaning which make it a holistic approach to curriculum and instruction (Pewewardly, 2003). Culturally responsive pedagogy entails developing knowledge base of cultural diversity that exceeds the typical concepts associated with culture like food, fun, folklore, festivals and holidays. Instead, as Hollins & Hayman (1997) suggest teachers who embrace this approach seek to understand the cultural characteristics and contributions of different groups in designing curricula and expressing caring and effective cross-cultural communications. Therefore, this is not a simplistic or easily acquired pedagogy; it is seen as an ongoing learning process for teachers.
Historical background on culturally responsive teaching

The proliferation of terms used to describe culturally responsive teaching is not unusual given that it originated in research conducted in various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, social history, applied linguistics, critical race theory, and law (Pewewardly, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This pedagogy was developed to address a growing concern about the academic failure of ethnic/racial groups during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Martin, 1997). During this time period, a series of case studies were conducted on various elements of teaching and learning associated with academic achievement in minority groups. These studies included power relations, motivation and student resistance (Ogbu, 1994); motivation and learning styles (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995); pedagogical excellence (Ladson-Billings, 1991) and urban classroom instructional styles (Hollins, 1982). These case studies centered on increasing learning opportunities for minority groups and contributed to the expanding scholarship on the linguistic, social, and emotional challenges confronting these students in public education.

In addition, research conducted by Foster (1991b, 1994, 1995) targeted the characteristics of effective and successful African American teachers that differentiated them from effective white teachers. Foster explicitly links “teachers’ racial and ethnic identity and background with effective practices that rely on the cultural and social underpinnings of the black community” (1995, p. 574). She argues that these teachers demonstrated unique characteristics in their practice which directly benefited students’ acquisition of knowledge and personal pride. The identified characteristics include
cultural solidarity (connectedness), linking classroom content to students’ experiences, an emphasis on student voice, focus on the whole child, use of familiar cultural patterns, and the incorporation of culturally compatible communication patterns. These characteristics would also be further substantiated in research on effective teachers of African American children conducted on a racially mixed group of teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

**Characteristics and dispositions of culturally responsive teaching**

In a review of research on culturally responsive teaching, Phuntsog (1998) produced a framework that outlined five critical elements in this pedagogical approach which included (a) cultural literacy, (b) self-reflective analysis of one’s attitudes and beliefs, (c) caring, trusting, and inclusive classrooms, (d) respect for diversity, and (e) transformative curriculum to engender meaning (p. 14). Phuntsog’s research recognized the “central and critical role of the teacher in creating a classroom that respects diversity and ensures the self-worth of all children” (p. 14). He concluded that teachers needed to hold an attitude of respect for cultural differences and become skilled in using students’ cultural capital.

Subsequent research conducted by Villegas & Lucas (2002) on a coherent curriculum for preparing culturally responsive teachers identifies six strands to becoming a cultural responsive teachers: (a) gaining sociocultural consciousness; (b) developing an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds; (c) developing the commitments and skills to act as agents of change; (d) understanding the constructivist foundations of culturally responsive teaching; (e) learning about

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students and their communities; and (f) cultivating culturally responsive teaching practices (p. 26). These strands indicate the fundamental orientation teachers must assume in teaching diverse student populations. The curriculum proposal emphasized the centrality of teachers engaging in an examination of their assumptions about schooling, the students and their work as teachers.

In an extensive discussion of the theory, research, and practice of culturally responsive teaching, Gay (2000) presents a comprehensive framework of the teaching roles, responsibilities and characteristics of this pedagogical approach. She defines six components of culturally responsive teaching: (1) validating; (2) comprehensive; (3) multidimensional; (4) empowering; (5) transformative; and (6) emancipatory. Gay’s discussion of these components communicates the agency of this approach; it makes clear the power of it to understand, act on, and effect positive change in the personal and social contexts of students’ lives. Gay (2000) concludes that teachers must be able to always center students of color as the “source, focus, and effect of instructional programs and practices” (p. 203).

What these frameworks and discussions indicate is that an essential aspect of becoming a culturally responsive teacher is the ability to surpass mere cultural sensitivity in the delivery of culturally responsive teaching. Teachers are challenged to keep an open-minded attitude (i.e., acceptance and respect) about cultural diversity. They are encouraged to “go beyond mere awareness of, respect for and general recognition of different values” (Gay, 2001, p. 107). Culturally responsive teachers are urged to develop caring relationships with students and recognize the pivotal role that
cross-cultural communication commands in working effectively with their students. As Townsend & Webb-Johnson (2002) clarify, culturally responsiveness indicates that the teacher manipulates the learning environment to account for what students bring to the learning experience.

Merely learning the history, culture, values, stories, music and myths of culturally different students is not enough. Teachers are asked to engage in a process of awareness that continuously questions their own bias. Cultural responsiveness necessitates that teachers actively avoid prejudices and attitudes that increase the likelihood of unwarranted labeling and stereotyping of students. The tenets of the pedagogy direct teachers to confront their own ethnocentric beliefs, values and standards in becoming culturally responsive caregivers (Shellman, 2004).

To become successful in implementing this approach to pedagogy, teachers must develop the reflective capacity to use observational, empirical and analytical skills to monitor and assess their performance. In short, culturally responsive teachers must become “intentionally disposed to act in particular ways” that promote respect for cultural differences while advancing the goals of academic achievement. A teacher’s disposition or frame of mind matters greatly in this approach since it influences how they come to understand, act upon, and implement their beliefs about teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999, p. 170). In the next section, I will discuss the relationship between these dispositions regarding culturally responsive teaching and classroom management in the formation of a new approach to management: culturally responsive classroom management.
Management and culture: Where we are now

As discussed in the previous sections, classroom management has a well-established theoretical and empirical base in management studies. It has been referred to as one of the success stories in research on teaching (Brophy, 1998). The field is rich in specifics concerning the implementation and design of various classroom management plans and comprehensive in its scope of approaches to “best practices & promising programs” (Freiberg, 1999, p. 57). Early researchers such as Kounin (1970) established the theoretical foundation for the existing knowledge base on classroom management. Kounin’s study on effective classroom managers identified key elements such as withitness, overlapping, signal continuity, momentum, group alerting, accountability and variety, and challenge in assignments. Kounin’s study served as a benchmark for later research on management techniques and many of his ideas are still commonly referred to in contemporary studies on classroom management.

Subsequent research on classroom management by Doyle (1986) on how teachers establish a work system and protect it through techniques like ushering, hovering, refusal to be sidetracked, and related mechanisms transformed theoretical studies into classroom applications. Evertson and Emmer (1987) work on the importance of establishing effective rules, procedures, routines, and accountability systems early in the school year and maintaining them thereafter facilitated the expanding knowledge base on classroom management. Scholarship on classroom management has produced a coherent set of principles to guide teachers in making decisions about how to manage their classrooms. Topics such as promoting self-awareness (Wolfgang, 1980; Jones &
Jones, 1995), fostering responsibility (Canter & Canter, 1996; Freiberg, 1999), teaching problem solving (Burden, 1995), extending personal influence (Evertson, Emmer, Clements, Sanford, & Worsham, 1994) and relationship-driven classroom management (Vitto, 2003) have identified key components of successful management. These management studies and practices form “the core of an empirically based yet integrated and theoretically grounded approach to classroom management” (Brophy, 1998, p. 1).

_C Culturally responsive teaching: The practical application_

This chapter also documents the substantial theory, research, and practice underpinning culturally responsive teaching since the late 1980s. The series of case studies conducted outside of education in the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, applied linguistics, and law established the theoretical foundation of culturally responsive teaching and its parent discipline multicultural education. Detailed research on the practical application of these findings has continued in work by researchers such as Banks & Banks (1995; 2004), Au & Kawakami (1994), Tharp & Gallimore (1988), Boykin, (1986), Nieto (1999), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), Jacqueline Irvine (1990) and Lisa Delpit (1995). These authors continue to draw attention to serious concerns regarding of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness in urban schooling (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Practical applications of culturally responsive teaching are apparent in research conducted by Wlodkowski & Ginsberg (1995), which explored the relationship between culture and motivation and offered a framework for reinforcing the bond of motivation and culture in the classroom. Brown (2002, 2004) extends the application of culturally
responsive teaching in research which concluded that successful urban teachers:
develop personal relationships with students, create caring communities, establish
business-like learning environments, demonstrate assertiveness, and use culturally
congruent communication processes in their classrooms. Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson
& Bridgest (2003) examine of teachers’ perceptions of the culturally informed
behaviors of African American males and inform the discourse on how culturally
responsive inquiry and pedagogy could reverse the present trends in school failure. In a
related study on cross-cultural learning styles, Irvine & York (1995) provide a
functional understanding of how traits common in African American communities (i.e.,
physical movement, animation, spontaneity, and displays of emotion) can be
incorporated into a cultural competency model of instruction.

Finally, in a piercing interpretation of the “power of caring” in culturally
responsive teaching, Gay (2000) details how caring, guiding and building cooperative
classrooms engages teachers in accepting personal responsibility for the academic
performance and behavior of students. Messages such as “I care about the quality of
your learning” and “I commit myself to making sure that you will learn” resonate with
the imperative of assuming “moral authority” in the improvement of learning
opportunities for students (Weiner, 2003).

Inside the black box: Culturally responsive classroom management

Until recently research on the relationship between classroom management and
culturally responsive teaching has remained distinctly separated. Each field of study has
concerned itself primarily with issues pertinent to their respective area of study. In
classroom management this meant research on the organizing of classrooms, establishing expectations, preventing conflict, and communicating with stakeholders. On the other hand, research in culturally responsive pedagogy remained primarily centered on issues of literacy, which included curriculum, content, communication, knowledge of students, and innovative teaching strategies. Missing in both these areas is research that attempts to explore how teachers make sense of and come to understand issues of cultural diversity in their classroom management approaches.

Despite mounting evidence of the relationship between culturally conditioned behaviors, student learning and exclusionary discipline policies, only a limited amount of scholarship exists on urban classroom management and even less on culturally responsive classroom management (Weinstein et al., 2003, 2004; Townsend & Webb-Johnson, 2002; Brown, 2002, 2004; Powell et al., 2001; Grossman, 1995; Gregory & Mosely, 2004). This scarcity of research was confirmed in a recent study on urban classroom management by Milner (in press) which concluded that a “search of databases with key words: urban, classroom, management identified only nine refereed articles” (p. 2). The results of this search suggest that traditional taken-for-granted assumptions about classroom management are still dominate; there still exist unquestioned acceptance that “classroom management is presented as if it were culturally neutral, rather than a White, middle-class construct” (Bowers & Flinders, 1990 cited in Weinstein at el., 2004, p. 26).

To date, only Brown (2004) and Weinstein et al. (2004) present comprehensive scholarship on the establishment of culturally responsive classroom management.
Brown (2004) conducted a series of thirteen interviews with urban classroom teachers around the nation mainly through telephone contacts. The work is insightful and verifies the importance of using culturally responsive teaching techniques in classroom management, however questions whether preservice teacher education programs effectively prepare prospective teachers for urban classrooms. The primary limitation identified in the study related to explaining how teachers learned to accept and demonstrate culturally responsive management strategies. Due to design considerations, given that interviews were the primary means of data collection, there was limited opportunity to understand how the positionality of the researcher (i.e., outsider/insider, gender, and race) might have influenced the teachers’ comments or self-disclosing statements.

Weinstein et al., (2004) offers a conceptual discussion of the components necessary to implement this approach in classrooms. She identifies five areas of teacher performance that situates culturally responsive teaching within the parameters of classroom management. The discussion is an engaging and thorough explanation of the topic. The primary limitation to be considered in interpreting the conclusions of this research is the conceptual nature of the investigation.

Case study: Where do we go now?

The paucity of case studies in the literature argues for a case study that relates theory, literature, and teachers’ classroom practice. The goal of this study is to venture into human discourse in real-time classroom management within the contested space of urban middle school classrooms. The research to date supports the assumption that
classroom management practices are not race neutral but rather interested knowledge influenced by considerations of race, class, culture, and gender. Classroom management in this study will describe socially constructed reality from the lived experiences of white middle-class females working with African American middle school-age students.

This literature review contextualizes and situates the study within the corpus of writings on these topics while establishing interpretative guidelines that embrace the reality of urban contexts. Classroom practice is value-bounded by the teachers’ beliefs and assumptions about students and themselves. It does not seek generalizable knowledge of classroom strategies and techniques for arresting student behaviors; rather it is knowledge specific to this group, but hopefully transferable to similar situations and other teachers in big-city urban school districts.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Objective reality can never be captured. We can know a thing only through its representations. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5)

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology for this study, it includes the research questions, rationale, setting, participants, data collection, researcher’s role, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Data for the study was collected primarily through the use of interviews, focus group meeting, and observations. In addition, as illustrated in Table 3.1 data collection included a wide variety of sources and methods to address the descriptive (what happened) and explanatory (how and why did this happen) questions guiding this qualitative case study research. The cases are in-depth, first hand accounts of the teachers’ perception, interpretations, and day-to-day thinking about the relation between classroom management and culture in their practice.

The project focused on the classroom management practices of three effective White, middle-class, female teachers (the case) working in a predominately African American urban middle school. Central to this inquiry was the question of the teachers’ sense-making understandings about the influence of cultural diversity. What this concept meant to them; how they made it an integral aspect of classroom management,
and the ways a focus on diversity required different skills and dispositions in managing a classroom? These subtopics were incorporated into the research questions which were specifically designed to provide the researcher with information regarding the effectiveness of the teachers’ classroom management. The chapter is organized into the nine design considerations proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that outline qualitative research and facilitate the fit between purpose, approach, and theory.

Research questions

The following research questions, with two subtopics guided this investigation:

1. How do experienced White female teachers make sense of and deal with issues of cultural diversity in their classroom management approach?
   - What are the teachers’ beliefs on authority and what practices do they use to gain their authority in the classroom?
   - What meanings do the teachers construct about their students, themselves, classroom communication, and management? How do these meanings shape and inform their management practices?

2. How do these teachers develop a well-grounded classroom management framework that uses students’ experiences, cultures, community values, and cultural norms? When did these teachers feel that they “got it” in creating productive, well-managed classrooms?
3. What influence does the teachers’ situatedness (i.e., culture, identity, interpretations, and knowledge – who I am, what I believe, and what experiences I have had) have on their classroom management decision-making?

Setting

The study was conducted at Prospect Middle School (pseudonym), one of twenty-six middle schools in the Pine City School District. The district is located in the largest city in the state with a population of approximately 700,000. It is the fastest growing metropolitan area in the Midwest and home of several nationally recognized Fortune Five Hundred companies. Growth in Pine City is evident not only through the extensive commercial and residential development the region has experienced since the early 1980s, but also by the number of new business that start in the city each year. The city is a center for government, commerce, and education for the state. The demographics are reported as 69% White, 25% African American, 3.5% Asian, 2.5% Hispanic, and 1.2% biracial (U.S. Census, 2001; Pine City Chamber of Commerce).

The District

Pine City school district is the second largest in the state. The district has approximately 62,000 students of which 66% are eligible for free and reduced-priced lunches; 30% of the students change schools during the school year; 8,300 students qualify for special education; one in five of the students (12,400) are identified as Gifted and Talented; and 3,900 are limited English proficiency. Over 800 students in
the district are homeless and 400 are in foster care. Finally, approximately 100 different languages and dialects are spoken in the city schools. It is a highly diverse and multicultural district adjusting to the realities of changing demographics, concentrated poverty, and restricted growth into more affluent suburban areas surrounding the city (Superintendent Remarks, 2004)

Although the district has experienced constant renewal and redefinition of its goals, it is still recognized as one of the most viable urban district in the state. Over the past two decades, the catalyst for change was influenced primarily by student demographics, which altered rapidly during and after the district’s release from court-ordered desegregation in 1979. Previously, the district was 61% white and 39% minority, mirroring the city’s demographics. However, in 2005, the district is now 68% minority and 32 percent white, which represents almost a complete reversal. The shortage of African American teachers and resulting declining recruitment from historically Black colleges and universities has resulted in a teaching staff that has remained mostly White, middle-class, and female.

Prospect Middle School

Prospect Middle School is designated as a central city school with approximately six hundred and seventy students, demographics indicate that 85% of the students are African American, 9.3% White and 5.2% Hispanic. The economically disadvantaged rate is 90.7% (State Report Card, 2004). The school’s population enrollment tracts were reconfigured according to district guidelines for the re-establishment of the
neighborhood schools concept. The impact of this realignment was the segregation of the school along racial and economic lines, for this school it meant intense segregation. Most of the students live within a five mile radius of the school in racially isolated neighborhoods and either walk or arrive in one of the eight buses assigned to the school. The housing stock in these neighborhoods is approximately fifty years old or greater. The city infrastructure is in need of repair, there is dense levels of concentrated poverty (40% or greater of the families in the area are below the poverty line), crime, and gang violence are associated with the residential area. Over fifty percent of the students are from single parent female-headed households.

In 2004 the State report card system designated the school an academic emergency site, which had a subtle impact on staff morale according to the building principal, who shared a concern widely circulating in staff discussions about “what do you do different when you have tried everything?” Students begin their middle years behind in academic preparation with the State’s accountability report indicating that only 37% (Reading) and 29.3% (Mathematics) of the sixth grade students were at or above the cutoff score for proficiency. The percentage of students below proficiency, is roughly 60-70%.

The Students

Though the number of White students at Prospect Middle School has experienced a decline during the past years, the school still offers a wide range of diversity when it is characterized in broader terms like “gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, biographical experiences, values, and learning disabilities” (Powell, McLaughlin, Savage & Zehm,
In addition, various microcultures exist within the school along the lines of culture, ethnic, and nation of origin. Recently, there was an influx of Somali and Hispanic students into the school and signs of ethnicity are more prevalent in the dress, food preferences, music, and language in the school.

The students range along a continuum of academic performance from gifted and talented to special needs. They are challenging and demanding. It is important to students from different nations and ethnic groups to maintain their representation as being distinct from other groups. For instance, Somali students, particularly boys, are quick to reference that they are not African American (e.g. “Me no Negro”) and Hispanic students mainly use Spanish to converse with each other in the hallways and cafeteria. The recognition of multiple cultural identities by the teachers has lead to workshops on multiculturalism, understanding poverty, and differential instruction. Teachers are grappling with the complex thinking required to address diverse student needs in the classrooms. These new competencies for teachers include different instructional strategies used to enhance clarity, motivation techniques, curriculum planning, communication, and classroom management.

Gaining access to the site

Attaining approval of the research proposal was a long and complex task. It involved gaining consent from multiple sources including the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Outreach Office of the college of education, the school district’s review board, teacher’s union, and the building principal. Each group required a detailed proposal that outlined different aspects of the inquiry from the vantage points
of their constituency. For example, the university’s Institutional Review Board was particularly interested in issues regarding the protection of human subjects, informed consent agreements, and the means of collecting data (e.g. instruments, questionnaires, surveys, interview schedules, focus group questions, observations).

On the other hand, the College of Education’s Outreach Office was primarily concerned with the comprehensiveness of the design and amount time involved in various research activities. The office decides how many university credit hours will be granted to the district for allowing the study to be conducted in their schools. Pine City School district distributes these credit hours to teachers for use towards the completion of additional degrees and licensure requirements. The university requires that researchers’ first secure permission from the Institutional Review Board before submitting the proposal to the Outreach Office, which then conducts its own review and approval of the proposal.

After approval of the proposal by the Outreach Office the document was sent to the school district for review by its panel. The guidelines of this office required a detailed proposal, outline of phases of the project, descriptions of how the dissertation will be shared with the school district and teachers, a letter of support from the building principal and principal investigator (i.e., dissertation chair), and evidence of adherence to the district’s guidelines for conducting research in the schools. These guidelines had to be secured from the district’s main office since they are not available on-line to applicants who are not employed by Pine City School District.
The final step in the approval process was submission of the proposal to the school district’s office of Evaluation Services. The director has an advisory panel of district officials, teachers, and union representatives who meet to review and approval all request to conduct research that involves district personnel or students. Since my proposal directly involved practicing teachers and activities that took place in the classroom the committee returned the proposal with specific requests for additional details on terms and research activities. The committee requested a formal response to three questions: (1) What are your operational definitions of teacher effectiveness and cultural responsiveness (2) What are the systematic procedures you will use for observation (i.e., rubric, checklist, etc.) and (3) How will you triangulate your results on teacher beliefs/attitudes? My response required creating an additional document that met the panel’s request for clarification and permission to conduct the study was granted.

This synopsis of the approval process is included because it caused the researcher to refine, defend, and re-think many parts of the dissertation project. My initial naiveté about the value-ladenness and political nature of the research was altered by the five month approval process. I became aware that theories on classroom management and culturally responsive pedagogy are themselves value statements. Thus they are viewed not only through the reader’s theoretical lenses, but also influenced by his/her value commitments. It matters to organizations and individuals how issues regarding classroom management, school policies, and disciplinary outcomes are portrayed.
Especially, given that this research involved a marginalized group (i.e., African American) it raised concerns about academic achievement and social justice.

The length of the process, extra procedures, and stated precautions demonstrated the multiple interpretations that each approval group had of what constituted classroom management. Therefore, any assumption regarding the simplicity of the research questions were eliminated during this extensive approval process. The study could not be condensed into a series of summary points applicable to all groups. Instead, my response to the concerns of each group increasingly relied upon explaining that the case study method (i.e., explanation-building, multiple interviews, and the use of cross-case analysis) offered the most relevant approach to describing and explaining the real-life context of the teachers’ classroom management practices. I had to justify research that primarily involved teachers’ voice, emotions, and understandings on culture and classroom management.

Participants

The study draws on the classroom management and cultural knowledge accumulated by experienced White female teachers to address the research questions. All of the teachers had at least three years experience. This criterion was used because most new teachers are primarily involved in experimenting and establishing their classroom management approach. The decisions they make involve a complex array of skill, dispositions, and knowledge that move the teacher from novice to experienced teacher (Darling-Hammond, Wise & Klein, 1999). This process is typically seen as
taken between three and five years. As a result, novice teachers were not selected for the study. The teachers in this study had an average of fourteen years of experience and their ages ranged from approximate thirty to mid-fifties.

All were regular classroom teachers in the seventh and eighth grade. The nominating process involved purposeful sampling in selecting individuals for in-depth study (Patton, 1990). The two inclusion criteria included 1) the perceived effectiveness of the teacher in helping African American children achieve academically; and 2) the absence of a high number of behavior referrals. Academic achievement was recognized as teaching performance that consistently resulted in higher than average scores on standardized test and active and affective engagement of students in learning activities.

Next, the absence high office referral numbers relates to these teachers’ use of classroom management techniques that established and maintained a successful learning environment. This included a range of strategies used to promote positive relationships, student cooperation, and purposeful learning in the classroom. Consideration was given to the ability to gain, maintain, and regain student attention, momentum, discipline, routines, and the use of time and space (Platt, Trip, Ogden, Fraser, 2000). These two factors established the criteria for selection: perceived effectiveness and absence of persistent behavior problems in their classrooms.

_Nomining committee: Purposeful sampling_

The investigator in this project used “purposeful sampling” to select teacher participants for in-depth case studies of classroom management and culture. Patton
(1990) describes this selection method as a distinguishing point of difference between quantitative and qualitative approaches. While quantitative methods typically depend on large samples, randomly selected to control for objectivity and generalizability of findings, the qualitative researcher can use even “single cases (n=1) that are purposefully selected” (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

The researcher with the assistance of a six member nominating committee (i.e., principal, in-school suspension teacher, counselor, and three classroom teachers) used this purposeful sampling technique to identify three cases where a great deal could be learned about the research questions. Initially four teachers were selected, but one could not participate due to previous commitments. The three “successful” teachers qualified by the selection criterion that included years of teaching experience, perceived effectiveness in helping African American children achieve success in school, and the absence of behavior problems in their classroom were identified.

The term purposeful captures the idea that the case (i.e. three teachers in the study) contains significant features that are central to the purpose of the study. I wanted to capture emic viewpoints and knowledge on how cultural information affected the sense-making understandings of the teachers’ and their management practices. By focusing on a small sample of teachers it was anticipated that a great deal could be learned through the use of in-depth interviews, prolonged engagement/observation in the classrooms, on-going conversations with the teachers, and focus group meetings.

The processes began by asking this committee to generate a list of the best or most successful teachers in the building. Questions used during this session included: Who
knows a lot about classroom management? Who works well with diverse groups of African American children? Who is a good teacher to talk to about students and culture? Who is considered a strong teacher by others on the staff? Nominations for study participants began with these questions and converged into a list of candidates as key names got mentioned over and over.

**Data collection methods**

The data gathering strategies used in this research were influenced by the five-month relationship established with the teachers. The strategies were both structured and unstructured protocols. The investigator relied on multiple conversations with the case study participants and interviewed them several times to follow up on particular issues, which included clarifications, concept checks and establishing the reliability of the data. This section presents the rationale and development of the interview protocols, field observations, and focus group meetings.

**Interview and observation rationale**

The teachers in the study were asked to provide detailed information about their teaching background, stance on classroom management, cultural diversity, how cultural knowledge influenced their assessment and definition of behavior problems, and proposed solutions. The interviews and observations examined the relation between culturally responsive pedagogy and classroom management (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004). Furthermore, the data collection techniques provided a way for the researcher to develop trust and mutual respect with the teachers. This
consideration was viewed as essential in facilitating a better understanding of the situated nature of their practice and contextual information accumulated in their “personal practical knowledge of the students and classroom situations” (Darling-Hammond, Wise & Klein, 1999, p. 31).

The interview protocol was designed to probe the teachers’ awareness of, perceptions on, and underlying processes used to make instruction and management meaningful and relevant to the lives of African American children. The observations chronicled the teachers’ classroom activities, descriptions of events, and interactions with students. The interview and observation schedules were initiated to describe the influences on the teachers’ assessment and definitions of classroom management problems and proposed solutions. Together, they queried the teachers’ reflective and critical thinking around professional behaviors seen as an integral part of being an effective teacher. Being honest, maintaining confidentiality, remaining neutral speaking, and protecting the teachers from any harm resulting from their statements was part of the research design.

**Interviews**

The data collection methods used in this research project were shaped and informed by findings from the literature review, discussions with advisors, and the five-month relationship established with the teachers. Due to the focus on verbal reports and the cognitive insights of the teachers (i.e., the perceptions, interpretations, and understandings of teachers), interviews were the primary data collection tool. These
interviews varied on a range of dimensions: type, setting, role interviewer, question format, and purpose (Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F., 1995).

There were three types of interviewing techniques used in the study: ethnographic, semi-structured, and structured open-ended. Each had a specific purpose and guideline for its use in the study. The ethnographic interview was a holistic anthropological technique used to conduct the opening in-depth interview with the teachers. The goal was to avoid stereotyping the teachers by making judgments about them based on distorted or incomplete information about their practice or life. The ethnographic interviews began with the process of understanding the teachers’ worldview, beliefs, and life situation.

The investigator used ethnographic interviewing to gain current and biographical information about the teachers. Information was collected on their cultural background, perceptions about the students, life experiences that might have prepared them to work in an urban setting, as well as their current ideas on classroom management and culture. The procedure involved audio recording and was largely formal since the sessions were pre-arranged. The questions were open-ended with a set of probes to ensure that teachers fully explained their ideas.

Transcripts were written subsequent to these ethnographic and formal interviewing sessions and used to check for reviews during debriefing sessions. The ethnographic interviews were conducted during the initial phase of the project along with cultural biographies to establish rapport with the case study teachers. These two methods also served to facilitate discussion on the role culture played in the teachers’
identity development. The follow-up discussions were particularly helpful as a catalyst for examining evolving self-understandings and appreciation of the role culture plays in their students’ lives. Data collected during the structured interviews was longitudinal and involving multiple in-depth interviews and conversations with each teacher. The interviews were semi-structure, based on a conversational approach with the teachers, and used open-ended questions with a set of probes to ensure the teachers fully explained their ideas. Twelve interviews and conversation sessions were conducted and the researcher met with teachers weekly.

The other type of interviewing was unstructured where “meaning emerges and is actively constructed within the interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 12).” No limit was set on this type of questioning and time was not a factor in how long it took to complete the interviewing. These conversations took place in the classrooms, hallways, time-out room, lunch room, or during dismissal. Many of the questions I asked were the follow-up type questions from previous conversations or classroom observations. They involved thinking out loud about teaching, classroom management, and the uniqueness of students. The researcher avoided controlling or attempting to predetermine the right answers or commenting on opinions expressed by participants. The purpose was to promote dialogue and feedback.

Observations

Techniques used during the observations included a) early mapping or “hanging out” in the teacher’s classrooms to learn the environment, b) participating
with students on various projects, and c) assuming the role as an aide to the teacher. The observations consisted of taking field note accounts of the teachers’ routines, behaviors, and intervention strategies used in establishing their classroom management approach. At times two or more data collection methods (field note techniques) were used to increase the credibility of findings and understandings derived from the observations. These methods include field observations (i.e., running accounts about what happened), personal self-reflective notes on different memories, methodology notes on particular principles or procedures in the inquiry, and theoretical notes on emergent trends in the study.

These types of observation notes were used to meet the criteria for triangulation of findings. As established by Ratcliff (2000), the researcher used location, methods of collection, participants, times of the day and other factors to develop a rich narrative account of the setting and participants actions. These notes proved helpful in subsequent data analysis and coding. Thirty observations were conducted in the classrooms and the researcher met with one or more of the teachers on a Monday, Wednesday, or Friday schedule.

Focus Group

The views of teachers about the persistent dilemmas, problems, or successes they encountered in the day-to-day decision making processes of classroom management provided insights into the value-bound opinions of the participants. Using the nine-week grading period as a guide, the investigator scheduled two focus group meeting
with the case study teachers to discuss the project and their opinions. These sessions allowed for across-the-table exchanges among the teachers to take place.

The teachers talked informally about shared understandings derived from practical experience with students, situations, and cultural insights concerning behaviors. For example, during one session the teachers discussed the importance of expressing care with students’ through touch, quiet affirmations, and concrete rewards. This discussion was interesting because it began with a question about students shouting out answers in the classroom and evolved to the Baptist religious practices of most African American students. One teacher felt that students were particularly loud on Monday morning due to the call and response practice used in church services. When this topic was brought forth discussion soon expanded to concepts of authority, students’ personal rights to not participate in class, and the role of adults.

These sessions were also used by the researcher to inquiry about questions I was hesitant to ask about during the interviews, situations the teachers’ felt needed closer examination (e.g. the use of the race card by students), and unanticipated developments in the study. The focus group meetings generally started a question related to a culturally responsive theme or technical questions about the teachers’ classroom management style and instruction. However, these meetings when beyond the behaviors of students and began to probe into some of the teachers’ understandings about their cultural beliefs and those of African Americans.

For instances, during one session we used Cartledge & Milburn (1996) chart on comparisons between African Americans and European Americans in communication.
behaviors. I used this chart to probe the teachers’ expectations and understandings about cultural differences between the behaviors of black children and white children. Specific areas of inquire were general behavior, arguing style, attitudes toward communication, questions about knowledge/ideas, sharing attitudes, eye contact, and beliefs on leadership (p. 150). In another session we used Sue & Sue (2003) chart on the components of white culture to discuss the teachers’ values and beliefs in comparison to those of African Americans. These conversations were helpful in exploring cultural misinformation and inaccuracies.

Data Collection – Sequence and order

Timeline for the study

A data collection timeline outlines each phase of research activities in the project. Phase I (Summer, 2004) – Drafting of research proposal that outlined the objectives of the research, methodology, and components of the Institutional Review Board research application. Developed informed consent letters for study participants and design of measures to insure confidentiality of data obtained during the research project.

Phase II (Fall, 2004) – Collection of background data on possible research site and school district. The researcher submitted initial proposal to the district’s research review board for approval to conduct the project in one or more of the twenty-six middle schools. The teacher nomination process began with initial contact of the building principal and teachers on the nominating committee for possible recommendations.
Phase III (Fall, 2004) – Concluded the nomination process and scheduled initial meeting with teachers to secure informed consent forms and explain the project. The investigator outlined the research method (case studies) and assumptions, major tasks, relationship between the researcher and teachers, how the selection process was conducted, procedures to protect the rights of participants, and the type of data that would be collected.

Phase IV (Fall [December], 2004; Winter and Spring, 2005) – Data Collection:

The study was conducted at Prospect Middle School and the researcher established a Monday, Wednesday, Friday observation and interview schedule with the teachers. Data collection took place between December 2004 and April 2005 over the course of 18 weeks in the classrooms of the three teachers. I conducted semi-structured ethnographic interview with each teacher the week before starting classroom visitations. A structured open-ended interview was conducted during the first week of teacher contact and a cultural biography was written by the teachers and researcher. During subsequent weeks, I conduct two group focus group meetings with the teachers, thirty classroom observations, and twelve interviews. The focus group meetings were held at the end of each grading period to discuss progress and concerns of the group.

Allowing for school holidays and possible illness, I observed each teacher’s room twice a week for 18 weeks. The research plan anticipates classroom observations with two of the teachers in the morning during 90 minutes block period and observations of the third teacher during afternoon sessions. Some observations were shorter or longer
depending on the routines of school life such as fire drills, tornado drills, library time, class projects, and other activities that altered the normal class schedule. All of the teachers generally engaged in informal discussion with the researcher at the end of each visit or during the teacher’s conference periods. Audio recording and field notes were collected during all interviews. Field notes were taken during each visit and later written up in the form of expanded notes. These included process notes concerning day-to-day activities, methodological notes, and decision-making procedures.

Phase V (Spring, 2005; Fall, 2005) – Data Analysis and Writing of Qualitative Report

Data analysis was on-going and summative. Data reduction, transcription, write-ups of field notes, coding, and data reduction was a continuous process that took place throughout the project. Data reconstruction, development of categories, findings, conclusions, connections to existing literature, and integration of concepts were summative activities that took place once the active data collection phase was over.

Phase VI (Fall, 2005) – Findings

The researcher organized, formatted and presented data, interpretations, findings and conclusions to the dissertation committee and research participants. Systematic methods and procedures were used to protect the reliability and validity (i.e. trustworthiness) of the findings. The researcher used procedures such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing.
Summary of data collection process

Specific techniques used in data collection included early mapping or hanging out in the classrooms, semi-structured interviews, unstructured open-ended discussions, participant observations, documents and artifacts collection. Teacher writings (i.e., first-person accounts) about their persistent dilemmas, problems, and cultural background were encouraged although only one teacher consistently wrote to the researcher. During interviews I used Kvale (1996) guidelines to vary the types of questions used: introducing, follow-up, probing, specifying, direct, and indirect. I also directed attention to asking simple, easy short questions without jargon. I attempted to balance the discussion by not talking too much and used clarifying questions to challenge inconsistencies.

Finally, an essential component of this research effort was observations. These were naturalistic observations of the classroom which included descriptions of the physical setting, stated expectations for behavior, teacher interaction with students, strategies for maintaining teacher authority, routines, decision making, conflicts and behavior interventions. The observations focused on how the teachers use the cultural knowledge of the students (i.e. cultural heritage, behavior sanctions, value orientations, learning and communication styles, and motivational styles) in their classroom management. Specific tasks observed included creating a physical setting that supports academic and social goals, establishing expectations for behavior and effort, communication with students, establishing assertiveness and authority, developing a caring classroom environment, and use of interventions to assist students with behavior problems.
Data management

In the next section, I review the methods used to manage data collected from the interviews, observations, focus group meetings, and documents. Within the four major methods used to collect data, fifteen sources and eight different contexts were identified. The data were categorized as descriptive, personal documents, field notes, first-person accounts, official documents, and transcriptions.

Participants were not identified by name or location in the computer files. Pseudonyms were used in all written reports and any additional identifiers were removed during coding to ensure that none of the data in the final report was traceable to participant's identity. The data were stored on a password protected computer system. Only the dissertation advisors and myself had access to the data during the data collection phase.

Next, each teacher had a separate electronic and hard copy file that contained the transcripts, field notes, researcher comments, and documents pertaining directly to their classroom. Included in these files were a rough draft of each teacher’s case and the transcriptions of all interview and focus group sessions. A transcriber and myself transcribed the audiotapes of interviews and reviewed the data to ensure that identifying references were removed. After each transcription was completed, I compared it to the audio tape to check for accuracy. These transcriptions were then used in debriefing sessions with the teachers and reviewed for accuracy. Any noticeable gaps in the tape were reviewed with the teacher and attempts were made to correct any oversights. Finally, consent forms provided the only information that a teacher participated in the study and these along with audiotapes were stored in a locked filing cabinet.
Researcher’s role and assumptions

As an African American researcher I was interested in the teachers’ thoughts on how their ethnic identity, classroom practices, and beliefs on culture related to their classroom management approach. This research offered a way to explore closely the understandings these selected teachers used successfully to reach culturally diverse students. These were students who looked like me, laughed along with me at Black comedy, cried when they heard stories of Black people suffering, and shared in the collective wisdom of African Americans.

Although I was aware that gender, social class, and age separated the students from me and shaped our different worldview, I still identified with these children. This converged with my interest in how these White female teachers came to identify with the students. I knew about the missionary zeal or perfectionist demand with which some teachers began their work with students in urban contexts, but these teachers were not that type. Something else kept them coming back to the challenge and promise of these young people. These were students whose lives, their parents, and my life were touched by the songs, sayings/proverbs, gestures, imagery, and stories of being Black in America. These students were also vivid reminders of the thousands of students I had taught as a teacher, counseled as a dropout intervention coordinator, and removed, suspended, and expelled as a principal.

I wanted to know what personal qualities, cultural competencies, or worldview helped these teachers to develop “visions of the possible” in their classroom management approach (Powell, 1996, p. 50). An obvious limitation in the literature on
classroom management is the lack of attention on issues of cultural diversity. There is little discussion on what it means for White teachers to successfully chart a course of classroom management for students whose cultural backgrounds differed markedly from theirs. Neither is sufficient attention given to the importance of these understandings.

This research design would fall into the category of emancipatory research (Tyson, 2005) that works to engage the researcher and the researched into a transformative social agenda. Tyson states:

...research can provide a working model for solving the problems of marginalized populations because it incorporates a more organic methodology, connects with the “grassroots,” enhances data collection and collaborative analysis, and can result in a grounded theory that arises from the specificity of the day-to-day experiences of oppressed people and provides links with broader social and political solutions to education problems. Its hope and promise lie in courageous action for change and the desire for critical understanding (p. 22).

Therefore as a researcher I took responsibility for ensuring the interviews were held in a timely manner and that discussion probed for underlying meanings and the articulation of the teachers’ concerns. I felt personally answerable for the organizing, interpreting, describing, and analyzing of the data. Whenever problems arose regarding the scheduling of observations or interviews, I immediately informed the teachers that my schedule was open to their needs. Their stories and experiences were seen as being too important to allow simple inconvenience to detract from talking about their teaching when it was convenient to them or they had something important to tell me.

I felt it was important for the teachers to know more about me and why I was interested in this research. So I shared personal stories about my multiple identities as a
husband, father, neighbor, researcher, and educator. I wanted to establish some common ground between us, something that went beyond the fact that I was examining their practice. We talked about what it meant to be an African American male teacher and principal, how it felt to be considered an authority on Black life, when the opposite was not expected of White teachers or principals. I asked them about their impressions of me as a researcher and individual and the extent to which they saw me as a representative of the students’ community? We also shared our disappointments in not being able to reach every child, parent, and fellow colleagues with concerns about teaching and learning.

*Interpretive research paradigm*

The paradigmatic foundation underpinning my perspective is reflected in Denzin & Lincoln’s (2000) statement that a main tenets of in constructivist paradigms is the acceptance of critical realism; “the belief that there is not a single reality that is out there,” which can be unearthed, studied, and understood (p. 19). Researchers construct a reality as they conduct and interpret their research. Reality in this study was situated in the activities of the teachers, it was constructed in social relations, multiple voices, gendered perspectives, and racialized interpretations. Teaching and learning can not be removed from the deeply personal beliefs, values, and attitudes the teachers held and applied to their experiences in the classroom.

As a researcher I avoided the naïve position that the study could provide a “clear window” into the lives of these teachers. These were complex individuals who had multiple identities that influenced how they made classroom management decisions.
Moreover, given the poststructuralist idea that any understanding is filtered through the participant’s lens of “gender, social class, race, and ethnicity,” the idea of reading the teachers’ reality was a complicated if not improbable task (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 19). With these apprehensions in mind, research must proceed cautiously and without intention to produce generalizable truths.

Based upon my readings of the literature on classroom management and culturally responsive pedagogy, I believed that I might find:

1. Understandings on the influence of culture in the teachers’ management practices that could be constructed through an intersubjective dialogue between the researcher and teachers.

2. Understandings that were shared, negotiated, and sustained in and through the context of the interaction.

3. Understandings could be enhanced through maximizing the power of dialectical interaction between the teachers and researcher as we came to describe/interpret culturally responsive classroom management looked like in these classroom contexts.

**Theoretical position**

The theoretical underpinnings of my perspective are based in culturally responsive teaching, which uses “the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). The five essential components of this pedagogical approach provided a theoretical framework for examining data from the study. The five essential components
are: developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural
diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning
communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic

Individually, each of these components has the capacity to enhance the learning
environment and basic purposes of schooling by providing teachers a way of gaining
cultural knowledge and skills in working with students from diverse backgrounds. More
importantly, when these components are implemented in unison they form a consistent
and coherent approach to teaching behavior that is linked to teaching effectiveness (Au
teaching practices have been used to improved academic achievement in literacy,
mathematics, science, and social studies; its application to classroom management
represents a logical extension of the theory (Gay, 2000).

My perspective in this research centered on the idea that culture has a strong
influence on students’ behavior, values, and attitudes. Given this prospect the
theoretical grounding of the research is situated within the explanatory capacity of
culturally responsive pedagogy. Research by Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran
(2003, 2004) and Powell, McLaughlin, Savage, & Zehm (2001) suggested that
traditional classroom management approaches have failed to serve the needs of minority
groups partially because they do not give importance to issues of student diversity.
Moreover, research by Skiba, Michael, & Nardo (2000) identified a need for “teacher
training in appropriate and culturally competent methods of classroom management” in
order to address racial disparities and the likelihood of bias in school disciplinary procedures. Therefore, based on my readings of the literature and my personal experience, the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy presented a comprehensive and appropriate way to explore the relation between culture and classroom management practices.

**Trustworthiness**

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I used several techniques to create “thick” coherence in the teachers’ cases (Denzin, 2001, p. 34). The techniques I used were prolonged engagement, persistent observations, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking.

**Prolonged engagement**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define prolonged engagement as the “investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the ‘culture,’ testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of self or of the respondents, and building trust” (p. 301). In this study I repeatedly observed the Prospect Middle School teachers’ practice over the course of five months. My initial activities with the teachers involved delineating my research intent and familiarizing myself with the school and classroom culture. During the five months, I ate lunch with the teachers, talked, and worked closely with them on classroom projects, and attended school events.

This prolonged engagement allowed me to get to know them as teachers and individuals. It also provided me time to examine my own preconceptions and
misinformation about the degree of knowledge the teachers recognized or needed about the tenets of culturally responsive teaching. The prolonged and intensive involvement with the teachers allowed time to develop a trusting relationship with them and the students in their classes. I was able to follow-up on comments from semi-structured interviews, focus group meeting, and ask “what if” questions about events in the classroom. I was also able to generate tentative interpretations about the teachers’ classroom management approaches and their relation to culturally responsive teaching practices. Finally, prolonged engagement facilitated the collection of a substantial amount of ethnographic data necessary to develop information-rich descriptive cases of their classroom lives as urban educators.

Persistent observations

As outlined in Lincoln & Guba (1985) persistent observation involves identifying “those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail” (p. 304). To accomplish the goal of persistent observation, I kept a research log that indicated the time, date, and length of my observations to monitor the frequency and details of each classroom observation. Case study teachers were observed at least twice a week or more if possible along with debriefing sessions on what was observed. I repeatedly observe the teachers in their classrooms, looking closely for and assessing the pervasive elements of classroom management: attention, momentum, discipline, routines, time, and space.

My observations generated question like: does the teacher have the attention of students, how does she organize to minimize the loss of learning time, and how does
she diagnose the cause of disruptive or inattentive behavior and match solutions to the problem? I spent many hours conducting classroom and hallway observations, talking to the principal and other teachers on the staff. After each observation I spent hours going over my field notes and writing in my research log. My evenings were filled with listening to audiotapes and revisiting initial premises, identifying emerging issues, and checking for discrepancies.

**Triangulation**

One of my main concerns was to avoid, whenever possible, an over-reliance on any one source of data. My readings of other research reports heightened my awareness of the real-world complications of sampling effects that could distort findings gained from just one data collection technique. I was aware of the following problems: teachers trying to look good or give a good impression, participants attempting to please the researcher, to give you what they think you want, teachers trying to play an appropriate part (role selection), rather than being fully themselves, and individuals who try to figure things out and look for what you are after (Boeree, 2003).

Therefore, the study used fifteen data sources, eight different settings/contexts (i.e., classrooms, hallways, time out room, school office, parent conference meetings, etc.) see Appendix G. I constructed the teachers’ cases from multiple sources of data, including a) field notes taken during classroom observations; b) transcripts from interviews; c) notes from informal conversations; and d) reflections from my research log. In doing this, I was able to create a consistent story of the teachers’ classroom management practices that incorporated a variety of data.
Peer debriefing

Throughout the research project I continued to ask colleagues and advance researchers (i.e., dissertation advisors and other professors) questions that could lead me to view the inquiry differently or lead me to another book or article about the use of culturally responsive theory. I wanted to keep challenging the suppositions that might lead me to certain interpretations of the data. I asked two colleagues who read each case after it was completed and provided feedback pertaining to the relevancy and adequacy of the information. These cases were revisited repeatedly based upon comments and suggestions from these debriefings. I had extended conversations with my dissertation cohort members and advisor during weekly meeting to discuss emergent findings in the study and to consider additional viewpoints. Based on these discussions additional revisions to the cases were made. By using these multiple methods of peer debriefing, I was able to compose rich narratives and accounts of the teachers’ classroom management interactions.

Member checking

Member checking is a step that Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” because it allows the researcher to test data, analytical categories, interpretation, and conclusion with the stakeholders (i.e., teachers). In this study, member checking was an on-going process as well as summative. During the research project two focus group meeting were held to review progress in the research, to discuss problems, examine emerging themes, and discuss
clarification. The teachers were also provided complete copies of interview transcripts, which we read over together and discussed.

All of the teachers were involved in regular debriefing and follow-up sessions with the researcher to check for accuracy in the reporting of statements. In addition, the teachers were provided copies of their cases to discuss possible oversights or the need for continued assessment. I have also spoken with one of the teachers in the study and the building principal about ways to disseminate the final dissertation document. Finally, I have returned to the building at the end to conduct a final member check of the final document.

Ethical considerations

The investigator in this study followed the Principles of Professional Responsibility established by the Council of the American Anthropological Association. However, there was another standard of ethical consideration upheld in this research related to potential conflicts of interest in the use of data or the confidentiality of participants. If ethical issues arose in the conduct of the study, consideration of the individual came first. This particular consideration was described in an on-line course required by the university’s Institutional Review Board and it held particular significance to me during my research. These teachers had become more than participants in a study, they were individuals who shared poetry with me, emailed me messages of encouragement, greeted me with professional courtesies, and opened their personal histories to examination.
I made certain that confidentialities were kept. Even in discussion with my advisors I used the teachers’ research pseudonyms. I also made certain that each teacher had a clear understanding that the research questions would probe for professional and personal understandings that would not be judged by the researcher. Explicit discussions were conducted to ensure that the teachers were advised of their rights as volunteers. Namely, their right to refuse to answer any questions they did not wish to answer and their undeniable right to leave the study at anytime without explanation or reprisal.
In this chapter, I discuss the qualitative themes identified from the interviews, focus group meetings, classroom observations, field notes and documents collected during the fieldwork phase of the study. Field note comments regarding preliminary discussions with the building principal are briefly relied in this section as they relate to the practicalities of research projects. Access must be granted. Permission needs to be obtained and protocols must be reviewed. These discussions were very beneficial in refining the research design and gaining support for the project.

During the course of the fieldwork, my informal discussions with the principal helped avoid potential obstacles and I quickly develop trust with the school staff, benefiting from the following factors: (1) being introduced by a former colleague (the principal) who endorsed the project; (2) my cultural identity as an African American male; (3) previously being a middle school principal and former teacher; (4) my perceived status as a researcher/practitioner sincerely interested in issues of culture and classroom management; and (5) my previous experience and reputation for working fairly with teachers and students in different buildings.
The data collected from interviews and focus groups consisted of more than 250 pages of interview transcripts, 150 pages of field notes, 12 hours of interviews, a grounded survey with participants and many pages of school documents on student conduct, classroom routines, schedules, teacher contract agreements and mapping of the classrooms. This data provided the bases for developing six evidentiary sources: documents, open-ended interviews, observations (direct and participant), focus interviews, structured interviews and archival records (Yin, 2003). As shown in Figure 4.1, the goal in collecting case study data focused on the idea of triangulation; to establish lines of convergence in the evidence probing the central research question: how do effective white middle-class female teachers make sense of and deal with issues of cultural diversity in their classroom management approaches? In this manner, the researcher intended to make the findings as robust and meaningful as possible, while addressing the sub-topics of what knowledge, skills, and dispositions these teachers have in managing African American children effectively (Darling-Hammond, Wise and Klein, 1999)?

Unlike other research methods such as survey, quasi-experiments, or ethnographies, data collection and analysis in these case studies preceded simultaneous. I could not wait until one phase of the project was completely over before using data to inform the next step. Interview questions changed after conducting field observations as information added to or conflicted with earlier understandings; observations shifted focus from one aspect of the teacher/student interaction to another based on reviews of notes; and document collection was modified as different insights and new perspectives emerged.
What began as a detailed research protocol, which took months to refine and be accepted by various approval committees, changed subtly as the needs and understandings of the researcher expanded.

**CONVERGENCE OF EVIDENCE**
(Multiple Case Studies)

- Ethnographic Interviews (Open-ended)
- Focus Group Interviews
- Documents (Rules & Procedures)
- Observations (Direct and Participant)
- Structured Interviews
- Archival Records

**FACT**

Figure 4.1 Convergence of multiple sources of evidence.

Different substantive areas of inquiry (i.e., teacher’s identity, knowledge of students and context of the school) focused on the main question and subtopics were scrutinized using an inductive analysis approach designed by Straus and Corbin (1998) which use open and selective coding. Taylor and Bogdan’s (1998) guidelines on data analysis and the development of coding families were used to bring together wide-ranging concepts and ideas about the meaning of different data. Initially, I had planned
to use Glaser and Strauss (1967) constant comparative method of grounded theory. However, in contrast this study was less concerned with developing concepts and theories about classroom management than with providing descriptive understandings of the setting and teachers, using their own terms and descriptions of events. I decided early in the design phase of the case studies to use the teachers’ own words, emotions and lived situations to grasp and interpret as correctly as possible their perspectives and experiences in these urban classrooms.

*Racial and cultural differences in schools*

It was important that the study began with a clear-eyed appreciation that management in urban contexts characterized by concentrated poverty and dense segregation along racial, economic, and class lines is often perceived as problematic, contested, and difficult to describe. This problem has been argued in the repudiation of deficit explanations of black children and schools (Kunjufu, 2004). Many studies on classroom management and thousands of “off-the-shelve” teacher how-to-books professing to be “real-life” portrays of successful classroom management techniques are actually written from the perspective of white researchers describing white middle-class students (Kounin, 1970; Evertson & Emmer, 1982; Canter & Canter, 1992; Brophy, 1999). A relationship dissimilar to that often shared by African American children and white teachers.

These teachers and white children shared in and gained from white privilege in schools, a situation they might have no conscious awareness of or necessary willingness
to participate in. For example, white children and their families are confident that they will never be embarrassed by hearing others suggest that the problems of the school (low levels of achievement, the need for special services or increased disciplinary actions) are caused by the high number of children of their race (Olsen, 1992). Moreover, white parents do not need to be concerned about taken for granted data and research results indicating that white children behave worse than African American children on almost every academic and behavioral measure (Tucker, 1999).

In addition, white families can be confident that policy decisions that affect their children’s school experience related to differences of opinion regarding what qualifies as a behavior problem will be made by groups dominated by people who understand their racial history and culture. The understanding sought in this investigation is how white teachers make sense of classroom management rules, procedures and techniques typically norm referenced to the values, beliefs and cultural backgrounds of the white middle-class in urban classrooms. What meaning-making understandings of themselves, their students’ culturally informed behaviors and the context of the school do these teachers develop to make their approaches to management more responsive to the social, emotional and cultural needs of their students? Given that conventional methods are not readily avoidable or particularly relevant in these urban settings.

This study, therefore, sought to displace the privileged position and understandings of white researchers and teachers. Instead of a thin description of classroom events involving African American children and misbehavior and the archetypal response offered to teachers of establishing a consistent structure of rewards
and consequences in their classrooms. This account employed experience-near the unit of analysis; a closer and more intimate understanding of what frame of mind, skills and knowledge these teachers developed in effectively using diversity as a lens in their classroom management decision making? The cases represent interested knowledge concerned with making the invisible visible by describing the situated nature of the teachers’ practice, decision-making and self disclosing statements on how they “got it” as urban practitioners. It looked closely at their personal practical knowledge which influenced their dispositions towards the urban learner, how they selected intervention strategies, and their viewpoint on social behavior.

*Need for cautious discussion*

The research is focused on establishing an emergent design conditioned upon the responses of white female teachers as skillful practitioners. It is important, therefore, to examine and describe their worldview including how they developed their identity as an urban educator and what it takes to cross racial borders to gain cultural knowledge about their students so their classroom management approaches are culturally responsive. Yet, this study proceeded with caution to avoid reinforcing stereotypical thinking about the ease with which the problems of urban schools could be rectified. As discussed in Bulman (2002), Hollywood maintains a middle-class fantasy of the teacher in the ‘Hood.’ The fantasy evolves around the teacher or principal-hero who represents middle-class hopes that “if only the right type of person would apply the right methods
– an unconventional pedagogy with a curriculum of middle-class norms and values,”
then city schools could be saved and ‘Dangerous Minds’ (2001) could be restored to the American dream (p. 251).

Taken-for-granted assumptions about African American children not being able to measure up to the standards of behavior and academic performance accepted and valued in schools require that precaution be taken when studying classroom management and culture (Tucker, 1999). Unquestioning acceptance of deficit explanations of behavior, which is socialized through culture are always present in educational discourse; especially as it relates to the influence of poverty in urban schools. Well-meaning models such as Payne (1995, 1999), unintentionally promote the idea of “that’s just the way it is” when working in urban settings.

Behaviors such as arguing loudly with teachers, angry responses, inappropriate or vulgar comments, physical fighting and disrespect to teachers are expected as a by-product of poverty instead of class enforced behaviors, low expectations by some teachers, and a depleted sense of responsibility for students (Payne, 1999). In this context, it should also be understood that blaming those caring and dedicated “Monday Morning” teachers, who return each week to their students renewed with commitment, but unsure of how to proceed is not the goal of this study (Howard & Obidah, 2005). This work proceeded from the proposition that well-organized classroom management in urban settings resembles Milner’s (2005) observation:

Classroom management is about the ways in which students and teachers are able to connect, learn, and grow; the avenues through which students are able to have voice, develop their multiple and
varied identities and agency; and the value of students’ self-worth and sense of belonging – all in the pursuit of optimal learning opportunities (p. 2).

This observation is found in the intent and design of these cases. It speaks to the need to provide voice to those silenced by “that’s just the way it is” thinking about urban middle schools, classroom management, and race. By seeking meaningful insights into the teachers’ identities as they develop as urban educators, we are offered a privileged position into the situated nature of their decision making about what works and how they “got it.” This line of inquiry takes us into the pedagogical reasoning of these teachers towards another bottom line assertion: students cannot learn in a chaotic classroom environment.

As the investigation explored the teachers’ biographical experiences, sources of knowledge (i.e., scholarship, wisdom of practice, and professional development) and yet-to-be codified dispositions about management, a narrative moment was revealed where voice, emotions and connectedness were storied. The ability to help children who have traditionally been underserved is not an accident or chance occurrence, it requires intangible aspects of teaching: a combination of enthusiasm, conscientious concern for the wellbeing of children, educational know-how and personal drive to continue were others may have failed. In short, a commitment to get the job done right. When this type of disposition towards classroom management is also cognizant of children’s culture and responsive to their beliefs, attitudes, and approaches to learning, then it can build bridges of meaningfulness instead of pipelines to prison.
Data Reduction

During the 2004-05 school year, I developed three descriptive multiple-case studies on the classroom management practices of white middle-class females in an urban middle school. The student population was between 90 to 100 percent African American, 90 percent received free or reduced lunch, and only 40 percent of the students performed at or above proficiency levels according to the State Report Card. I spent an average of 10 to 12 days a month in their classrooms over a period of eighteen weeks. The data collection phase of this study was not limited to a single source of data, instead multiple sources of evidence were used and a considerable large amount of raw data was assembled.

The data reduction for this project was guided by the existing literature on classroom management and culturally responsive teaching with the aid of SQR NUD*IST, a software program for analyzing qualitative data, and inductive analysis. In order to create thick coherence in the cases; I employed four basic strategies commonly used to ensure trustworthiness: triangulation of different data sources, prolonged engagement, persistent observation and peer debriefing as a means of enhancing findings and safeguarding against researcher bias (Patton, 1980; Stake, 2000). Analysis was also influenced by Gay’s (2000) work on the theory, research and practice of culturally responsive teaching, Ladson-Billings (1994) seminal manuscript on the characteristics of successful teachers of African American children, Cooper (2003) study on effective white teachers of black children and Brophy (1999) research on classroom management.
In like manner, this reduction of data could not have proceeded without acknowledging certain methodological concerns distinguished in Irvine’s (2003) reminder that researchers bring to their work “values, opinions, and beliefs; their prior socialization and present experiences; and their race, gender, ethnicity, and social class” (p. 33). Similar to how teachers tend to teach who they are, researchers must guard against developing reports that principally reveal their ideas and thinking. The factors identified above not only influence what researchers see, but also the type of questions they ask, what data is valued or excluded, and the interpretation of findings.

As I wrote these case studies, special attention was given to exploring not only the complexities of the interactions, but also my experiential and culturally-bounded perspectives on classroom management. After being a middle school teacher, principal and stakeholder in the future of black children, I had developed various thoughts and beliefs on classroom management in an urban environment. At times I felt that I already knew the answer to some of the questions asked of teachers; yet, I resolutely returned to the line of inquiry and balanced the intricacies of the study’s substantive issues with the need to collect data in a careful manner. By reviewing the events and data in a recursive manner, guided by the theoretical perspectives of the study, the mitigating influence of my subjective cultural lens (i.e., worldview, life history, race and gender) was accounted for in the collecting and interpreting the data. The goal as the case study investigator was not the self-governing autonomy of objectivity in reporting the data. Instead, the intersubjectivity of interpretive understands was sought in better reveal how these teaching lives were shaped, sometimes irrevocably, by their interactions with student’s cultural backgrounds and life experiences.
Each case is presented separately to retain the holistic nature of the interactions, perceptions, beliefs, and practices of the classroom teachers. Embedded within the overall holistic case is sub-cases that describe how the individual teachers orchestrate classroom management and instruction to “embrace, affirm, and extend culturally socialized behaviors to support effective academic and social skill outcomes” (Townsend & Webb-Johnson, 2002. p. 4). These sub-cases use the conceptual framework proposed by Weinstein, Curran & Tomlinson-Clarke (2003) to assist in organizing the data. The five components essential to culturally responsive classroom management is: (1) recognition of one’s own ethnocentrism and biases; (2) knowledge of students’ cultural backgrounds; (3) understandings of the broader social, economic, and political context of the education system; (4) ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate classroom management strategies; and (5) commitment to building caring classroom communities (p. 27). These components are use to illustrate the interplay between what the data revealed and my interpretations of it.

Finally, as a point of clarity, the term effective is used in reference to the teachers’ skillful ability at combining instruction and management to promote high achievement and acceptable behavior. The term “effective teaching” is defined as “when most of the students (a) are motivated to succeed; (b) have a positive relationship with the teacher; (c) are engaged in the lesson most of the time with very little resistance; (d) feel challenged, supported, and interested in the curriculum; and (e) are showing improvement in all skill areas and in subject matter knowledge (Obidah & Teel, 2001). This construct of effectiveness is explored within the cultural components identified
by Weinstein (2003). Teacher effectiveness anchors the biographical experiences and “thick descriptions” of meaningful events or moments in the teachers’ classroom life that defined how and to what extent cultural knowledge influenced their approach to management. A recursive thread that weaves through the case investigation is the question of when did these teachers feel they “got it” in creating a well-grounded classroom management approach that is responsive to students’ cultural experiences, worldview, and life histories?

Coding

Various coding strategies such as coding the content of the text (microanalysis) and coding to convey information (open coding), also described as base data and case data coding, were employed in categorizing the data into concepts, themes, patterns and surprises. Throughout the process the clear purpose of coding was sustained: to allow emergent ideas to surface. Although certain ideas from the literature review could not be ignored, they did not dominate nor direct the coding process. Also, given that the teachers were not formally prepared in the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies, various free codes developed – codes not linked to the literature.

New categories emerged when existing codes did not quite fit the data, or when new data suggested a different dimension to the category. As the project proceed coding included re-making categories, coding from various documents and coding from existing results. These measures were undertaken to allow the data to speak to the researcher rather than forcing the data into pre-arranged categories. Initially all
responses related to the sub-cases were coded accordingly, then additional strategies were used such as combining coding (axial) with other ways of thinking, spreading and refining codes to exclude those that seemed inappropriate. In the end all responses related to the research question were coded as they emerged.

*Case #1: Ms. Jackie*

Question: Jackie, how important is it to form relationships with your student?

Answer: I think it is the most critical part especially with middle school students. When I did not have a relationship my first year with the kids, it felt like I was on this side of the wall and they were on the other side of the wall. It was like I was yelling over the top of a wall to get to them. I felt I never reached them. I feel now that the kids know me…I tell them a lot about myself. I share pictures of my family at the beginning of the year. I let them know who I am and then I expect that they are willing in return to share who they are. (2/2/05)

The perspective that classroom management is based on relationships is a recurring theme throughout my conversations and observations of Ms. Jackie’s classroom. She often refers to the class as a team or family that supports, encourages and commitments itself to the serious work of academics. This work, however, is always contingent upon a sense of connectiveness. Trusting relationships built upon shared narratives about family life, personal hardships, respect and achievement. Ms. Jackie expresses her caring and concerned with students through a mixture of personal experiences and sustained persistence on academic achievement.

Jackie places a premium on making her students feel “special” and important in their expressions of various concerns and comments. It’s what she calls a “personal
touch,” knowing some aspect of their lives that is not readily apparent or public. In class, she focuses her entire attention on the child: leaning forward in their direction as they speak, listening attentively, supporting their discussion with nonverbal clues such as affirmative nods, smiles, “uh-huh” and “I understand.” These listening and clarifying techniques are only part of a repertoire of classroom management strategies used to maintain appropriate behavior and create positive interpersonal relationships.

Jackie can also, “go there” with a student, a verbal tactic associated with African American female’s use of speech, head and hand movement and the use of sharp sarcasm. For example, a student might say “I know I am not leaving, I don’t know who you think you are?” complete with finger snapping, head movement, and eye rolling. Jackie’s response is immediate and clear, couched within black vernacular and mannerism, “Well, I am going to tell you who I am...” What came across most in the interviews and off-the-record comments was that this teacher was fearless. She was not afraid, resentful, or hostile toward students, but she did demand their respect and effort to achieve and she returned it in kind. Jackie’s classroom management approach adheres to the adage that “sometimes it takes more than praise or setting limits to let kids know that you care. It takes being interested in them” (Weinstein, 1999. p. 59).

Introduction

It was during my third trip that week to Prospect Middle School when I first encounter Ms. Jackie (a name she selected because it reminded her of someone she respected deeply). The principal and I were discussing my research project and details
about access to the building when suddenly, a petite, brown-eyed, and slightly pimpled young white female teacher burst into the principal’s office. She was approximately five feet six inches, one hundred and ten pounds, in her late twenties; she could on the first glance be mistaken as a high school or college student. The teacher rushed in and stood in the middle of the room. She was visible upset, agitated, and clearly disappointed. Jackie began speaking rapidly and it was clear that she was near tears or an emotional outburst in her frustration. Being familiar with the principal’s style of leadership, I was not surprised by the teacher’s sudden unannounced entry into the room; so I sat back and observed the exchange.

The teacher said, “Oh…Mrs. Dean it’s awful, the football coaches from a local college are not coming for the awards assembly, I don’t know what to do! They promised to come and I told the students, they are expecting them. I personally spoke to them and visited the college to secure their involvement before telling the kids about our plans. This is a big thing with them since it is all the students who did not receive a failing grade on their report card for the first grading period. What should I do?” Mrs. Dean quickly focused her attention on the teacher and made several suggestions. Within moments I was also quickly drawn into the problem solving. We suggested several alternatives and then the teacher immediately pulled out her cell phone and began calling students’ parents. One parent in particular was suggested by Mrs. Dean as a possibility in getting a speaker on short notice. However, what amazed me most was that this teacher had the students’ home numbers in her speed dial.
Within minutes she was on the phone with a student; then shortly after that she was speaking to the parent, explaining the problem and asking for the mother’s help. She wanted to know if the mother would either give her the phone number to her father’s house, who was an ex-professional football player, so she could call him personally or would she call him herself and ask if he could speak to the kids on short notice. The teacher negotiated a deal with the parent within minutes for her help in getting the student’s grandfather to come to the event. Later, the mother mentioned that her daughter needed a letter of recommendation for an after school activity and asked would the teacher consider writing her one. Her immediate reply was of course…“She is a good student in my class and it’s no problem to acknowledge that in a letter.” The mother agreed to call her father and get him to speak at the school.

The whole exchange took about thirty minutes and went on as other teachers came into the principal’s office with various concerns and conversations…each seemingly more important than the last. As these events continued to unfold, Ms. Jackie kept right on calling other students, talking to parents and grandparents as she made arrangements for the assembly. At one point, she turned to me and said… “Mr. Hubbard this is just so important to the kids that I just can’t stop, they worked so hard. If I don’t get this gentleman could you speak to the students?” Again, I was somewhat shocked, she barely knew me. Later I would find out that this request was due in part to her respect for the principal’s opinion of a person or idea; she trusted Mrs. Dean implicitly. I, of course, agreed to speak to the students, it would be an honor to help. I knew right then that this was a teacher I wanted in the study.
Lesson Learned

This vignette demonstrates some of the elusive qualities (i.e., knowledge, skills and dispositions) that characterize effective teaching practices with urban African American students and their families. In this brief exchange, Ms. Jackie, a young fourth year educator, accomplished several noteworthy things related to culturally responsive teaching. First, she created an alliance and engaged in joint work with a family while communicating with them as equal partners in a school activity that recognized and valued academic achievement. As the teacher said, “this is so important to the kids that I just can’t stop, they worked so hard... [these are] all the students who did not receive a failing grade.”

Next, despite the failed attempt at getting local college officials to attend the event, her involvement demonstrated awareness of promoting college access for first-generation college goers; middle schoolers who are formulating college plans with their parent(s). The activity exhibited interest in and a willingness to initiate and cultivate a school-based working relationships that went beyond the boundaries of the classroom. The assembly served as a means of validating the accomplishments of students, while building bridges of meaningfulness between the home and school experience. The statement that “she’s a good student in my class and its no problem acknowledging that in a letter,” offered encouragement and praise to the student’s efforts while recognizing excellence as the standard of performance.

Finally, the exchange reinforced the seamless connectedness between the teacher and the students. Jackie had their home phone numbers in her speed dial and she did not
hesitate in contacting the family for help in negotiating common understandings which supported collective action. She had interrupted the principal’s meeting and could have easily been reprimanded for this intrusion, but due to the perceived urgency of her problem she never hesitated: “Oh...Mrs. Dean, it’s awful. This is a big thing with them since it is all the students who did not receive a failing grade on their report card for the first grading period. What should I do?” Nothing could stand in the way of addressing the problem. The actions defined her teaching as a caring relationship and promoted the importance of developing awareness of the community, its resources and support networks.

Over the next four and a half months I would observe, conduct interviews, and actively participate in Ms. Jackie’s classes. I documented many other events related to her approach to students and classroom management. Some of the most memorable moments involved discussions about why she became a teacher.

*Teaching and being raced*

Question: What would you say to pre-service teachers to help them overcome their fear of working in an urban school?

Answer: These kids I feel more than any experience I had in a suburban school want to learn desperately...these are kids that want to be taught and want to learn. Don’t ever think that they are like these big bad kids that are going to stick you up in the parking lot...They want to be loved and they want to learn. I feel that about every student that I’ve ever had, they really want to learn but they have not been given the materials to learn and too many people have given up on them. So I say...I am not giving up on you. The worst kids work better for me sometimes than the really good kids. (4/21/05)
Jackie grew up in a rural area in the Midwest; her early life experiences emphasized various components of her cultural values and beliefs and adherence to core cultural concepts such as: rugged individualism, competition, action orientation, Protestant work ethic, and the importance of status and power. These values guide much of her decision making in classroom management; it is always based on the individual and rarely is the whole class disciplined as a group…ownership for misconduct is emphasized. She enjoyed sports in high school and through her talent won an academic and athletic scholarship in baseball that paid for her undergraduate degree.

Her competitive drive manifested itself in a coaching approach to management…the class is a team. Everyone must improve and be able to celebrate each other’s success while helping those who did not make the “cut.” It’s a life lesson for the students in her class…self efficacy and resilience tempered with humility. Jackie is also very proud of her religious affiliation (Catholic), and never thinks about what it means to be privileged as a white person. But she was clearly shaken when a girl responding to Jackie’s request at the end of a grading period for the class to evaluate her teaching performance wrote:

Ms. Jackie you are a really caring and giving teacher and I really believe you have the best interest of the students in mind. Even though your skin is not the same as mine, you still care about us a lot. (3/22/05)

This statement touched Jackie in a place reserved for private thoughts…she had never thought that her race made any difference. The statement made her sad because
Jackie could not believe that it would cross the student’s mind that she could not care about her or educate her because she (the teacher) was white. She shared, “That was the first time race ever really had been like in my face.”

On another occasion, she felt raced when a local school board member made the comment that “the school district needed more African American teachers because white teachers could not relate to our students.” She vividly remembers this statement because “it hurt me for someone to say that white teachers don’t work well with our students. I think that there are certain qualities that people need to be teachers. I don’t know that it is the color of your skin or your gender. It probably was the first time in my life that happened. I feel for people who have to deal with that on a daily bases, it probably helped me have more of an understanding for what my students go through.”

Jackie’s remarks to these experiences displayed awareness and anger with the broader social issues of race, prejudice and discrimination. She felt the school board member was “almost promoting some type of segregation and we worked so hard to try and overcome that I was never raised to think that way or to every judge someone by the color of their skin.” Jackie then went on to share her student’s stories about being followed in stores, restricted from entering stores with signs like “only two students at a time” and of a student telling her once in class that, “I don’t have to do anything but be black and die.” Jackie couldn’t understand the racial comments and the discrimination. One day outside her class she overheard several students saying, “I am black and proud, stay strong.” These events, however, did not scare her or silence her about racial injustice and the struggle of black people. Jackie is willing to discuss students’ concerns
about racism and feels that she should share her point of view, because “I am a white person they trust.” This statement is quickly supported with her assertion that education is how the students can fight racial bigotry…and “I feel like I am able to give that too them.”

Conflict: Middle class background and understanding poverty

When Jackie speaks about her childhood there is a subtle shift in her posture, she sits up a little straighter and speaks slightly more clearly. The importance of family and status is found in her stories. These are core values formed early in her lived experiences and they still shape her perspective on teaching and poverty:

I grew up in a middle class family…you know, pay your mortgage first and then you buy grocery and things like that. My mom was a nurse and she commutes forty-five minutes one way to her job in the city, but my dad is a laborer. He’s a truck driver and I never wanted to work as hard as my dad did…away from the house really long hours and the way people talked to him just because they thought he is nothing…because he’s a truck driver. I wanted a profession where I was more respected and my ticket there was to get into education. It was like my way out.

Upon closer examination, we can see within this statement of cultural informed behavior (i.e., pay your bills first, delayed gratification, the importance of status) some of the complexities that filter Jackie’s worldview and work with African American students and families. While she is clearly an advocate for her students and quickly defends, her middle class ideas disconnect with how they prioritize responsibilities:

I see a difference here. I see you get your pay check and you buy new Nikes, Jordans or Fubu gear and then if there is money left over then we pay for were we live and then if we are still okay then we will pay our electric bill and gas bill. So I see a big difference in order of
responsibilities and I think that carries over in our classroom. Because the kids take care of the things they want to take care of first. Like they take care of the things with their friends and make plans for the weekend and if I have time then I am going to get my work done. So I think the way that they order things or make them important is taught at home. So they are not putting their education first. (4/21/05)

The disconnection in this statement does not stop Jackie from caring or respecting her students. Poverty and the behaviors that seem to originate from coping with it is an area where Jackie feels she is still growing. She learned a lot about it from her African American female principal who stay after school with her many nights until six and seven o’clock reviewing her actions and telling her what she needed to know about African American culture. Jackie states that “My first year of teaching was pretty tough, as far as discipline issues I wasn’t as aware of African American culture as I needed to be to be teaching.”

So she learned by listening by listening to Mrs. Dean, other experienced teachers, and her students. One teacher in particular who shared a room with her told her to stop saying please so much to the students; she needed to be more direct in her requests of them. The teacher told her, “If you say please one more time to them I am going to throw something at you from the back of the room. Quit asking them please and tell them what to do. This took place in March or April and that’s when her class turned around. By the end of the year she asked them “why is it so much better now than it was in the beginning? They said Ms. Jackie because you tell us what to do instead of asking us and when you ask us we feel like we have the right to say no. Jackie still says please and thank you to her students, but she learned that there are certain incidents when it
has to “be sit down…now!” Jackie learned that just because she said thank you, please and smiled a lot, the kids still would do what she wanted them to accomplish…she had to be firm.

*Respect: Without it you have nothing*

Developing personal relationships and mutual respect were two persistent themes in discussions with Ms. Jackie. She often expressed the importance of students respecting her actions in creating a caring classroom environment were structure and individual respect were maintained. Establishing respectful relationships and maintaining high expectations for behavior was essential to Jackie’s sense-making of how best to work with her students. During her first year, she felt the students did not perform well in her class because “they did not respect me.” While she attributes part of this to her lack of experience in an urban context, she recognizes that her students must respecting her stance first as an individual then as their teacher. Jackie states that three areas of respect must be maintained:

| Respect for the | There were a couple of times that I have had run-ins with kids where they actually like verbally wanted to fight with you…the adult. That has caught me off guard. I found out that I don’t have to yell at with them but I can’t back down. I can’t walk away and look like I am afraid. I have to stand there and when they are done yelling, then I say now you are going to listen to me and just be very firm. Firmness is the key. |
|walk Teacher     |                                                                 |

| Respect for Students | The parents will tell you that their kids are not to talk to adults that way. But I think that the kids have a hard time separating two basic understandings in their world. First, they are not supposed to be a punk to their |
friends. Second, no one should ever get the best of them. For example, one student I have, if I yell at him because I am mad at him, he yells back at me. Because he feels like he is being embarrassed or punked in front of his classmates. So I just go over and sit down next to him and I tell him this behavior is not appropriate and it will not happen in my classroom and he says, “Yes Ms. Jackie.” Now if I yelled that or said that from across the room he would come back with, “I’ll do that, I’ll do whatever I want.”

Respect for Achievement

They respect me because I have high expectations and I have consequences when they do things wrong. They want to do “A” work, but they have to believe that you want “A” work from them. Like they’ll do it for me, like sit down and work on the test, do their best. They will do it because they know that’s what I want. So the problem I have is teaching them that it has to be for them. They like to have someone to work for and not just themselves.

The teachers’ comments are consistent with assumptions found in the literature on culturally responsive teaching; namely that: “Teachers with strong self-confidence and feelings of efficacy in their teaching abilities have high expectations for all students” (Gay, 2000). Jackie’s expectations include academic as well as behavioral standards. She tells students that disrespect is not a choice and identifies for her students the correct voice tone and mannerism that is acceptable. In this sense, she operates her classroom as a decision maker who makes sound judgments about when student compliance is required. Yet, Jackie is also a teacher who can articulate the rationale for this judgment and recognizes the value of modifying such decisions when presented with additional data. She seeks to understand the reasons for the behavior and then models for the students other behaviors that would be more appropriate.
Vignette: Establishing Assertiveness and Authority

For weeks teachers had complained that students were running through their section of the hallway between classes. When approached the students they were loud, disrespectful, and usually ignored directions from teachers. Some had even used profanity in not-so-muffled voices as they defiantly walked by staring or laughing at the teachers and mumbling “I don’t know who the F you think you are?” Daring the teachers to do anything. When asked why they did not stop the students, teachers responded that “they did not know these students and felt uneasy confronting them.” The usual compliant was “they’re not our students and they won’t listen to us. That’s an administrator’s job, I just teach.” However, the duty roster had changed with the new nine-weeks grading period and a different teacher was on duty in the hallways. As a group of loud, pink-haired, vulgar-mouthed, African American girls approached she quickly stepped forward and said without hesitation, “Ladies, you’re not supposed to go this way. Stop where you are and turn around.” The students said “Oh, that’s Ms. Jackie; I told you she always stops us.” The students turned around and go the other way. They go to where they were supposed to be because they know Ms. Jackie was going to follow them to class.

The teacher in this vignette was Ms. Jackie and she shared this story about a time when she felt she “got it.” It is an intangible part of becoming an effective teacher in an urban context and involves learning how to “read” students; their mannerisms, tone of voice, physical demeanor and the influence of context and culture on their behavior. Some students parent themselves and other younger siblings. These students need to
understand that there are different sets of behaviors and expectations necessary for them to successfully negotiate life: one set for the street and another for school, work, and life outside of their neighborhood. Although Jackie did not know any of the students personally she assumed an authority stance, while not using a parent’s voice of disapproval, but rather an adult voice of reasoning (Payne, 1996).

In a business-like manner she informed them of their infraction and provided them with an appropriate way to correct the situation. Jackie offered them a way to be successful, while also communicating that this is not a choice. Jackie shared this “got it” moment and elaborated that:

It hit me like a ton of bricks. My eyes opened up and I walked around like dang…I got it. They are listening to me. It was almost like a sense of power. I don’t know what it was but it felt good. In the beginning I backed up and I just gave them their way because I felt like I am never going to win this. But then they see that you are willing to walk away or almost like you are scared or intimidated. That’s when I found out you can’t show that, even if you are intimidated or maybe even scared at times. Now I try to handle everything that comes my way …

This epiphany is related to a developed skillfulness in Jackie’s interpersonal relationships with students. Its personal practical knowledge of students’ cultural references regarding how best to approach them in this particular situation within this particular school. It is situational knowledge that is applied in non-routine circumstances that demand a contextualized response (Darling-Hammond, Wise & Klein, p. 31). This teacher has become adept at specifiable and observable actions moves that involve the use of discipline, momentum, expectations, attention, clarity and personal relationships with students. What makes these moves operate in an effortless
manner that seems natural and unexplainable to the teacher, is the unconscious almost automatic kind of knowing on her part. These teachers seem to “just know what to do,” these actions are identified as “got it” (Saphier & Gower, 1997. p. 3). To others it seems like these teachers have a type of tacit knowledge about what works with students. However, this skillfulness is not something with which this teacher was born. Accomplished urban educators are made, not born. The task of managing effectively in these urban contexts is a learned behavior. As Jackie relays, “I love it here. I am excited to wake up in the morning to come to work. I learned a lot from Mrs. Dean, I watched how the students respond to her and other experienced teachers and then I try to do the same thing.

Case #2: Ms. Dupree

Classroom Profile

Ms. Dupree’s classes are held in the Northwest wing of Prospect Middle School, located between the gymnasium and the rear playground area of the building. During lunch recess for the other grade levels she must compete with the sounds of young adolescents--free-style rapping, yelling, and racing around the grounds. Occasionally, there might be a fight that draws students immediately to the large windows. The room is a colorful, print-rich environment (see Figure 4.3) organized around instruction. The walls are appropriately covered with charts, informational materials, motivational posters, and rubrics related to the six subjects she teaches. At the doorway a list of eighth grade expectations and a Respect Statement is posted: “Treat others the way you
want to be treated, show kindness and consideration to others, like yourself enough to
be yourself, and accept others for who they are,” along with a sign that states “Nothing
Great was ever Achieved Without Enthusiasm.”

The classroom communicates clear expectations and students are informed
through visual display and teacher direction what is expected of them and what they
must do to meet the academic and behavioral standards of the class. It is a student-
friendly learning environment filled with weekly/daily calendars and schedules,
assignment lists, and grading criteria. Prominent on the front chalkboard are two lists,
one details the teacher’s behavioral system (i.e., rewards and consequences) and the
other contains various tasks students are assigned responsibility for in the class:
messenger, distribution, librarian, writing center, computers. Developing a sense of
ownership for the classroom is a priority for this teacher and students regularly clean up
the room so it remains clear of paper or a disorderly appearance.

Every space in the room is dedicated to an instructional purpose. On the rear wall
closest to the windows is located the writing center; a book case separates the area from
the rest of the room and contains a classroom set of dictionaries, thesaurus, and
textbooks; while on the wall is a rubric of evidence that defines the criteria for student
work. Next to this it a Word Wall of mathematical concepts and terms; then an area
designated for science processing skills using the scientific method; which sits beside a
small computer station and motivational poster: “There are no limits for journeys of the
mind.” A small sign over the teacher’s desk, situated in a corner facing the students
reinforces Ms. Dupree’s approach to the seriousness of learning, “Save Time…See It
My Way.”
Vignette: Enhancing student’s motivation

There was a knock at the classroom door and a tall young man in his late twenties quietly walked into the class. He stood just over six feet tall and was nicely dressed. He presented himself as a professional. On the lapel of his suit he wore the official blue and white visitors pass. At first, Ms. Dupree did not notice him and continued to address two students about a question regarding the assignment. Briefly, she glanced towards the visitor and asked him to wait a minute as she finished up with the students. Ms. Dupree assumed he was an older sibling or uncle of one of her students. As she looked at him again he said, “You don’t remember me.” The teacher paused and examined more closely the name tag and recognized that he was a former student. It had been at least twelve years since she had seen him.

He spoke softly and chose his words carefully, “I’ve wanted to come back and talk to you for years; I wanted you to know that I just graduated from Law school and you’re the reason why. You were the first person to ever tell me that I was smart.” Ms. Dupree paused and caught her breath. She felt a sudden jolt in heart as her throat tightened with emotion. The young man continued talking and her whole class stopped to listen, “Because of you and the way you helped me and what you told me, I started to believe in myself.” He wanted to come back after earning his undergraduate degree, but did not have a chance, “I have been meaning to do this for years…thank you, Ms. Dupree.” The teacher instantly remembered him as a young squirrely, but bright student who now stands before her as an attorney, smart as he could be. “I was the first person to tell him that?” Slowly she begins to notice the tears flowing down her
face, she can’t control them…she is crying in front of her class. The magnitude of the moment is overwhelming. Even now, three years later, Ms. Dupree still cries as she retells the story. “If I never hear that again, the rest of my teaching career…I have done my job. This is why I became a teacher!”

The teacher in this vignette is Ms. Dupree, a serious-minded eighth grade teacher who is non-pretentious and very pragmatic in her beliefs, practices and demeanor. For the past sixteen years Ms. Dupree has consistently demonstrated her caring and commitment to middle childhood education at Prospect Middle School. She offers an engaging and ambitious learning experience to her students; it is based on high expectations for academic performance, a strong sense of teaching responsibility, and a developed awareness of her identity as an urban educator. Ms. Dupree is a teacher who is intentionally disposed to acting in particular ways that best facilitate learning and self-regulated behavior in her students. She does not leave student performance or conduct to chance: “I expect them to show respect to me and to themselves and each other, that’s my biggest thing. I talk to them a lot about responsibility and about having self-control they are going to need to be in control of themselves.”

In the above vignette, the student returned to acknowledge how Ms. Dupree’s actions help propelled him to achieve academically and enhanced his determination to challenge personal mediocrity: “Because of you and the way you helped me and what you told me, I started to believe in myself. You were the first person to ever tell me that I was smart.” Ms. Dupree made a big difference in this young man’s life and she is a teacher who regularly challenges deficit thinking. She is quick to praise and slow to
criticize when encouraging students to make choices about their learning needs. Ms. Dupree is not the least bit uncomfortable assuming a role that goes beyond the expectation of middle school teachers; she is an advocate, coach, cultural mediator and “other mother” to her students. The classroom is a community. She refers to it as a “family that is here to protect and help each other.” Her students represent a tapestry of personalities, abilities and opinions, but most of all they are a field of dreams where the promise of urban education is held as a goal for each student. A theme often repeated in discussions with Ms. Dupree was the ideal of students taking responsibility for their destiny:

Most of these parents kind of assume that they are poor and their kids are going to be poor too. They assume there is not much you can do about it and it’s a very fatalist view of life. Hopefully I am doing something to show these kids there is another world out there and there is things that you can do. You don’t have to be poor the rest of your life and getting an education is one of the keys to that.

While the dialogue suggests a proclivity towards individualism, it is a value firmly situated in Ms. Dupree’s culturally informed behavior. It is a part of her situatedness and comes from her worldview about “who I am, what I believe and what experiences I have had” which shape her interpretation of teaching. Rugged individualism is a part of Ms. Dupree’s middle class background – the idea that the individual is the primary unit, has primary responsibility, and can control their environment--agreed with her viewpoints on life. She also adheres to a belief that working hard brings success; a
person must always do something about a situation, and the individual should value continual improvement and progress more than immediate gratification (Sue & Sue, 2003).

In her opinion, if you are from the middle class, “you are kind of raised with the belief that poor people are poor and it’s their own fault, because they have not worked hard enough...they’re lazy and that’s why they are poor.” This worldview has undergone much change since her childhood and she is not naïve about the difficulties confronting her students in life. Nor is she gullible to the classroom management myth that “all they need is love.” She wants her students to be successful in life and that entails them learning how to play by the rules:

I am not here to tell you how to act, speak, talk, walk or behave when you are with your family and friends. That’s not my job. What I am here to teach you is behaviors when you’re out in the world with white people and right now that means playing by what you guys see as white society. Like it or not this country is still run by white men. You need to know how to play that game.

Playing by the rules

Ms. Dupree uses the game metaphor in various ways. Primarily, to challenge student’s awareness of systemic forces in society that may be overpowering and stacked against them as culturally diverse students. She qualifies this belief in saying: “I’ve seen enough of the world to know that these kids are at a disadvantage, they absolutely are. They are at a disadvantage because of their race, because of their poverty level and they definitely see a very big line in how black and whites live and they will tell you that I think they need to be told, we need to be honest with them and say that there are people who will use your race against you.”
When her students told her that some teachers were racist towards them, she felt it was due to the absence of a relationship between the teacher and student. She replied that no one who is a racist would work at Prospect Middle school, because there are so many all-white schools they could work at: "a racist person stays in an all white community and teaches all white kids. No one who is a racist applies in the Pine City School district. I mean they wouldn't do it." While this comment is open to disagreement, Ms. Dupree still perceives and evaluates racism as a social justice issue that her students could face and is very adamant about telling them the truth: "there are racist people and they are going to have to learn how to deal with it in their life time if they want to be successful." For her preparing them to be organized and disciplined learners is the best defense. Ms. Dupree wants her students to think systematically about their educational needs and how to play by the rules of the middle class.

Analogy: “If you want to win, know the rules and play by them.”

On one occasion, Ms. Dupree stopped the class and engaged them in a mini-lecture which used an analogy to explain the importance of understanding and following the rules. Not just for the purposes of school, but rather for life in general:

I once had a girl who played basketball and she was a great basketball player. In class she kept saying, “I am who I am and people just have to take me as I am.” So I told her, if you feel that way, I am fine with it. The problem, however, is let’s say you are playing basketball, you foul somebody and the referee blows the whistle. He charges you with the foul and suddenly she tells him, well that’s how I play the game
and you can’t tell me I can’t do that. So what’s going to happen? She is going to get kicked out of the game. Either the coach is going to set her down or the referee is going to throw her out for a technical violation. How is she going to be seen as a successful basketball player acting like that? As I shared this scenario with her, my student said no, she could not be seen as a successful player if she was not in the game, “You have to play by the rules if you want to win.” Then I looked at her and a big grin spread across her face and she said okay, I see what you are saying. That’s the same thing with life. If you want to win, know the rules and you have to play by the rules.

In this analogy, Ms. Dupree uses cultural scaffolding to explain the importance of knowing the rules and being able to apply them in a game or life situation. The analogy was used to communicate several points related to student behavior:

1. **Self-regulation**
   **Excerpt:** “I try to instill in them a sense of taking responsibility for themselves, accept responsibility for their actions. No, you can’t blame somebody else, you did this…you made this choice.”

2. **Principled judgment**
   **Excerpt:** “Getting them to see that it’s okay to act this way in this situation, but in another situation I have to act differently. But you have to explain that to them, they don’t just get that and a lot of the time we assume that they should already know that by now. Some of them don’t, some of them have never been told this before.

3. **Reflective learner**
   **Excerpt:** “I try to get them to understand that a lot of the stuff we are doing in school is teaching them things they will need to be successful later in life. Being on time, getting things done when they are due. It’s not just success for school, its going to be success for the rest of your life.”

In Ms. Dupree’s classroom knowledge of how to play the game is directly related to being organized to participate. While she promotes student interaction and
questioning, the emphasis is on organization. All classroom materials are kept in mini stations (reading, mathematics, science and social studies) and educational materials such as textbooks and resource items do not leave the room. Students are encouraged to construct their beliefs about the world and engage in dialogue that is robust, loud and sometimes challenging. However, before the end of class, assignments are recorded in their personal logs, important papers are placed in their folders and Ms. Dupree makes her daily rounds to check and initial student work. Seats are rearranged at the tables and students share ideas and small talk about concepts covered. The teacher uses organization to shape her students’ practice and efforts at learning. For Ms. Dupree, it’s not enough to just teach, she “wants to make a difference in her students’ lives”…she wants them prepared for high school and life beyond: “I need to understand the way they frame their world and what it means to them.”

**Teacher Authority**

Ms. Dupree is the only teacher in the building with a self-contained eighth grade classroom. She volunteered to design and implement the class to help with overcrowding in the school. This self-contained classroom, however, quickly became more than just a mechanism for alleviating overcrowded conditions. It became a space for troubled students with social adjustment issues, a safe harbor for young adolescents experiencing self-doubt and authority problems and for those going through a particularly hard period of intense physical, emotional, and psychological development. It became clear to the principal and the eighth grade teaching team that some students could be more successful in a tightly organized classroom.
Ms. Dupree’s classroom is that place. It is a protected space where young “learning machines” can question their world while exploring intellectual ideas and concepts without sanctions from peers or criticism from adults: “I don’t allow students to say shut-up or use profanity in my classroom. I talk about being respectful. I tell them you have never heard me use profanity inside this classroom. I don’t want to hear it out of you either. We’re at school. It’s not appropriate here. I try and get them to make that connection.” In her classroom the pejorative characteristics associated with urban 13-to-14 year olds (i.e., raging hormones, derogatory rap influenced by videos and CD’s, and rebellious gangster antics) are noticeably downplayed. The emphasis is placed on developing a “can do, will try attitude.” The images and artifacts in the class convey a message of self-esteem, courage and personal resilience.

Ms. Dupree is a pragmatist. She is not disposed to sentimental or sloppy thinking about the conditions some of her students have grown up in. After sixteen years of teaching in a dynamic, complex, and changing urban context; one that is highly ethnically affiliated and influenced by the realities of poverty, crime, and too-early sexual involvement she has developed strong opinions about caring and teachers’ expectations. Ms. Dupree is actively involved in setting limits, providing structure, establishing high expectations and pushing students to achieve. Her work is helping students to believe in themselves and this takes shape in interpersonal communication with students about school and life beyond the walls of the building. At times, situations require that she is direct with students, but not rude about their behavior:
I have had students say to me when I had to discipline them: you’re not my friend anymore. I tell them I never was your friend, I am your teacher. You have to be the adult. Some of the kids have parents who are their friends and not parents, they don’t parent them. So we have to kind of pick up the slack and that’s a big part of being an urban teacher.

Ms. Dupree’s teaching is more than the transmission of basic skills; it encompasses the ability to release students to learn how to learn. She structures the classroom to support a positive learner self-concept and regards her teaching as a “calling.” She mentioned, “Our principal always says she feels this was her calling, I guess that’s kind of how I look at it too. I would rather be here where I feel I am needed. I think the biggest problem with our educational system is that good teachers don’t stay where they are most needed. I don’t feel like I am doing my part to help society as much by teaching somewhere the kids are pretty well off.”

This commitment to children shows up in various ways within the classroom: absence is the rewarding Black students for being “nice,” instead they are held accountable for high-quality academic and social performance. Intolerance and control is replaced with patience and persistence in meeting instructional goals and establishing assertiveness and authority in the classroom is always balanced against being oppressive to students (Gay, 2000). Ms. Dupree does not want “students to be afraid of her” or to be perceived as using the office as a remote control mechanism for maintaining appropriate behavior. When difficulties arise she is direct, but respectful and provides choices for her students to correct their behavior. Her management style incorporates assertiveness, humor and clear instruction:
• Being assertive with her authority, while remaining “firm, fair and consistent.” Using cultural congruent communication to communicate disapproval: “AARON MICHAEL stop what you’re doing and turn around in your seat! Focus on the work, not your friend.”

• Using cultural humor and colloquial expressions in her classroom management: “Don’t have me to come over there!” “Don’t even go there with me!”

• Clear explicit instructions and feedback: “Your eyes should be right here when I am speaking. You might not feel that you’re being disrespectful, but I am telling you to me you are being disrespectful.”

Ms. Dupree does not allow insecurities about the substance of her relationship with students interfere with demanding their best behavior and effort on educational tasks. She uses her skills in telling, guiding and facilitating learning to maintain a smoothly functioning classroom.

The context of learning

Social, political, and economic contexts all affect learning in significant, though not always obvious or predictable, ways... Cognition is always interactive with the environment and schools are never ideology-free zones. (Kinchloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 24)

Sociocultural theory informs our understandings about the cultural basis of learning; it is socially mediated and develops within a culture and community (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990). Ms. Dupree’s classroom can be used to demonstrate this. Students learn through her modeling, use of metaphors, analogies and examples the means for making sense out of their experiences. As a willing or reluctant cultural
mediator teacher’s actions guide students through their zone of proximal development as they learn to negotiating relational patterns with their world.

Ms. Dupree takes this role seriously and is selective in her dialogue with students that engages them in critical and divergent thinking about social realities. Poverty, discrimination and “making it” are topics that students have experienced in their daily lives. These topics intersect with their understandings of race and social class. These African American students know what it is to experience poverty and discrimination when using food stamps, or to be followed by security guards in the malls and given disapproving stares by store clerks. They also have witnessed and heard hundreds of media reports about the seemingly innate violence of black communities.

In the classroom, Ms. Dupree openly admits to students that life is not fair and becoming successful will require enormous effort and dedication to improvement. That Hollywood’s portrayal of them in the movies as “dispossessed kids who bear the brunt of poverty, crime, violence, and despair in the inner cities of the United States,” unfairly increases the difficulty of being successful (Giroux, 1999, p. 239). She mentioned that, “the fact that there are people out there who are not going to hire you because of your race. People who are not going to hire you because of the way you talk, walk or look. However, if you can prove it, then you can sue them.” Taking action against bigotry or even unintentional bias is a necessity in their discussions. Ms. Dupree’s challenge to the students is simplistic and clear: “If you want things to change [for the better], then what are you willing to do? Education is one of the keys to having a nicer house, living in a nicer neighborhood and not having your children grow up around violence.”
She confronts students with the reality that there is nothing wrong with the way they talk to their family and friends. That Black vernacular is a perfectly valid form of English. Yet, she reminds them that her job is to teach Standard English because “It’s still a White man’s world out there, whether we like it or not.” In her opinion, they will need to know how to code switch, form alliances, and take responsibility to be successful in high school, college, or to get and maintain a job. Ms. Dupree actively attempts to make the connection for them between what they are doing in school and their future: “we just assume that it’s there, but they don’t always see it. We have to make that connection for them.” When I probed about the racial comment (It’s a White man’s world) her rationale was straight forward: the only choice she sees for her students is to always improve. Ms. Dupree firmly believes in making a difference in her students lives and after sharing this conflicting experience, given that she is both white and a female, she told me one of her favorite stories. It is a story she shares with her class: The Starfish Story.

Although I had heard it before, in a different context, I sat quietly and observed the different emphasis she placed on it. In this story thousands of starfish wash up on the shore of a beach and a man walking by sees a person throwing them back into the ocean…one at a time. He comments that the man’s efforts are in vain, there are thousands of starfish and how could his throwing them back one at a time make a difference. In response, the man picks up one and throws it back into the ocean and says, “I made a difference to that one.” To Ms. Dupree, the Starfish story provides a lesson in determination and perseverance; it is analogous to teaching in an urban
district: “To me that’s teaching, we are not going to get them all and that’s the hardest part a teacher has to learn. You go into teaching thinking that you’re going to save the world and you’re not. But if you can have a positive impact on even a few kids and each of us does the same thing then that multiplies. That’s what keeps me going.”

Case #3: Mrs. Wuise

Question: When you talk about trust, at the beginning of the year, when you first meet your students, how do you go about building a relationship of trust with them?

Answer: The kids don’t come in trusting anyone of my color…truly they don’t. This is hard for some white teachers to understand. Just because you have a degree and want to help students does not mean they will automatically trust you. We are part of a race that has not always been giving to our kids [black children]. The students are not accustomed to seeing a white face wanting to give. They have been snookered so many times by people who have hidden their true feelings toward young blacks and blacks in general. These students have experienced that already, so just because you have tried once or twice don’t expect them to trust you. That’s a hard thing to get… it’s really a very hard thing for them to give. But you can’t imagine what you can get if they come to respect you.

In our opening discussion, Mrs. Wuise touches on a central theme of this study: the topic of “getting it” as a white female teacher in a density segregated urban middle school context. Getting it has to do with white teachers “understanding their own whiteness and knowing how to arrest white privilege” in their classroom interactions and interpersonal relationships with students (Hytten & Warren, 2003. p. 76). It goes beyond having a passion for marginalized groups or the simplicity of an “add and stir” approach to rectifying racial inequalities. Getting it is a disposition, a frame of mind, that directly challenges classroom management myths like “all they need is love or just be consistent” (Powell, R., McLaughlin, H., Savage, T. & Zehm, S. 2001. p. 155).
Working successfully in city schools remains a complex task that requires considerable effort by the teacher to learn contextualized knowledge of the students: their abilities, experiences, and backgrounds. In this example, Mrs. Wuise explains how she must persist in her actions to gain the trust and respect of her students. She also acknowledges the influence her race might have on black children who are forming their racial identity. This text provides a glimpse into how this teacher engages whiteness in her practice.

Mrs. Wuise’s self-disclosing statements describe her as an advocate for social justice and academic excellence in the service of black children. She has spent years developing a teaching stance that supports these ideas. Her case is an intriguing journey into her twenty plus years of “maturing in my classroom management approach.” It is an insightful excursion filled with life stories, analogies, examples and lessons learned about working day in and day out, inside the diversity of an urban classroom. Mrs. Wuise begins this journey by sharing personal limitations she has in understanding the concept of being raced; however, this should not be taken as an excuse. It is more an affirmation of her willingness to learn more about her students and develop learning opportunities that best suite them:

A lot of times I don’t think most people of my race have ever experienced a lot of interaction with blacks and listened to what they say because at times we can’t. No matter what I have experienced as a white female, I will never experience what they have. I can commiserate with you, I can wish that it never happened, but I can never really grasp what you have experienced in a racist kind of way.
The Person: Mrs. Wuise

I am a person who must have fairness around me.
I cannot exist in a place that isn’t…The kids
have been raced and raised to suspect...(Wuise)

The classroom is situated along the main hallway of the building. It is located between an outdoor sixth grade module and a rear playground area. Hundreds of students pass her room each day returning from recess or on their way to class. It is a tightly fitted hallway with student lockers on one side and a wheelchair access ram on the other. Physical contact is almost unavoidable during class changes. The voices of excited 11-to-14 year olds resonate loudly off the concrete walls and unforgiving floor. Yet, standing within this mass of students during each class change is Mrs. Wuise.

She is a small teacher, 5’ 1,” “fifty-something” years old, modestly dressed, aided by an elaborate cane and a love of teaching: “Stop running Miguel. Stay to your right Kenyon. Good morning Lashanna, did you get everything you’ll need from your locker?” Mrs. Wuise is often the only teacher in the hallway directing students, which is due to the different teaching schedules; however, this does not stop her from wading into the students. This is her element, it’s where she feels most comfortable: engulfed within a sea of adolescents, surrounded by acidy perspiration, the smell of tennis shoes, cheap cologne/perfume and the wide-eyed search for hope and confidence in their boundless possibilities. When asked, “What brings you back?” she ponders for a moment then replied:
I love it here. The kids are full of life. To teach the children you have to be comfortable with them and the school. If you really don’t care for a situation where it is basically all black, you can’t hide it for very long. You may try and it’s sad…it will come out in how you deal with the students, how you speak to them and heaven forbid how you talk to the parents. This is a very comfortable place to teach. If you’re not comfortable, then you should get out. I have never been uncomfortable here.

When Mrs. Wuise makes reference to the term comfortable it is not about physical comfort, it’s about fairness and caring: “I have to be in a place that looks at people as people, what you do and what you contribute, how you react to people and how you deal with kids. At the very end the least most important thing is what color you are. A person’s value is not what you see on the outside, not the skin, and you are losing so much if you don’t try to find what’s inside.” This was a lesson her father (referred to always as Daddy) taught her when she struggled over comprehending the terror of the Emmett Till tragedy of the sixties: “I just sobbed and sobbed, how could someone treat another human being like that over something so simply? My Daddy took me in his arms and told me not all people think like we do. I was so shaken that anyone could hurt someone, anyone, alone someone just a few years older than me.” This would turn out to be only one of several racially motivated events that would shape Wuise’s sense of fairness and commitment to social justice.

Another event that shaped Wuise’s opinions about racial injustice took place during the Civil Rights era and involved the desegregation of lunch counters. While traveling with her college’s track team, which was an integrated team with several
Nigerian students, they stopped to eat at a restaurant. The owner quickly informed them that “I would be allowed to come in and eat at the tables, my friends were to wait outside and I could bring their order out to them. I was amazed, so amazed that the girls were able to okay this process. I asked the man why and he gave us directions to another restaurant down the road that would serve us all. We went and had a wonderful time TOGETHER.”

These incidents help galvanize a belief that guides Wuise’s actions: she knew she could not be in a place that was not fair to all races. Over the years, she has counseled teachers to leave urban schools because they could not hold the interest of black children first in their hearts and practice. Teachers who consistently referred to black students as “they” and “them;” individuals who would bluntly make callous statements like: “now you’re showing your true colors” or say to other colleagues “they can’t do this work or they can’t do this level of math.” Mrs. Wuise (who insisted that I refer to her simply as Wuise) stated that those remarks remained vivid in her memory because they represented a significant sign to her of how the teachers felt inside towards the students: “Now that’s an antenna wiggling for me, when someone keeps on referring to black children as they or them. Our kids know THEY is almost a derogatory term.” Her advice in these instances was to tell the teachers to find where they would be comfortable working, hopefully somewhere else: “we have white females who teach in urban settings and do not belong there and they know it... no one should ever diminish what any child can become.”
Wuise’s classroom is wealthy by any standard. The room has all the “stuff” associated with a seventh grade reading/language arts and mathematics classroom: bookshelves filled with dictionaries, usage handbooks, style books, thesaurus, student portfolios and class sets of literature and pre-algebra texts. Every wall is covered with instructional materials and displays – the “guidelines for success” at the door, a list of Eighth grade expectations, examples of students work, colorful displays of essays that include sparkling lettering and resource guides that outlined the rules for the use of grammar and mathematical equations. The room is comfortable and inviting; two characteristics that describe Mrs. Wuise approach to students.

More than 40 posters lined the walls and over 100 books are in the classroom library; the books reflected a wide variety of literature: mysteries, romance novels, poetry and biographical materials on African Americans. Autobiographies and fictional accounts by authors such like Alex Haley, Maya Angelou, Langston Hughes, Alice Walker, Richard Wright and James Baldwin; contemporary books on Spike Lee, Michael Jordon and Martin Luther King Jr. All of these books are a part of Black History Month activities, one of few events going on in the building; it engages the students in discussion and dialogue about the contributions and significance of these individuals.
These books were part of class projects involving poetry, biographies, book reviews and recitals. Wuise shared a story about how she came to primarily use black authors in her classroom:

Nobody Ever Asked Me

At my previous school (the only black catholic school in the city), although it was all black, there were no black authors used in the classes I taught. However, after addressing this with the head nun (Mother) I was allowed to purchase various authors and books [Malcolm X, Roots, Maya Anglou and others] with Title 1 funds. Yet, when I left the school the new head nun collected all of the black literature and placed them outside for pick up by the public school depository which retained ownership of the books. The head teacher placed the books out in the rain and never called for pick up, which resulted in many of the books being destroyed. When I was informed of this action by another teacher still at the school, I quickly recovered the remaining books. The ones usable became the foundation for my current reading program, which is mainly centered on black literature. Nobody ever asked me what to do with the books, the mother superior rather see them destroyed than used by the children.

As Wuise told this story I quietly watched as emotions crossed her face: angry, sadness and finally joy. She was angered by the callousness of the action; it had taken her a significant amount of time to secure the books, funding, and work out the agreement with Pine City School District for the use of Title 1 funds. Next, she was saddened by the assumption that in an all-black school the leadership still felt that students
could not benefit from black literature especially after seeing the pride in the
children’s eyes and knowing that “we had so little.” The ignoring of black children’s
need for literature that affirmed their identity and cultural heritage struck at her sense of
fairness and justice.

Finally, she was joyful at the support her present principal provided when
informed of the books. The principal and Title 1 office agreed to allow the books to be
kept at Prospect Middle. As a postscript to the story, the Catholic diocese later closed
the school due to falling enrollment; however, now interest has been renewed in using
the diocese as a choice in the school voucher system. Wuise’s words still frame the
central argument: “I don’t want to see my young black men in prison and I don’t want
to see them in the grave yard... I don’t. So when you can at least give them that sense
that there are possibilities, there are potentials and there are people who will help you.
Then you must act.”

Sustained and directed effort results in high achievement

Art supplies, computers, containers for tools, a portable radio for “Quite Time”
and plastic crates complete Wuise’s room decor. On the walls motivational posters
outlining metacognitive skills (i.e., self-monitoring and self-management) and messages
about the merit of effort-based achievement: “I Don’t Give Out Grades, YOU EARN
THEM,” The Most Important Thing You Can Give Someone is…a CHANCE. It is a
colorful student-friendly space where each acknowledgment of learning relates to
engagement and resilience “…the kids must be taught how to fight back; they must be
taught how to learn.”
The institutional beige walls come alive with messages of hope, persistence, and determination. It is clear that this teacher expects all of her students to achieve at high levels. Her demeanor is not antagonistic, nor particularly challenging; however, she defines explicitly with her actions what the students are expected to learn: *Sustained and directed effort results in high achievement*, it is a phrase depicted in the Principles of Learning which hang behind Mrs. Wuise’s desk. This position is clearly communicated to the students and parents of the classes. Learning is demystified in this room, everyone knows what it takes to make an “A.” Effort has replaced assumptions about low aptitude; everyone is considered smart.

Every detail is accounted for in preparing the room for learning: the floor shines, litter is not allowed to stay on the floor and everything is organized to communicate the idea of effort. From descriptive criteria and models of student work to dismissal procedures, this is a well-thoughtout classroom based on thinking, problem solving and respect. Wuise teaches pre-algebra and reading/language arts, basic essential skills of literacy. One of her sections is the gifted students and her remaining classes are mixed ability groups, differentiation of instruction is important. While this second group needs additional help with their reading/language arts skills, Wuise insists that they are not treated any different than her high ability group: “*They just need a little more time to get it. When they first came in and found out they had me, they said…Oh, Mrs. Wuise, she only teaches the smart kids’ and I said to them: You got it, I only have the smart kids in my class. So right from the first day it was WOW, we must be smart. So I took them up on that because that’s true. They are smart…all of my students are gifted.*”
Affirming diversity/ Finding shared understandings

Wuise gets to know her students “quietly” during the first month of class. This time is critical to her. She wants them to feel like they are part of the room – a small community. But most of all she wants them to feel that they know something about her. She does not want to be viewed as unresponsive or distant to their needs not just “some white woman.” She begins this process by giving them an introductory letter and asks them to write her one about themselves: their family, the neighborhood and their interest, it can be a personal narrative or poem. Then they “talk.” They talk daily for about a month during the open phase of school. Wuise calls this “my working month, because it’s a time to get to know them,” and she allocates time for dialogue with the students. It might take place during zero periods or at other opportune times during the day.

They talk about a lot of things: cultural heritage, polite behavior, thoughts about adolescence, concepts of beauty, personal values, standards for achievement, social taboos, relational patterns with adults and communication styles. These discussions range from everyday-life concepts to student concerns about contemporary events. Less formal attempts to build a sense of trust include teacher directed actions such as private critiques of behavior, keeping promises, apologizing when wrong and remaining open to feedback from students. On some topics they laugh, while on others there might be tears. It seems that every child in the class either knows of someone in their family or someone close to them who has been killed or served time in prison. Everyone in the
class does not necessarily involve themselves in these discussions, these are touchy times and everyone is cautioned to remain respectful of each other.

Getting to know her students and becoming aware of their culturally informed behaviors, ways of solving problems and relationships with adults is a personal goal for Wuise: “I am a white female, they don’t have any idea who I am or what I’m about. So, I have to give them a perception of who I am, what I am, and how I work. I go to the word trust because they don’t have built-in trust for me yet. They haven’t had any kind of relationship, interaction or situation with me where they would know how I deal with them.” The key to building trust with her students involves making small deposits daily: giving specific praise, seeking first to understand before taking action, admitting when she has made a mistake, being courteous to them, and not calling attention to every negative behavior. Respect for her students and parents are always first:

The students need time and consistency from those who they see in their classrooms. Respect comes with time and is earned through a growing relationship that is nurtured from the teacher. We as white teachers, one and all, must know this from the beginning. When we achieve this the success we find in our classrooms is amazing and so very rewarding.

Building relationships that are based on respect for the student’s life experiences is viewed as her responsibility as a teacher, it is essential. Wuise attempts to learn as much as possible about how her students perceive and evaluate situations and how they take action based upon these appraisals. Her two greatest challenges involve affirming diversity and finding a common ground where shared understandings can exist between
her and the students about how the classroom operates. This, however, does not excuse Wuise from rethinking previous ideas about her pedagogy and viewpoints. Some things had to be relearned. Coming from a Catholic school background, where the emphasis was always on being quiet, Wuise had to get use to the loudness of her students and patterns of response. At the Catholic school “You had to be so silent. There was no interaction, quiet talking or questioning. Whereas here [at Prospect Middle] that’s were they learn. They learn by talking to each other, challenging the teacher, and discussing issues. They don’t mean to be disrespectful.” The level of talking is always closely monitored and is never allowed to become obtrusive to the lesson. Wuise is always the adult. But she has come to expect a certain level of talking and talking out when conducting lessons: “They want me to talk to them. They want to have discussions.”

The “N” and “B” word: Straight Outta Ca$hville

Many of the topics discussed during this first month of school are the usual ones: rules, procedures, guidelines and the whys on their importance in the organization of the classroom. However, the class also talks about more controversial topics such “cursing” as the use of the “N” and “B” word. On the other hand, a less controversial but necessary discussion is also held on what happens when students need emotional “space” in the classroom. Because Wuise was raised during the Civil Rights era and experienced first-hand racial bigotry and gender bias, she is displeased with the use of the “N” and “B” word by students. She tries to make sure this is discussed during the
very first day of class because “I want them to know exactly where I am coming from with this.” I tell my students:

When you go there you need to know that because of my backgrounds, because of where I come from, there are two things that I find hard to accept…they make me very angry. The first thing is the “N” word and the other is the “B” word. I have issues with that because it has been such derogatory terms my whole life, it has been very NEGATIVE. So you have to try to respect this space when you come in. I know you use a form of it with your friends, but here we are trying to eliminate that in our space. I don’t want to hear them because they hurt me when I hear it. I want them to know how I feel about it…so I tell them.

Words like “Niggaz” or “Beeotch” are used with impunity in “gangsta” rap, they appeal to black adolescents desire to appear “hard” (i.e., tough, streetwise) and have become highly ethnically affiliated with urban youth culture (Gay, 2000). These words are accepted terminology in the vernacular and culture of some middle school-age African American teenagers. But, regardless of their popularity and distorted spin in meaning applied by children; there is no question about their use in Wuise’s classroom: they cannot be allowed. She views this as a twisted irony, black children referring to each other using these words almost as terms of endearment, rather than seeing them as a type of verbal abuse: “I know it’s very difficult for our kids today to understand because they hear it in their songs, they see it in their movies, and they hear it out on the streets. It’s everywhere, it’s like hello, how are you? But I tell them we don’t need to hear that in here, you don’t need to talk to each other like that. Adults shouldn’t talk like that and if you’re trying to imitate adults, it’s not proper for them either.”
Maintaining the students’ sense of dignity and cultural are important goals for Wuise, she attempt to teach the whole child and quickly responds that “I cannot work in that negativity.”

During other times highly emotional things can happen at home or in the neighborhood and students need a free-pass from participating in class to allow them time to cope with the experience: “Whatever happened might not be any of my business, but if it’s bothering them, I tell them to come and tell me that you had a horrible night and I will give you space. I am going to be compassionate enough to say... I am going to give you space.” When this happens, Wuise respects their need for solitude and allows them to opt out of discussions or class work until they can “come into themselves.” During these times her plan is simple: don’t push and don’t demand that they share with you what happened. Just be supportive.

After a period of time her student either rejoin the class discussion or is excused from the room. Severe incidents are referred to the school counselor or principal and might be raised as a concern in team meetings. This final option is contingent upon issues of confidentiality, privacy, and appropriate treatment of the student. Wuise has learned from practical experience that she needs to understanding, to whatever extent possible; her students’ lives outside of school (e.g., family circumstances, community concerns, and economic conditions). Events that happen outside the school walls greatly influence what can happen in class: “My students’ education does not end at the classroom door.”
In both instances, Wuise expresses her care for the whole child by being an adult, not just their teacher. It is not enough for her to simply teach children the academic requirements of their grade level; she wants them to maintain their cultural, ethnic and gender identity. On of Wuise’s hobbies is painting and she was a student of a very famous African American artist in the community. When several of his patrons insisted that he tell them who had painted certain works, due to the power of the themes, they were amazed at her ethnicity. Wuise describes this with a sense pride in her voice: "They were shocked and they said ‘...no, she could not be the one to do this.’ I’ve had it said to me many times...if you just heard some of what I’m talking about, just my conversation, you wouldn’t know whether I was black or white.” The correcting and prohibiting of derogatory racial and gender terms and giving students space to cope with harsh life experiences are part of Wuise’s actions in building a classroom where students can trust. However, she will admit that her actions do not always result in victory, every student cannot be reached:

I would not delude you to think that I am always successful with each and everyone of those who go through my classroom door. This is one reality that I am painfully aware of and one that has taken me along time to adjust to.

Behavior Intervention: Culture counts

One girl came in today with an issue and stated: I’m not afraid of Mrs. Wuise. Another girl spoke up and said to her: Well I am not afraid of her either, but I respect her. You do not get that kind of cooperation by fear because a lot of times they don’t fear anything.

Wuise sets in front of the classroom (one of her knees will be replaced this summer due to constant pain) and conducts the lesson in an almost effortlessly manner.
Disruptions are few; but they do occur and some days are better than others. While small talk is allowed the tone is kept modest and discussions are centered on the lesson: Pythagorean Theory. Wuise makes distinct reference to the use and understanding of the name Pythagorean for her students. It is a point of pride. She emphasized that “some white teachers still tracked students away from the use of terms like Pythagorean. Rationalizing that black children did not need to know this detail since they were not going on to college.” Not in this class. Here the students use notebooks, the old-fashion large black Mead hard cover notebooks; purchased by the teacher. They keep extensive references on problem solving techniques and the history of important individuals like Pythagorean. The student must know not only the theory, but also who and why Pythagorean himself is important: “I want them to be able to have discussions in college about Pythagorean, to see his name on an SAT test and remember the history behind the theory.” For her to do otherwise is seen as a disservice and Wuise mentions that it implies low expectations of black children.

Wuise’s high expectations for academic achievement extend to classroom behavior; she works hard on establishing a good relationship with the students, but emphasizes that “First and foremost, I am your teacher.” She recognizes the boundaries that exist in teacher/student relationships and manages her classroom using several techniques: attention, momentum, discipline, routines and time. Yet, each of these traditional techniques is mediated by her awareness of the child’s identity: At this grade level a young black male considers himself to be a man. So I, as a white woman, cannot embarrass him or chip away at his image of himself in front of the class. That’s a major...we have to understand that we cannot do that.
As a result, behavior interventions are situational and correction is determined by the severity and history of the child. Some things can be handled by a technique Wuise learned from her students called “talk to the hand.” It is a cultural response based upon her knowledge of the students and experience working in close proximity with other respected black professionals. “Talk to the hand because the ears can’t hear it” came out of the black sitcom “In Living Color” and her students quickly brought the mannerism to school. Wuise admits that she has learned several cultural mannerisms including sarcasm (“I can be your sista, but I can’t be your bro.”), tone of voice (“Don’t MAKE me go there with you”) and when to simply overlook something and end the behavior with a hand signal (“Talk to the hand”). Her intervention strategies do not involve approaching students with a “heavy fist.” Instead, Wuise relies upon calmness, reflection, and cultural humor when possible (i.e., rolling one’s eyes and adding a huff) before intervening in a problem:

Before you just blast into a situation, before you just go in and clean house…step back, think, and listen, then when you think you’re ready to go at it, step back one more time. I don’t react; I don’t respond…I just interact in some way. Once you actually get involved, it’s almost like getting into the whole situation, you become almost part of it.

Nevertheless, some situations cannot be diffused in the classroom and require parental intervention. This is where Wuise feels her strongest, she has always had the ability to identify with black parents, she attributes it to her demeanor and respect for them: “You have to respect parents at all times, they have to feel that.” When she meets with parents and their child, she always lets the child speak first and then the
parent. She also never makes reference to them except as Mr., Mrs., or Ms. and does not use any slang or black vernacular with them. Her actions are measured and based on concern for the child, sometimes it works, but not always:

When our parents come in, at times I feel they think we act like we are above them. Sometimes they have been made to feel subservient to someone. You have to start out with making sure they know that I have to have your help. I can’t do this on my own. I need for you to know that I’m here for you and my interests are to get your child as far advanced as I can in the year that I have them. I can possibly do that, but I cannot do it without you.

The key to Wuise’s classroom management approach relies upon calmness, recognition of the individual dignity of the student, and knowledge of the parents; this has worked even in the mist of major aggravation. She paces the student’s outburst and does not attempt to initiate fear: “Nobody is afraid of me, the only fear they have is that they know I will speak to their parent or whoever is in charge of them and they will listen.”

Summary of Findings: Cross Case Analysis

After completing the individual case studies a more holistic case approach was necessary to place units of information together in a way that could facilitate evaluation and analysis of the entire data set. Until this point, data analysis had focused primarily on developing an in-depth study of each individual case in what is called a “within-case analysis” (Smith & Strahan, 2001. p. 362). This within-case analysis entailed sorting through each teacher’s data set. Open coding was used to identify relevant data, which
was grouped into categories and emerging themes. The coding process involved
discarding whatever was extraneous and bringing together what seemed most important
in the classroom management approaches of the teachers. Given the complex and
deeply embedded nature of classroom management (e.g., contextualized decision-
making about instruction, instantaneous assessments of the learning environment,
personalized disciplinary interventions and attentiveness to students’ socialization
needs), the individual case studies offered a way to collect and assess the idiosyncratic
practices, routines and procedures used by each teacher (Brophy, 1999).

The task in reporting the individual cases was to provide “richly detailed”
descriptions of the teachers’ management experiences: glimpses into the self-disclosed
intentions and meanings that organized their actions. These cases were designed to
provide a sense of verisimilitude, “a feeling that they [the reader] experienced or could
experience the events being described” (Denzin, 2001. p. 32). In this regard, the cases
portrayed the situated activities of the teachers, how they located themselves in
conversations about their classrooms – the routines and problematic moments. The
purpose was to examine the teachers’ sense making understandings of classroom
management, the students’ culturally influenced behaviors, and the context of urban
middle school teaching. The cases attempted to go beyond the superficial constraints of
examining classroom management from a behaviorist paradigm. The researcher wanted
to avoid prescriptive list making of management techniques. Instead, each case
explored the interconnected nature of classroom management, sociocultural
understandings, and the teacher’s identity as an urban educator.

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Specifically, the research sought to describe how the teachers saw themselves inside issues of diversity and classroom management? What did they hope to accomplish in their overall classroom management approach? How did they define what they do? What was important to them? Did they have a particular orientation that affected how they defined and practiced classroom management? What these questions purport to examined is the teachers’ worldview – how they perceived, and evaluated situations and took actions based on their appraisals (Sue, 2003). Interwoven in these questions was how the teachers’ life experiences mediated their perception of the students and the actions they were willing to take in creating and maintaining the learning environment.

Cross Case Analysis

The use of a cross case analysis method was seen as instrumental in identifying relevant themes in the data collected from the individual cases. Analysis of the data set was on-going during the collection of raw data and the writing of individual cases. These preliminary assessments proved helpful in developing an in-depth understanding of each teacher, but the cross-case analysis, consisted of an extensive search for patterns in larger data set. This level of analysis required that open-coding be reinitiated in examining the data corpus and information be filed in appropriate categories and natural clusters that emerged. The cross-case synthesis was used to avoid mimicking the linear sequence of quantitative research (i.e., hypotheses → method → data analysis → findings → interpretations and conclusions). The recursive process of re-examining the
data set, asking questions, and making theoretical comparison supported the emergent
design of qualitative research. This research had started with only a vague idea of the
topic (i.e., sense-making of teachers) to be investigated and the depths of the research
was still to be discovered.

Therefore, the cross-case analysis of the teachers’ classroom management actions
(i.e., arranging the physical environment, establishing rules and procedures, maintaining
attention to lessons and engagement in instructional activities) and attitudinal
components helped to “convey an argument and an informed context as to how these
details and facts interweave” (Van Mannen, 1988.p. 30 cited in Yin, 2004; Brophy,
1999). While the individual case revealed distinct mannerisms and personalized styles
in the teachers’ approaches to management, the task of discerning underlying themes
and key linkages was necessary in making any overall statements about the
significance of the data.

In other words, the investigator engaged in an iterative process which involved
repeated searching the data set – listening to audiotapes of interviews, reviewing the full
set of field notes, interview notes, transcripts, site documents, methodology notes and
research questions for patterns that would “make the largest possible number of
connections to items in the data” (Erickson, 1992. p. 148). For example, interpersonal
relationships were seen as a key linkage that made various connections within the cases
to caring, trusting, respect, and meaningful communication. The task of repeatedly
reviewing the entire data set helped in establishing evidentiary warrant for knowledge
claims made in determining the interweaving themes of the study.
Coding and Themes: Interwoven Threads of Understanding

During the initial open coding process twenty-eight categories of codes were identified from specific statements, observations and descriptions of events by the teachers. A montage of images was revealed in the codes and indicated the complexity, richness and depth of classroom management concerns held in these urban classrooms. Conflict, cooperation, social relations and integrity were some of the mediating variables involved in the interpretive experiences of these teachers. As previously seen in the cases and now in these narratives, multiple voices and points of view had to be used along with different textual formats and various typefaces to describe the richness of the interactions. The coding moved from the personal to the political, the local to the historical concerns of fairness and race in how the teachers used disciplinary interventions. The codes indicate this social reality and provided initial entry into how social experience was created in these classrooms and given meaning by the teachers. Lists of the code are shown in Table 4.1:
Table 4.1 Code List

These codes were re-examined against the data set repeatedly during the cross-case synthesis and four major themes were subsequently identified: relationships (i.e., caring, trusting and respecting), teacher confidence, interventions, and cultural competency. The themes are representative of the multiple realities and ways in which the teachers interpreted their actions and beliefs. The teacher engaged in various aspects of the four themes; using them strategically to build a coherent approach in working with their students.

The themes represent critical pieces of the data and help establish an argument that little relevant evidence remained untouched by the researcher given the boundaries of the study. The research did not look at student perceptions or administrative considerations regarding classroom management; rather it concentrated on the voice,
emotions and actions of the teachers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The themes illustrated how the teachers valued relationships with the students, gained cultural knowledge, expressed their expertise and used strategies to meet expectations established for their students. To put it another way, the themes are critical pieces of the data; they are direct impressions substantiated in the cases and demonstrate the “complete” attention given to the evidence (Yin, 2003b, p. 163).

Subsequently, the researcher again reviewed the data to identify “conceptual congruent synthesis statements” for each theme and developed summary statements about the analysis (Smith & Strahan, 2001, p. 362). When these excerpts and summary statements were placed in narratives the themes were confirmed. Examples of these statements with their ensuing themes are provided in the following discussions of the teachers’ classroom management sense-making understandings:

Theme 1 – Relationships: “You have to be fair which isn’t always easy and you have to be consistent, which again is not always easy. You have to let them know that I care about you. They have to know that you care. If they know that you care about them as a person they’ll do anything for you. If they think that you don’t care about them or you don’t like them, they won’t do anything for you. Even to the point of failing the class. (Wuise)

“I build relationships…they need to see that you are willing to give extra time, to invest in them and work hard for them. But I also think it is important to say hi to them in the hallways. I always hated that as a student when my teacher would walk right bye me and act like she does not even know me. I try every time I see one of them to pat them on their shoulder or say hi to them. They know that I care about them and how well they are doing. I say it all the time to the kids…there are people who care about you.” (Jackie)
Assertion: Developing genuine relationships based on trust, respect and care with African American students is essential in attaining higher levels of classroom management and academic success.

Trust

I believe that this age group responds better to learning experiences that reflect the internal questions they have about place, responsibility, personal worth, and intellect. (Stanley, 2005)

During the interviews each of the teachers expressed the belief that establishing relationships with their students was a critical part of their classroom management approach. Students had to feel trusted and cared about before they could be expected to fully commit to work of the classroom. This was especially true for those who had previously experienced academic failure or disciplinary problems in middle school. These students’ social and emotional needs had to be viewed as important for them to engage in sustained academic effort or to take interpersonal relationships with teachers as genuine. The teachers had to acknowledge they cared and demonstrate a willingness to trust them by honoring and valuing their presence in the classroom: “I begin by affirming the importance of their presence in my life—how fortunate I am to have this time with them. I acknowledge that they have already achieved much and demonstrated the ability to navigate their particular realities successfully.” For these teachers building a trusting relationship is a slow process that reflects a fundamental belief in the students’ inherent dignity and worth. As Brown (2002), states “you can’t just come in and teach them, and walk away. These kids have so many other needs” (p. 67).
Respect

The students’ needs at Prospect Middle are comprehensive and the impact of residential segregation and concentrated poverty is not neutral; it reduces lasting chances for academic and social success (Massey & Denton, 1993). A majority of these children have experienced a social environment where joblessness and poverty are the norm, where most families receive public assistance, where the majority of children are born to single-family households, and academic failure prevails (e.g., 75% of the students received free or reduced lunches).

According to the teachers, many of students have failed at least one grade level before reaching the seventh or eighth grade. The students share lived experiences about the apprehension of being hungry, dying young, living meaningless lives, or being trapped in the despair of poverty. They did not come from the inner or outer-ring of suburbia; they came from neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and persistence racial inequalities, but these teachers tell them “you may come from the hood, but you are not the hood. You don’t have to settle for this, you can have more.”

Something that may often be missing in the students’ daily lives is respect. Personal respect is very important…the boys fight at the slightest hint of disrespect and the girls fight if they perceive that “she looked at me funny.” Respect is worth fighting in the students’ world and as one teacher remarked: “It’s all about respect, but you have to earn it.” This commented applies to teachers as well as students. Being seen as “weak” must be avoided at all times, teachers must communicate the message "that you're not their friend – that I am a teacher – and let them know that you're not
"playing." This assertion at times must be forceful to accomplish certain teaching goals, but it also should empathize with students’ life experience. This respect was not the warm and fuzzy type, nor is it the “cultural deficit,” disadvantage type; it does not reward students for being “nice” or sitting quietly in the class detached from the lesson. Instead it is respect shown through the teachers’ knowledge of the students. Knowing when and how they can push for additional effort and when to simply back off.

Caring

The teachers amassed a wealth of information about each of their students. They can easily tell you about a student’s progress and failure, their home life, girlfriend or boyfriend, favorite artist and even who is their mother’s boyfriend. More importantly, they can tell you what can set a student off emotionally. The teachers accepted that learning is as much about emotions as cognitive ability. Initiating relationships is viewed as the teachers’ responsibility and will only be reciprocated once the student is sure of the teacher’s sincerity and have witnessed how she handles problems. Caring sometimes means being tough as one teacher said: “I don’t play and I am not going to send you to the office if that is what you are thinking. It’s going to be between me and you and we are going to duke it out until I win. I am telling you, if you don’t do it for me then I am going to get your parents involved and the principal is the last step.” These teachers care enough and know their students well enough to appropriately monitor their interactions with students. They balance encouragement with reprimand, create opportunities for discourse and personal discussion, and use their personalized styles to communication high expectations.
The teachers’ sense of responsibility is the basis for constructive relationships with the students. They often shared stories about how their classroom had to be seen as clean, organized and structured. Transitions had to be purposeful and classroom activities designed so students could readily experience success. This did not mean giving students dummy-downed curriculum or meaningless seatwork; assignments were relevant not only to the goals of learning, but when possible to the students’ life beyond school. Also, these the teachers made sure that their students were protected from initial failure in lessons. They over planned for lessons and revised them whenever necessary.

The idea that they are authoritative figure in their classrooms was never in question. The teachers accepted their role as a responsible adult and managing the classroom was never considered a prerequisite to initiating learning activities. Some lessons went better than others and they were aware that events outside of the classroom could affect the lesson for today. Yet, academic achievement was always number one and their students demonstrated this by the number of them on the school’s honor roll. The emphasis placed on relationships promoted achievement and these positive interactions in the classroom enhanced the students’ sense of involvement, success and self-esteem. It was the quality of these relationships that was important; trust interconnected with respect and knowing their students and caring wove it all together.

Underlying these relationships was their awareness of being White, middle-class women. Admittedly, the teachers might never fully understand the life experiences of the students or be able to reconcile all of the differences between them such as income,
class, residence, value orientations and beliefs. However, they could respect them, reveal their feelings with them, share in conversation and laughter and be both a friend and responsible adult. In these classrooms, relationships where based on trust, respect and caring and it could be seen in the quality of personal bonds established between the teachers and students. Mutual respect was the goal and the message was clear, it was not the mantra of be responsible, be quiet, be on time, behave; rather it was “you are a valuable and valued person here; without you this entire enterprise would flounder and fail” (Ayers, 2001).

Theme 2 – Teacher confidence: “If a child is going to do something in my classroom that I don’t agree with then I tell them that and I tell the parent that also, I am not going to allow that behavior in my classroom. I don’t say please for doing my job. You don’t have to make excuses for doing what you need to do. You stand up and you do it.” (Dupree)

“I stay late at the school and I arrive early. It is never about the money. We’re up there, we are respected with lawyers and doctors, but we don’t make what they make. So it is really just about you knowing that your job is very important, it’s almost like a service opportunity.” (Jackie)

Assertion: A highly developed sense of personal teacher efficacy (i.e., beliefs regarding their ability to positively affect student outcomes) and confidence supports effective academic and social skills outcomes.

Confidence

The war to increase student achievement, like any war, will be messy and unpredictable. There will be advances and setbacks, but it will be necessary to press forward every day. War produces heroes, slackers, and deserters. (Mizell, 2002, p. 83)
Each teacher firmly believed they were vanguards in promoting the academic achievement of their students. Their commitment to urban education assumed different roles inside the school and within the community. These teachers were activists, advocates and defenders of students. They promoted college access for first-generation college goers, walked neighborhoods streets to deter fights after-school, defended students against angry adults and older teenagers who might harm them, interceded in volatile exchanges, volunteered at neighborhood recreation centers, and coached sports and chaperoned student events after-school hours. Most of these activities were undertaken without supplementary contracts, recognition from other colleagues, or with regard to altruistic purposes. They took these actions because it was necessary. “You build relationships wherever you can, whether you are in blue jeans or your formal teaching attire, the kids and parents need to see you care,” was the response of one teacher...”we are trying to form educational support teams for the students (Wuise).”

These activities require courage and confidence. To stay after school in a tough urban neighborhood until nine o’clock so kids can have a school dance, to then walk around the outside grounds of the building checking for students whose parent did not arrive to pick them up, or help a child in trouble takes determination and a belief that your presence makes a difference. These teachers did this every year. Sometimes they were asked, but most of the time they just volunteered. There was no question about their “will” to do whatever was necessary to provide their students with a schooling experience that paralleled those taken-for-granted activities in outer-ring suburban schools. This position was universal in this group of teachers.
Each year the teachers developed more informed perspectives about their students’ personal, social, cultural and familial backgrounds. The extra-curricula activities they engaged in with students were seen as necessary to develop good working relationships and dispel any underlying fear they might have about not being successful in working with students that others viewed as challenging. This also meant having confidence to experiment with different instructional strategies, to question existing practices and beliefs that might be linked to deficit thinking, or stereotypical generalizations about the students’ social realities and family life.

For example, the belief that relationships with African American children had to be based on an authoritative approach to discipline and instruction was questioned by these teachers. In practice, while they experienced success in using this approach to reach traditional goals like demonstrating computational skills, writing a narrative or reciting historical dates and scientific facts, constructivist techniques proved just as helpful when learning was scaffold through the students’ frames of reference and “loudness and movement” was accepted as acts of knowing. One teacher shared that when she worked at another school the expectation was quiet learning, there was no interaction, no quiet talking or questioning, “But here that is were you learn. They learn by talking to each other and discussing the issues. However, it’s that initial bringing them down without yelling and arguing.”

In these classrooms the teachers used their confidence and sense of efficacy well. They asked questions like “What are the students doing? How can I help them do that more effectively?” and “What do I need to do to improve my classroom?” The teachers
asked these questions often. They inquired about their effectiveness with the students and probed colleagues and themselves for answers. These teachers were more concerned about student learning than how they [the teachers] did it: “I don’t think about me very much, I want to know if they understand.” Absent from their demeanor was the type of confidence associated with misguided ego: confidence in traditional methods, overly confident, pretend confidence, competitive confidence and overly controlling confidence (Wheatley, 2000). These teachers had strong egos and they believed passionately in their mission to teach, this was necessary, but it was never associated with conceit or personal gain.

The type of confidence shown by these teachers was not scripted or brash; it was a quiet steely assurance that communicated conviction and self-reliance, characteristics they wanted to convey to their students. The teachers were very concerned with test scores and they wanted to see improvement; but what seemed to motivate them most was on the other side of the report card, life skills. Grades were important and schooling was seen as meaningless without achievement; skills to negotiate life played a significant role in the success of their students.

These teachers worked hard to have students who were actively engaged in the classroom, who came prepared for learning, worked effectively with classmates, and resolved conflicts without resorting to physical violence or threats. These competencies were seen as important attributes to develop for later life; they went beyond high school and college: “I feel like I am very successful. I think I am good at helping the kids make decisions so that they will know how to make them when I am not around. I try to tell
them how I would handle a problem or what I would do, but I always want to hear how
they are going to handle the situation. What are you going to do (Jackie)?

Theme 3 – Intervention: “You have to kind of set it up so they [i.e., students] know that
school is a place where they can be a kid. You have to tell them at times, you are a child in this building, you don’t have
to take on an adult role. You’re not in charge here. Let us be in charge, let us handle the problems. They very much want to
handle their own problems, whether it’s fighting with another student or arguing loudly with a teacher.” (Dupree)

“I’ve had students who laughed in my face when I was correcting them. They would laugh, smile or giggle whenever
you were discussing what they should be doing opposed to what they’re doing. Some of it this is a way of saving face or
showing defiance when they are being disciplined. But sometimes even when I speak to them privately it happens, it
seems like a rogue reaction. I have grown to understand that it’s not a disrespectful thing. It’s just their way of reacting to bad
news.” (Wuise)

Assertion: Guiding, mediating and scaffolding students’ culturally informed behavior is
a more feasible approach to classroom management than controlling and
manipulating student behavior.

Power

The teachers agreed independently and in focus group meetings that classroom
management should not be viewed as exerting power or control over students. For them
management was seen as a responsibility to guide, nurture, and protect students. Their
beliefs about classroom management were centered on the concept of “power to do”
rather than “power over” students (Jackson, 2001, p. vii). Power to do meant allowing
students’ voice in how rules and procedures would be developed (i.e., class-running
routines), trusting students to self-correct distracting behaviors, encouraging them to
tone down animated reactions and volume of voice and maximizing the time spent on worthwhile academic activities. The teachers used various cuing techniques (ex., finger to mouth, exaggerated looks, instructional momentum, group alerting and affirming gestures) with students to inform them of expected behavior while emphasizing the importance of self-regulation and personal responsibility. The emphasis was on appropriate levels of cooperation and convergence; they chose to guide student behavior rather than control it.

*Cultural awareness*

“You have to kind of set it up so they know that school is a place where they can be a kid...they don’t have to take on an adult role.” (Dupree)

The case study teachers acknowledged that while the majority of their students came from low-income families, they were raised to respect adults and work hard in school. Although the parents did not usually volunteer for PTA meetings or events, they could be counted on to correct behavior concerns regarding their child’s performance at school. Generally, just a phone call or the mention of contacting a parent was enough to curtail most misconduct: “My parents this year are great. If notified that there is a problem, it is corrected. This year I can tell you, there is not one parent I have called that has not made a difference. All I have to say is that I’m going to call your mom. For instance, when I had to remind Andre (pseudonym) of behavior, I simply said to him...you know I have your mom’s number on my cell phone, I’m going to call her and she will be here in five minutes; you know that...you know what she’s going to do it. No, Ms. Jackie don’t do it, I got it, I’m sorry... I forgot.” This level of parent cooperation
was generally found in each of the teachers’ classroom. They felt it helped them not only with discipline but also with understanding some of the circumstances surrounding a child’s behavior since these phone calls also typically resulted in informal conversations with the parents.

However, some of the students did not have much of a childhood and their parents were not involved actively in their lives. These students were placed at risk by damaging forces in their lives like poverty, poor child care, crime burden neighborhoods and dysfunctional families where one or both parents might be addicted to alcohol or drugs. Nevertheless, the teachers did not act as if these children were powerless or did not know the difference between right and wrong or came to school needing to be protected. Their life experiences and social realities required that they grow up fast, take on responsibility for themselves and others. These children shared stories of child-care responsibilities that lasted late into the night, cooking and cleaning because of a parent’s work schedule or problem, monitoring younger siblings at play while protecting them from older children or adults, and disciplining them when necessary. They also shared more complex stories told only after reaching an emotional breaking point; stories about abusive relationships, domestic violence, fear and hunger.

These students did not come to school with nothing. They knew what it meant to have responsibility and to be held accountable in the strictest of sense. This knowledge was learned in another set of realities and it was not necessarily applicable in a school context. While the innocence of childhood might have been taken from these students by life experiences, the teachers never communicated pity towards them or regarded
them as “weak” because of their realities. Other family members might be contacted, a
grandparent or aunt might be called, and when necessary referrals would be made to the
counselor for outside agencies to intervene. The teachers never communicated that all
they could do is lower their expectations and expect less in their academic performance.

Instead, expectations were held high for all students, the social curriculum was
blended into academic performances. Cultural knowledge gained from parents, black
teachers, the African American principal, readings, and talking with the students were
used to refine understandings about culturally determined viewpoints about polite
behavior, respect, etiquette, and communication styles. Noncompliant, aggressive or
antisocial behavior that was harmful to self and others was not ignored or allowed to go
unchallenged. Limits were established in the classrooms and behaviors that might seem
perfectly sensible to young adolescents in their out-of-school context (ex. strike first
and ask questions later, direct defiance to adults, aggressiveness or hostility) were
discussed, discouraged and reprimanded. Out of class referrals to the office were
limited.

The need for caring relationships with adults was not replaced with pity or
misplaced cultural empathy. These teachers actively sought to learn more about their
student’s motivational systems, learning styles and relational patterns. A challenge to
the teacher’s leadership was not automatically equated to insubordination or a threat.
Arguing was distinguished from differences of opinion and anger or hostility. Talking
out was judged against the student’s perceived right to enter a discussion whenever
possible and not always viewed as being disrespectful or rude. What these teachers
shared was a belief that they had to resist the drive for punishment (i.e., zero tolerance). Instead of indiscriminate disciplinary referrals they choose negotiated understandings with students about the motive or reason for certain behaviors (minor offenses). The rush to discipline was mediated with the search for possible culturally based explanations for an action: “If I can get them to the side and talk to them in a calm voice I am much more successful. If I stay calm and have a very calming tone when I am talking to them, then I feel they respect that and then they can come down to where I am and tell me what’s going on with them.”
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

When you get, give; when you learn, teach. As soon as that healing takes place, then we have to go out and heal somebody, and pass on the idea of a healing day – so that somebody else gets it and passes it on. (Angelou, 2000, p. 24)

This chapter is about giving back, passing on what was gained so it might help another teacher in a similar classroom situation or circumstance. This belief reflects an African American tradition that dates back to the antebellum period; it is a principle that is applicable in this research on urban classrooms and the confluence of classroom management and culturally responsive teaching. Knowledge about successful teachers of African American children resides in a special category of pedagogy because it has exceptional significant in liberating children of color from schooling practices that seemingly perpetuate academic failure, alienation, and the lack of access to powerful learning experiences. These are precarious schooling practices that label these students as being uninspired, unmotivated, irresponsible, threatening, and in need of special education placement (Townsend, 2000).

The project was designed to examine the meaning-making understandings of effective White, middle-class, female teachers, a group that represents the majority of educators in pre-service and teaching assignments in public education (Ladson-Billings, 169).
2001). The investigation also makes suppositions as to how they “got it” in becoming effective urban teachers, while specific attention is given to their use of cultural diversity as a lens in classroom management. It is recognized that a residual benefit of effective classroom management is the influence it has on improved academic performance and student achievement. Therefore, this inquiry examined closely what might be overlooked, underconceptualized, or unarticulated theories in the teaching and learning interactions of these particular teachers. The goal was to explore and describe what might have been left out in comprehending how they became successful classroom managers in a segregated, densely urban middle school earmarked by race and class isolation.

The problem: Classroom management and cultural diversity

Too often teachers in urban districts quit within their first three years they generally refer to problems with discipline and difficulties working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds as their most salient reasons for leaving these districts (Haberman & Rickards, 1990). This exodus accounts for a significant percentage of the teaching staff and as indicated by Fideler & Haselkorn (2003), employee separation rates can range upwards to fifty percent of the recent hires in low performing city schools. These departures result in a substantial interruption in the quality of learning that is provided to urban students and has a debilitating impact on the cohesiveness of building and grade-level operations (Darling-Hammond, 2002). High absenteeism, teacher grievances regarding class coverage and a procession of unqualified substitute
teachers cause irreconcilable damage in student learning and staff morale. However, the literature reviewed and the results of this study suggest that the loss of qualified teachers in urban education can be addressed through improved teacher education and professional development that emphasize cultural diversity.

The study presented deliberate questions that probed the tension between teachers’ choices to adhere to the cultural hegemony of Eurocentric beliefs and their purposeful actions to be cultural responsive. In this regards, the inquiry explored to a certain extent the miseducation of White teachers and the misguided belief that their mission in teaching is to help the diverse “others” to be more like them (King, 2000). This chapter summarizes the results of the study and conducts a discussion into the inferences that can be draw from the inquiry. The section concludes with recommendations and implications for future research on culturally responsive classroom management.

Overview of the study

The teachers in this study were middle-class, White, females who had taught in an urban school for a minimum of three years. The selection criteria for teachers included past experience, perceived effectiveness in helping black children achieve success, and the absence of sustained behavior problems in their classrooms. The study examined classroom management practices and teaching behaviors congruent with findings in the literature on culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000).

The teachers selected were committed educators who expressed a willingness to share their perceptions, interpretations, and sense-making understandings on cultural diversity as an important component of their teaching and classroom management.
practices. Although these teachers were nominated by their principal and colleagues as “difference makers” (i.e., teachers who consistently have shown the professional expertise, enthusiasm, and determination to actively engage in improving the academic performance of African American students) it was still necessary for them to make a personal decision regarding involvement in the project.

The teachers were asked to consider the ramifications of granting access into their classrooms and professional lives before joining the research project. Participation was viewed as a highly personal decision because of the situated nature of teaching (i.e., blend of personal beliefs and pedagogy in a specific context) and the intent of the project to closely explore the teachers’ decision making process, values, beliefs, and assumptions around management and culture to adequately address the stated goals of the project the researcher would have to probe the extent to which teachers felt a relation existed between their views on classroom management and the tenets of culturally responsive teaching.

This effort would require self-disclosing statements concerning their personal histories, commitments, and norms they held related to the idea of differences (Gay, 2000; Weinstein, et al., 2003, 2004). The researcher questioned teachers’ beliefs on race and racism, social stratification and privilege, authority, social justice, and their perspectives on the influence of culturally determined behaviors. Caution was used in discussing each of these areas since as Weinstein et al. (2004) indicates this is “dangerous territory” because these discussions are subject to accusations of racism and prejudicial treatment. The potential for emotional attachment to different viewpoints on
classroom management, discipline, and cultural diversity was a reasonable expectation during the interviewing process, therefore, teachers had to be willing to accept the intensity and imperative of the research agenda.

The researcher asked hard questions about managerial practices in ethnically diverse classrooms, questions that required courage, a sense of cultural efficacy, and confidence in what the teachers did as individuals to make instruction meaningful and relevant in the lives of African American children. This was serious dialogue that queried their self-reflection on race, ethnocentric ideas about their values, standards, and assumptions concerning student behavior, and what it took to create safe, caring, and orderly environments. The research protocol delved into the teachers’ acceptance and respect for cultural differences and questioned their skill at learning the cultural backgrounds of students. For example, how did the teachers gain an understanding of the students’ cultural heritage, behavior sanctions, celebrations of accomplishments, rules of decorum, deference, value orientations, communication and learning styles (Warner, 2004)?

It was important to look closely at their degree of cultural awareness and ask how they avoided imposing their values and standards on classroom management decision-making. In addition, the teachers were also asked more subtle questions like what keeps them going, how they avoid acts of cultural oppression, and what enabled them to accomplish effective classroom management when it defeats so many others. Their teaching backgrounds as well as their personal stance on social justice and equity was a
part of this questioning. The researcher wanted to know what behaviors get recognized immediately, rewarded, or earmarked as a concern in their classrooms and why these were important considerations to them.

The questions were open-ended with a set of probes to ensure that teachers were given the opportunity to fully explain their ideas. These questions and prompts also served to keep the researcher on task, consistently asking questions about the influence of cultural knowledge on the teaching plans and management strategies of the teachers. The overall goal was to develop detailed case studies of how the teachers “got it” in being culturally responsive in their teaching and managing of classrooms which were predominately populated by African American children. In other words, what sense-making understandings did they develop about culturally informed behaviors, the contexts of urban middle school teaching, and themselves as urban educators.

Discussion of selected findings

In this section, I have grouped the understandings that teachers described in the interviews as most useful in addressing how they make use of cultural diversity in classroom management into the following three categories: relationships, teacher efficacy, and intervention. These categories included three assertions derived from the cross case analysis: 1) Developing genuine relationships based on care, trust, and respect with African American students is essential in attaining higher levels of culturally responsive classroom management; 2) A highly developed sense of teacher efficacy and personal confidence supports effective classroom management; and 3)
Guiding, mediating, and scaffolding students’ culturally informed behavior is more feasible than attempting to control, manipulate, or ignore the influence of culture on behaviors.

This discussion looks at how these teachers developed appropriate, responsive, classroom management approaches with students who are markedly different from them in respect to racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Underlying this discussion is the contention that culturally responsive actions by the teachers improved their classroom management. In other words, as the teachers developed more informed perspectives on the influence of culture in their classrooms, this knowledge increased their ability to successfully intervene in management issues. As they learned more about their students, who they are and what knowledge, interests, and life experiences they bring to the classroom, they were able to develop more sophisticated ways of including diversity in the managing their classrooms.

The discussion references the body of literature reviewed previously in Chapter 2 concerning the equitable treatment of African American students specifically as it relates to fairness and the educative values of discipline procedures. These references are used to determine the extent to which the classroom management approaches of the teachers (i.e., attitudes, dispositions, and skills) reflect research on culturally responsive teaching. By exploring their actions within these parameters a description of the teachers’ sense-making understandings about diversity and classroom management takes shape.
Cultural dynamics and teacher understandings

The perspectives discussed in these case studies about the cultural dynamics of the students and the realities of the classrooms are locally and politically situated in the context of schooling in this urban setting. The culture that influences students’ expressive behaviors is complex, multidimensional, and continually changing to meet students’ needs for safety, group membership, and validation. As Gay (2000) illustrates in a cultural dynamics model, the expressive behaviors of students (i.e., thinking, relating, speaking, writing, performing, producing, learning, teaching) are influenced by a wide variety of mitigating variables (i.e., affiliation, gender, age, social class, education, individuality, residence, immigration) that have a reciprocal relation with foundational ethnicity and culture anchors that range from high to low (p. 10). The interaction between these factors accounts for the inadequacy demonstrated in behavior management approaches that rely on strategies that assume groups have fixed cultural characteristics (i.e., traits) that are common among all members. The model suggests that group members share some core cultural characteristics; however, there is extensive variance in how expressive behaviors are manifested.

For instances, at the school site it was not uncommon to hear profanity, derogative rap lyrics in reference to gender and race, argumentative language, or for students to justify preempted physical violence with the concern of being victimized in the future. Yet, by the same token it was also not uncommon to hear the case study teachers make reference to the good manners, affectionate demeanor, and respect demonstrated by many students. As one teacher commented, “I think that the African
American children in this building are taught respect. Maybe more so than the Whites because they are very good about saying yes mamma and no sir and I don’t ever remember any of my friends saying that as a child.” While the syntax of these statements is historic and culturally situated in the experiences of African Americans, it still reveals the importance placed upon respectfulness by many families when children address adults. 

Other factors that influenced the expressive behaviors of students could be linked to the physical condition of the school and the sociocultural conditions of the students. The building is under-resourced, overcrowded, and densely segregated which is apt to make students feel alienated from, rather than engaged in, the educational process (Schwartz, 2004). Leaking roofs, worn books, poor ventilation, pestilence, and inadequate restroom facilities give the impression that schooling is not a public priority for these students.

The students come from neighborhoods associated with a high concentration of poverty, crime, drugs, children born out of wedlock, dependency on public assistance, and a deteriorating physical infrastructure (Massey & Denton, 1993). These sociocultural conditions create a uniquely disadvantaged environment and a schooling context that is totally unknown to most White Americans and hard for White, middle class teachers to fully understand. To a person unfamiliar with the plight of under funded urban schools this might appeared to be a destructive environment that constrains life chances for African American children irrespective of personal traits, individual motivations, or private achievements.
However, within these somewhat mired concentric circles of qualitative concern, the teachers in this study, along with others in the building, are strongly determined to make a difference in the educational experience provided to these children. Instead of excuses being offered for academic failure and disciplinary problems, they substitute negativity and stereotypes with knowledge about students’ and family circumstances. Despite the reality that the school is experiencing a nearly intractable problem with academic achievement and a growing percentage of the students have experienced academic failure in early grades (e.g., 3rd and 6th grade), the teachers do not use this as a rationale for presenting a remedial curriculum. Instead assignments are at grade level and cooperative learning strategies are used so students can support each other.

These teaches accepted responsibility for learning and student behavior in their classrooms, while rejecting the misconception that African American children do not care about learning and their parents or the conditions of their lives are to be blamed for their behavior. Instead, these teachers learned how to dispel the ill-informed notions of cultural deficit and to account for the biases of their socialization as privileged, middle-class, citizens. They have chosen through their continued employment in this urban middle school to stay and work in a setting that is contested and subject to public scorn and ridicule. The analysis of the data suggest that these teachers have engaged in the difficult process of understanding their own whiteness and learning how to arrest white privilege in the assumptions and taken-for-granted understanding they first had about African American children and classroom behavior (Hytten & Warren, 2003). The
emphasis in these classrooms was placed on developing culturally responsive
dispositions in the managing of students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Relationships: Trust, Respect, and Caring**

A central theme in the teachers’ response to the character and quality of their
classroom management practices involved the importance of relationships. These
teachers actively sought to add detail, context, and emotion to the web of social
relationships they form with students. The dialogue during the interviews revealed that
their actions were organized around well-defined intentions and meanings derived from
sustained contact with largely African American children from low-income
communities. It was important to them that students felt valued, trusted, and respected.
As one teacher commented, “I begin by affirming the importance of their presence in
my life – how fortunate I am to have this time with them. I acknowledge that they have
already achieved much.” Yet, underlying this affirmation is the firm belief that these
positive affirmations must be shared, the students had to also come to value, trust and
respect the teacher.

These teachers wanted to ensure that all students felt a sense of inclusion and they
manipulated events in the classroom to guarantee that all voices would be heard. No
student would be allowed to simply state that the reason for cultural misunderstandings
or misinterpretations of their actions was because “nobody ever asked me.” A lot of
energy was directed towards creating relationships of mutual respect with the students
and everyone (including the teachers) worked hard at keeping promises, displaying
kindness, expressing courtesies, and apologizing when mistaken. Time was used not only to clarify expectations of student behavior, but also for teachers to critically reflect on the bases of their expectations of student behavior. What standards did they use to form this expectation? Was it solely based on their Eurocentric concepts of universal values? Or did it take into account the geographic of differences and the problems of privilege… instead of concentrating on violations.

In this respect, the teachers emphasized an approach popularized by Payne (1999) to make “deposits to individuals in poverty,” these deposits include appreciating the humor and entertainment found in students joking with each other or engaging in a culturally-based form of verbal sparing called “cracking or playing the dozens.” Instead of put-downs or sarcasms about the humor of the exchange the teachers learned to accept it as a way of demonstrating exuberance, verbal skills, and playfulness that was found in the students’ cultural settings.

Students were not routinely removed from these classes for minor incidents of verbal abuse or profanity simply because they used an inappropriate word or phrase. To the contrary, these moments of exaggerated boasting or the mistaken use of profanity was acknowledged as a culturally-influenced event. The pervasiveness of profanity in the lives of young Black urbanites was evident in their music, casual exchanges, and even in statements of admiration. Rather than seeking to control entirely for these moments, the teachers viewed the behavior for its inappropriateness in the social situation. They commented on misbehavior in a matter-of-fact, business-like manner, or dismissed it with a reassurance from the student that it would not reoccur. It was always
made clear to the student that this type of behavior would not be accepted in their classroom. In this sense, protecting students from initial mistakes was seen as one of the steps in learning more about them and the students learned more about their teacher’s concern for them.

In my analysis of the interviews I found that the teachers had undertaken an arduous process of amassing a large amount of information about each of their students. They considered this as an important task in their classroom management approach. The teachers wanted to have enough knowledge about individuals so they could judge when and how best to intercede in conflicts that might occur. In place of the stereotypical image of an urban classroom teacher struggling for authority, these teachers used the knowledge gained about students to reinforce their position of strength in the classroom.

Demonstrated use of this knowledge was sent in a simple reminder of a grandmother’s advise captured from a previous narrative assignment, a warning given to a student about a mother’s disappointment seen during her last visit to the school for a behavior problem in a classroom or a reminder of the anticipated anger of a father’s discipline shared during a biographical essay that would bring a student back from the brink of disrespect or violence. It could even be the personal disappointment expressed by the teacher toward a student. The teachers viewed themselves as powerful and influential individuals who could easily recount what they knew about parents and social rules of respect in the students’ household to correct behavior. This was especially true in regards to knowledge of a father or stepfather’s disapproval of a child’s behavior, these moments carried particular significance in a setting where
matriarchal arrangements typified the children’s households. Strict corrections or reprimand of a child was a private event, the teachers lived by the motto…*praise in public, criticize in private.*

**Beliefs on authority**

The teachers could easily mimic the mannerisms, tone of voice, and demeanor used by African American adults to interact with children; however, these moments of imitation were always conducted respectfully. Forced use of African American phraseology was avoided since it could be perceived as pretentious and demeaning. The teachers learned when to use these language patterns/styles from phone conversations, meetings with parents, and other African American colleagues at the school. An assessment of interview data and handouts used during parent conferences disclosed their seriousness when meeting with parents. One teacher’s handout opened with the statement, “*Where there is little respect for parents, there is little respect for students... I respect you!*” Exchanges with parents were polite, persuasiveness, and formal. The teachers always referred to them as Mr. or Mrs. as a sign of respect. Teachers had learned that many of the parents came to these meetings not only to meet them, but also to reinforce with their child the passage of authority to the teachers to act in their behalf on discipline concerns, a step that was reminiscent of Irvine’s (1999) concept of “other mothering.”

The neutrality of middle-class views on emotional involvement with students was displaced by the intimacy of respecting the demands and priorities of adult-to-child
relationships. Adults were expected to demonstrate leadership and authority in the classroom; if they did not it was considered a personal weakness or disinterest in the students’ lives. Showing personal interest and acceptance of their feelings was an essential part of creating and sustaining a learning environment that fostered academic as well as social success (Townsend & Webb-Johnson, 2002). The teachers established clear and firm discipline structures that recognized the parameters and internal boundaries of African American culture. They had learned from visiting Black churches, accompanying students to events outside of school, and conversations with African American staff members that a social norm in the culture was that children had their place and should never be allowed to overstep their authority with adults.

Other mothering means caring not only for the physical needs of these children, but also being willing to correct them when necessary and appropriate. In these classrooms it meant saying “Don’t back talk me when I am speaking to you” despite it being improper grammar. It resonated with concern about a child who came to school disheveled and distraught because she had only had candy for dinner that week and became tearful when speaking about “something” that happened to her on a previous night. This other mothering did not mean arguing with a child about what would be accepted or rejected in their behavior, it also meant being able to say no to disrespect in whatever form it took.

What became clear in the observation data was the fact that authority was earned in these classrooms. Neither the teacher nor the students were to be disrespected and a position of respect was conditioned on the consistency of one’s mannerism. Angry
responses by students was met with an adult voice that did not argue, but set strong choice-and-consequence guidelines that embraced African American virtues of community (Foster, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The classroom was a community and each person was responsible for each of the others. If students began to fight, challenge the teacher, or continue in some absurd behavior, the whole class might become involved in correcting the student. Teaching credentials, position, and years of experience were important factors, but respect merited authority.

**Teacher Efficacy/Confidence: Don’t be afraid to take risk or to be criticized**

Teachers used knowledge gained about the context of students’ lives in various ways and did not attempt to place them in the position of being cultural experts. Instead, the dialogue during interviews revealed that they asked other African Americans on the staff, particularly the African American female principal, about disconnects and shortcoming in their responses to the students’ behavior. As indicated in McIntyre (1992), it was important that these teachers rejected taken-for-granted culturally determined assumptions that students should be compliant, docile, and responsive to authority. Only by rejecting these assumptions about student behavior could they engage in critical discourse about entrenched cultural beliefs regarding classroom management. Through this process of questioning and exploring personal biases and experiences with diversity could new visions about classroom management and culture be developed or amended. The teachers in the study guarded against the tendency of imposing Eurocentric ideas and assumptions on the actions of students when assessing a
situation or referencing it to past events and learning, the saying “Don’t be afraid of failing. It’s the way you learn to do things right” was applicable in these classrooms (Edelman, 1992, p. 42). Every teacher was in an on-going learning loop related to culture, managing the classrooms, and working with difficult students.

The research further indicated that the teachers had learned through trial and error to ask rather than assume about a students’ response to a situation, regardless if the response was angry, tears, or indifference, the teachers valued student’s opinions, concerns about fairness, and respected their lives by maintaining a focus on achievement. In place of repeatedly questioning themselves about the shortcomings of the students’ academic preparation, their community life, or the psychological origins of a behavior, these teachers concentrated on the birthright of these students’ to a quality education. As the results of the study indicated, pejorative character traits were never assigned to the students’ actions. Teachers made sure that when they corrected a child the comments were about the inappropriate behavior that needed to be changed not them as individuals (Mizell, 2002). These positions: not being afraid to make a mistake, asking when they did not know why a student responded in a given manner, and avoiding damaging statements and opinions about students required a heighten sense of teacher efficacy and confidence.

The teachers firmly believed they were vanguards of the students. No teacher involved in the study described their classroom management strategies as typical. They each felt it was the result of their commitment to meet the needs of diverse students. The teachers were as Cooper (2003) claims activists, advocates, and defenders of their
students. When they saw a need such as chaperons for a school dance or someone who would walk school grounds after evening school events to provide security for students they were there without compensation or praise. Even when these teachers witnessed a fight they never hesitated to assume a responsible adult role and intervene instead of saying “that’s the principal’s job.”

When their authority was questioned, these teachers did not necessarily retreat to the positional power of credentials experience had taught them that “you can never act like you’re afraid, even if you are.” Unlike others, these teachers relied upon their moral authority to act in the best interest of children; they never forgot that they are the adults in difficult situations they confronted at the school (Weiner, 2003). As Jackie, mentioned “I feel like our students here need a lot of support and they need teachers that enjoy their job and I really want to make a difference in the kids lives. They need a lot of support and consistency and I feel like I am able to give that too them.” Her comments demonstrate the meaning of teacher efficacy and confidence; Jackie believes wholeheartedly that her efforts will positively influence the lives of students and she’s not afraid to say it or show it.

Gaining sociocultural awareness

As noted in Chapter 2, equitable discipline of African American students resulting from classroom referrals to the school office was of particular interest to me as the researcher. The literature reveals that discipline disparities based on race are present in every major urban district in the United States (Johnson, Boyden & Pittz, 2000).
Despite well-crafted mission statements that proclaim the democratic virtues of the school and verbiage about “every child can learn and every school can ensure the success of all children” (i.e., No Child Left Behind), the continued disproportionate representation of African American students in office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions are a dire concern for the families of these children (Slavin, 1996, p. 3).

As revealed by Skiba, Michael & Nardo (2000), findings on disciplinary actions in public schools suggest “evidence of a pervasive and systematic bias inherent in the exclusionary discipline procedures” (p. 19). The concern expressed by parents is captured in the troubling connections between increasing racial disparities among those students who are most severely sanctioned in schools and in the juvenile justice system, research disaggregated by race indicates that school removals, suspensions, and expulsion rates are strong predictors of negative school outcomes for African American students and increase the likelihood of their involvement in the school-to-prison pipeline (Wald, 2003).

In the review of literature I found frequent reports from various geographic regions throughout the United States that confirmed racial disparities in discipline data between Black and White students. Removals and suspensions rates ranged from a national average of 2 to 1 to upwards of 5 to 1 in some suburban school districts (Bridgman, 2004). This literature and the thirty year history documenting the existence of the discipline gap suggests the trenchant nature of the gap between persistent cultural misunderstandings and mismatches, between teachers and students regarding cultural differences in behavioral expectations and interpretations.
Studies have repeatedly shown that student behaviors that do not conform to the dominant culture, which is the unquestioned standard of schools supported in policy statements on the student code of conduct, were viewed as “deficient” and in need of “fixing” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 35; Grossman, 1995; Cartledge & Milburn, 1996). This viewpoint was not representative of the teachers in this study. In comments during interviews and focus group meetings, they shared their concerns about instances where teachers expected their African American students to adopt majority culture behaviors almost immediately in their classrooms. This practice of expecting students to adopt the teacher’s culturally influenced beliefs on what is appropriate behaviors was ill-advised for several reasons, particularly because it denied the legitimacy of students’ cultural practices, beliefs, and knowledge.

In their opinion, teachers should not establish unrealistic expectations of students who do not necessarily share in, or are defined by, the teacher’s life experiences. Students in their classrooms are not expected to be compliant, docile, and responsive immediately to adult authority without question or challenge. Teacher/student relationships were considered a developmental process of gaining trust, respect, and confidence in the directions of adults. The reality shared by these teachers was their awareness that students’ parents might have taught them to fight to avoid being victimized while growing up in a tough neighborhood. The students may have learned that certain behavior traits like a more physical style of action, greater approval of the
use of violence, less disguised aggression, a lack of subtlety in verbiage, or even a measured amount of defiance, could be behaviors that served a legitimate purpose in their lived experiences (Hanna, 1988; McIntryre, 1991).

_The “got it” question: Moving beyond misunderstandings_

One of the more important contributions of this study was examining teachers’ understandings about how they transformed their pedagogical and classroom management practices to account for cultural diversity. The study offers a detailed description of the teachers’ perceptions and interpretations about performing in culturally responsive ways in their instruction and classroom management actions. Their stories transcend traditional approaches to classroom management as seen in texts for preservice and inservice teachers, while still covering a wide range of topics, from designing the classroom environment and teaching students how to behave, to planning and organizing instruction and working with families.

The case studies give an account of the “enacted” behaviors the teachers used to transform their images and beliefs about what it means to teach in an urban context, and what it means to develop an identity as an urban educator. They spoke convincingly about the emotions they felt when they saw teachers respond to students’ culturally determined behaviors in ways they characterized as “insensitive, inappropriate, and counterproductive.” They also shared stories of teachers whose actions were offensive to the students and their culture, one result of these perceived cultural mismatches, lack of appreciation, and even intolerance for cultural differences was the influence these
instances had on the teachers’ decision to become advocates for the children and their culture. As one teacher shared, “I think there is a very big difference between our cultures, but I also think that Blacks had to fight to get to where they are; they had to come a really long way in our country to be free. I respect that and when I see people promoting some type of segregation that bothers me greatly” (Jackie).

The discipline gap was seen by these teachers as a phenomenon that was sustained through a mixture of missed opportunities, cultural bias, well-meaning intentions, but misinformed expectations about the relation between culture and classroom management. They had resolved individually and as a group that the practice of simply sending children to the office for every infraction was misguided and discriminatory, they wanted to improve upon their practice, to learn more about their students so actions taken to correct behavior could better match the intention behind them. Every student-initiated action could not be judged inappropriate simply because it did not match with their culturally influenced perspective on behavior, one simple example that came out during a focus group discussion was the fact that most of the teachers had never had a physical fight when they were children, a fact that their students found amazing and bewildering. As a result, it was hard for the teachers to understand why a student would choose to fight instead of “talking it out” or “letting an adult handle the problem.” At the same time, the students found it hard to explain to their teachers the subtle reasons why they had to fight to “save face,” regardless of the presence of an adult.

The teachers’ response to questions about discipline supported findings in the literature that the racialized discipline gap is partly condoned through misguided over-
reliance on negative and punitive school policies and practices that disfavor African American students (Johnson, Boyden & Pittz, 2000). Whether it was through cultural misunderstandings or racial bias the effect was similar: too many students were removed, suspended, or expelled from school and this negatively affected their opportunity to gain from the educational experience. It set in motion a familiar cycle of suspension, expulsion, dropout, criminalization, and imprisonment.

It also became apparent in the discourse that these teachers acknowledged that given the cultural face of the teaching corps (87% of all teachers being White) any substantive change in classroom management practices must be drawn from a more developed understandings of the students’ culture and backgrounds (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Each teacher was engaged in an informal self-renewing process of developing more informed perspectives on culturally appropriate behavioral interventions, justifying their pedagogical decision-making and actions, and communicating more closely with parents, students, administrators, and colleagues about what they needed to know, care about, and be able to do with students (NCTAF, 2003).

As supported in the literature, these teachers were grappling with understandings about the influence of race, ethnicity, class, and culture on the dynamics of their pedagogical practices. While these concerns have been addressed to a large extent in the general field of literacy with the emphasis placed on culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching being seen as key in helping students relate lesson content to their own backgrounds, this has not been a primary focus in classroom management theory.
Instead, these issues have remained silenced in discussions of classroom management. By virtue of its absence it is artificially separated from considerations cultural factors outside of the dominate culture. Fortunately, these teachers demonstrated cross-cultural competency and used these acquired abilities to interpret and evaluate their cultural encounters with a high degree of accuracy and show cultural empathy towards their students.

They have seemingly learned that effective teaching and management in an urban context has a great deal to do with their conceptualization of who I am, what I believe, and what experiences I have had. The images and beliefs with which they began their professional career have changed in powerful ways. The cultural filters of socioeconomic class, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, and family life that once might have been barriers in limiting ideas about diversity were now being used to make sense of the knowledge and experiences they encountered in their classrooms. Intertwined in this process of gaining sociocultural consciousness, the teachers also developed an affirming attitude towards the cultural diversity of their students and demonstrated an enhanced commitment to expanding their skills to facilitate culturally responsive ways of working with students (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003).

The teachers “got it” in the sense that they arrested White middle-class attitudes (i.e., ways of thinking, talking, behaving) regarding the superiority of their cultural standards. They located themselves on a continuum of ideas regarding race and culture and opted to validate their culture and make sense out of being White, without
demeaning or devaluing the culture of their students and families. Diversity came to be seen as differences that could be thought about, discussed without glib remarks or awkward moments, and acted upon with respect and affirmation. The idea of “fixing” students’ cultural deficits was debunked as race-based misunderstanding that needed to be unpacked and examined for their association with cultural hegemony and constructed consciousness (Gay, 2000; Hinchely, 2001). Of course, the teachers did not use these terms, but their discourse reflected these same concepts. The teachers in the study expressed a willingness to move beyond the unreflective and uncritical “habits of the mind” (i.e., perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that limited and distorted their understandings about inequity, social justice, and cultural diversity (King, 1991, p. 135).

**Critical theory: A lens into culturally responsive practices**

The discussion in this chapter moves beyond data collection and analysis as I begin the process of interrogating the findings of the study base upon the powerful theoretical and analytical framework provide by critical theory and critical race theory. These analytic lenses were selected because they provide a framework to ask questions about the different choices individuals make and how those decisions affect outcomes. The teachers in this study wanted to get beyond behaviorism in their classroom management approach. They understood that change necessitated them acquiring a new way of seeing the classroom, school, and the role of students. As suggested by Freiberg (1999), and revealed in their conversations, these teachers wanted to move from “I am
in control” to “We are in control,” they were tired of getting the same results: student alienation, misbehavior, removal of disruptive students, and suspension (p. 9). This approach had only resulted in the reoccurring and self-defeating loop of violation and punishment, defeating the opportunity to create a learning environment that was responsive to the needs of both the teacher and student. They began to question and think that “this isn’t enough, something more has to be possible” in working successfully with African American children than just discipline and punishment.

This questioning that things could indeed be other than they were was a precursor to the teachers developing a more critical outlook on classroom management. It led them to other uncertainties such as the deterrent value of removing students from their classrooms when they actually needed more productive and trusting relationship with them to become effective teachers. Experience had shown them that eliminating one troubling student did not necessarily serve as a deterrent to others; generally another disruptive student took their place since the underlying cause of the behavior or understandings of it was not addressed. This type of questioning by the teachers is typically of a critical theory approach to teaching. Dissatisfied with the “unquestioning acceptance” of classroom management practices that never got beyond compliance or moved towards student involvement and self-discipline, the teachers began a process of “what if” questions (Hinchey, 2001, p. 2). What if they learned more about the students, their communities and families, and worldview? What if they learned more about the students’ cultural background, could this change their classroom management approach for another?
The teachers had stopped assigning lunch detentions for minor offenses, but had kept the framework of assertive discipline in their classroom management practices. Check marks and magnets were still used in the classroom to denote a students’ upward movement in disciplinary consequences which ended with removal from the classroom. Although they had started using a more student focused approach to discipline and learning with their teaching roles adopting a more semi-directive/facilitative approach. The teachers still found themselves adhering to traditional management myths like “just be consistent, I can out-tough them, and grades will motivate their behaviors” (Powell et al., 2001, p. 154). Yet, nagged by a sense that they were still not doing enough to reach students, these teachers decided to gain a more cultural understanding of the bases of student behavior.

Deeply ingrained ideas about classroom management and unquestioned acceptance of current practice permeated the school ethos and definitions of student misconduct. The consequences for misbehavior could be easily found in the adopted code of student conduct which listed verbal reprimand, detention, in-school suspension, removal, and suspension. The taken-for-granted understandings discussed in the teacher’s lunch room also reflected the conditioned response that student infractions should equal punishment. While some teachers held firmly to this approach, a discomfort existed in the study participants about what they believed and what they chose to do in the privacy of their classrooms, they revealed in their biographies and discussions that they were committed to the belief that the current assumptions about classroom management and discipline were unquestionable.

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One of the teachers in particular was outspoken regarding this point. She felt that
the attitudes and expectations of some teachers reflected cultural beliefs linked
primarily to White culture and confused them with “Truth.” In her opinion, the
definitions of appropriate behavior were culturally and value bound to the person or
persons doing the defining, she maintained that White teachers were not in a position to
always assume that their perception of behavior was the best for everyone, Wuise stated
“that not the way it happens. It is hard for [White teachers] to understand, we are part
of a race that has not always been giving to these kids, they don’t automatically trust
who I am.” The logic of her position is found in critical theory and discussion regarding
the reifying of whiteness. White teachers have difficulty identifying the influence of
their cultural beliefs or the demands it places on others to conform to them since they
and the schools are immersed in culture beliefs and possessive investment in whiteness
(Lipsitz, 1998).

Critical race theory: Outcomes and intentions

The concept of culturally responsive classroom management has three
prerequisites that teachers engage in when they are successful in enacting this approach
in their classrooms. According to Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran (2004) these
prerequisites are recognition of one’s own ethnocentrism and biases, knowledge of
students’ cultural backgrounds, and awareness of the broader social, economic, and
political context of schools. The prerequisites are interconnected and intertwined “like
threads in a piece of cloth” and they are constantly intersecting and informing the
teacher’s practice and management activities (Villegas & Lucas, 2001, p. 26). The metaphor of a series of threads reinforces the idea that these preconditions are inseparable in practice, they form a dynamic synergy identified as a “frame of mind” or dispositions teachers’ have to issues of social justice and equity in classroom management (Weinstein et al., 2004, p. 27).

Attempts to disconnect these threads into discrete teacher competencies encapsulated in the phrase “what teachers need to know and be able to do to teach effectively” is limiting and results in unraveling the concepts underlying teachers becoming culturally responsive (Darling Hammond et al, 1999, p. 16). Instead of placing emphasis on developing certain attitudes in their approach to diversity, attention is shifted to a prescriptive list of recommended behaviors. Therefore, to a large extent, this approach to management resembles the belief that “all students are capable of learning to high levels,” which was a remark that ran counter to earlier theories that I.Q. was fixed at birth.

Each of these characteristics of culturally responsive classroom management reflects a refinement of fundamental attitudes and dispositions toward the students, their culture, and the relationship of schools in perpetuating discriminatory practices and differential access to power. If teachers employ the tenets of culturally responsive classroom management they must assume an activist stance in school issues related to social justice against, for example rigid tracking, the uneven disruption of fiscal resources, high-stakes testing, standardized curriculum, zero tolerance, maximum security-like schools, and the racial profiling of African American students as
demonstrated in disproportionate disciplinary consequences. By taking these actions the teacher is rejecting the centering of Whiteness in schools, displacing the invisible system of unearned privilege and power that operates in schools to maintain institutional racism. To become culturally responsive implies action and White teachers would have to be able to see their own implications in the systems of power and dominance in schools.

School practices that are situated within the boundaries of “normal” procedures that continue to define, identify, and “pull over” students of color on the road to a quality education would have to be subjected to critical thought and the framework of critical race theory. Concepts like the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992), counter-storytelling (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001), whiteness as property (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), interest convergence, and critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004) are aspects of critical race theory that could be used to unpack “the way it is” in school practices that marginalize and relegate students of color to the ranks of “others” (Hinchey, 2001). While it is beyond the scope of this discussion to explore the ramifications of each of these concepts and their impact in the study as it relates to classroom management, two of the concepts have particular importance: the permanence of racism and Whiteness as property.

*The permanence of racism and Whiteness as property*

The unquestioning acceptance of disciplinary practices that disadvantage African American students was an idea rejected by the teachers in this research. They opposed
the belief that the uneven application of disciplinary consequences came simply from sloppy thinking by innocent overzealous teachers merely attempting to manage the exuberance of adolescents. For them, emotional withdrawal from the students and racism were factors that could possibly be used to explain how some classrooms were managed. Each of the study participants had deliberately re-evaluated their classroom policies, rules, and structures for gender biases and discriminatory practices. They reflected on their practice and growing awareness of the racial identity concerns of African American adolescents, students for whom the development of a positive and affirming identity represented a significant life task. Through different teaching assignments and constructed narratives these teachers had become aware of how their students were “raced” in their daily lives by store merchants, police officers, teachers, and media programs. It was important to the teachers that the students felt good about their racial and ethnic heritage, while at the same time they needed to feel good about being white. They needed to feel good about being a white person who cared and could empathize with black students.

As a result, they withheld judgment on different activities that African American students engage in while actively exploring their identities. Styles of dress, the use of Black dialectic and vernacular, rap music, and the groups they choose to associate with was not taken as their fixed identity, but rather one of many transitions in which youth people engaged. Although as white teachers they did not have any personal history with what it meant to be black, their experiences with the African American culture had shown them that their students had to answer these questions for themselves. If they did
not a racist and highly stratified social order would define them in the all too familiar stereotypes ranging from lazy and slothful to menacing and dangerous.

The contention that rules and procedures were neutral and maintain some position of impartiality was unraveled by the harsh realities of repeated removal of students from school. Indiscriminate enforcement of rules, without consideration for the progress students had made in adjusting to the culturally-based expectations of teachers placed severe limitations on children’s opportunities to improve. The message framed by this intolerance was clear: “a pedagogy of tough love” (Giroux, 1999, p. 241). To combat this attitude, in team meetings these teachers reviewed the disproportionate disciplinary consequences revealed in action reports compiled for each grading period on students who were removed, suspended or expelled.

While it was undeniable that more African American students attended the school, other ethnic groups (i.e., Somali, Hispanic, and Eastern European) in the school were not disproportionately represented in disciplinary figures which suggested an inequitable distribution of consequences. This type of informal questioning caused these teachers to examine more closely what behaviors were targeted in their classrooms and the school. They wanted to examine how culturally-based constructs on behavior related to school discipline. Did sagging pants or exaggerated short skirts get the same attention as exposed midriffs and wildly colored hair; two behaviors associated with White students and MTV videos? Or did the behaviors associated with rap culture (i.e., loudness, threatening images, and exaggerated forms of bravado) get more attention and correction than (surliness, defiance, and rudeness) in their classrooms and the school?
The teachers had gained increased awareness of some of the sociocultural factors associated with poverty through the school’s endorsed workshops and reading of Payne’s (1996) book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Two of the study participants felt this book was very helpful: the third felt that while the book did not mention race it was assumed that it was referencing African Americans. For this reason she did not feel it was as useful of a book for understanding her students since it implied stereotypes. However, what was gained from this book and subsequent discussions for all three teachers was awareness that the lives of African American middle school students from impoverished backgrounds could forever be seriously impacted by unfair, arbitrary and capricious actions taken by adults they are suppose to trust.

These teachers who had an average of thirteen years teaching experience had witnessed police officers taking students away from the building base on a compliant by a teacher; they had seen probation officers bully young African Americans criminalized by infractions as simple as truancy or the unintentional bumping into a teacher during a fight. They were aware of the expectation that teachers should prosecute students for making even minor physical contact with them. At a time when these students were forming lifelong outlooks on matters of justice and fairness, these teachers felt that the insensitive and discriminatory actions of some teachers could be perceived as willful and unreasonable, actions that could have a long-standing deleterious affect on them.

In addition, the study teachers were aware of the combined influence of state legislative policies, schooling practices, and corporate interest in constructing a schooling experience that failed to provide African American students the same quality
of education offered to White students. The political realities that confronted these teachers daily included the wholesale abandonment of an equitable school funding formula not entirely based on property taxes, the public endorsed ridicule of city schools in the posting of standardized test scores, and the implied superiority of suburban districts evident in the voucher and charter school movement. These teachers were acutely concerned with the poverty in their school, the type of poverty that was seen in students’ teeth, skin tone, and eyes. It was poverty that was intergenerational and maintained through inequalities in the educational preparedness provided to African American students in city schools.

The market - and choice - oriented policies of federal accountability rules derail local school reform initiatives (e.g., reading, mathematics, and science) and consumed limited financial resources and teaching time in the classrooms. Moreover, the sanctions linked to academic achievement scores in these policies fall especially hard on city schools while asking for much less progress from affluent suburban districts. These colorblind guidelines are dangerous and frightening because they perpetuate and create greater disparities in schooling opportunities for city children. Color-blindness becomes a way to deny power imbalance, unearned privilege, and the permanence of racism in the rhetoric of equal treatment and equal opportunity. The pretense of not seeing color in the deeply divided and increasingly unequal education of African American children was denounced by these teachers, they had begun the journey of overcoming the racism inherited in a predominately White ethnocentric perspective.
While these teachers were not readily acquainted with the body of literature documenting the preponderance of statistical evidence illustrating a glaring racial gap in who is identified as a problem to the school, punished more frequently and harshly and ultimately pushed out of school without a diploma, they were aware of the racialized gap in disciplinary actions. The impact of exclusionary discipline policies that stigmatize African American students (e.g. national average of 2 to 1 in office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions) and racial paranoia and fear was common knowledge. A teacher could remove or ban the reintroduction of a student in their classroom pending a disciplinary hearing without the approval of the principal based on a negotiated clause in the union contract. This type of policy is reflected in Cross’s (2004) statement that, “African American boys are cute until about the fourth grade, and then teachers start to fear them” (p. 2). This apprehension is often manifested in the silencing of males through repeated office referrals. Actions such as these disenfranchise students from their birthright of a quality education and empowers biased teacher to act with impunity.

The central question related to the context of schools poised in critical race theory is the centering of race in all research concerning student outcomes? A review of statements listed on office referrals has shown that teachers’ perceptions of behavior infractions are highly subjective and culturally bound (Civil Rights Project, 2000; Skiba, Peterson & Williams, 1997). Researchers found that the most frequently cited reasons for the removal of students from the classroom were insubordination, disruption of class, and disrespect. These finding highlight the importance of who is defining disrespect, what are their parameters in defining expected behavior, and finally what is the power relationship between the conflicting parties.
The teachers in this study disclosed that they took special precautions in disciplinary hearings with students and their parents. They supported the idea that when a parent provided support, insistence, and expectations to the child, their physical presence in the building was immaterial. The child behaved in accordance with their parent’s wishes and was cognizant of the consequences for misrepresenting them in school. In this sense the teachers rejected the racist contention that African American parents are disinterested or uninvolved in their children’s education. However, when parents did come in for a disciplinary hearing these teachers demonstrated their respectfulness for them by allowed them and the child to speak first about the facts surrounding the incident.

This practice of demonstrating respectfulness was unusual since students and parents are generally powerless when dealing with a behavior infraction that resulted in removal from school. Typically, whenever inconsistencies existed between the student’s statement and those of the teacher, the comments of the student are summarily dismissed or viewed in a suspicious manner. Also, due to the bureaucratic nature of disciplinary hearings, the parents of African American students are typically silenced by false platitudes regarding the virtues of the teacher, intentional statements about the teacher’s level of education (a direct attempt to intimidate the parent’s educational preparedness) and strict adherence to time constraints that limit discussion (Kunjufu, 2002).

The concept of Whiteness as property is also seen in how white privilege is manifested in schools. In a listing of unearned privileges accrued to whites in public
schools, Olson (1998) offers insights into the pervasiveness of these advantages. For example, she maintains that when white parents visit their child’s school, staff members reserve judgment about the parents’ economic class, level of education, and reason for being in the school until they make it known. White parents are confident that their child will never be embarrassed by “hearing others suggest that the problems of the school (i.e., low achievement, violence, or special service needs) are caused by the high numbers of children of their race” (p. 83). Furthermore, in terms of curriculum and instruction, White parents and children know that they will see faces like theirs copiously displayed in textbooks, posters, films and other materials throughout the school. Finally, White parents are confident that policy decisions such as classroom management that affects their children’s educational experience will be made by individuals who understand their “racial history and cultural background” (p. 83).

These privileges imply that a multitude of educational policies and private prejudice has created a “possessive investment in whiteness” within the context of schooling (Lipsitz, 1998). Whiteness as property is seen in the unequal education given to children of color and in the policies and practices that restrict their access to high-quality curricula and a safe, well-equipped, and rigorous education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). These restrictions include access to highly qualified teachers, advance placement course, gifted and talented programs, and scholarship opportunities.

This concept of Whiteness as property is particularly salient in the middle school in this study given its segregated and low income status. The fact is that the students of Prospect Middle School receive unequal opportunities to learn. This likely results in
unequal educational achievement, that subsequently reinforce economic inequalities such as low-skilled jobs due to not being prepared for or being able to attend college. This is the oppressive reality in this school. The denial of educational resources to African American children is a social fact that continues to be addressed by scholars and school practitioners interested in changing the life opportunities of marginalized children.

For the teachers in this study, the underachievement of African American students has taken on a personal meaning; they are closely tied to the lives of their students and recognize that how they enact their classroom management practices reflects their beliefs in social justice. They are well aware of the broader social, economic, and political context of city schools. The teachers know about the accusations of it being referred to as a colonial educational model, a pipeline to prison, and a conduit for the ghettoizing of African Americans. Nevertheless, they have chosen to stand and attempt to make a difference in the all-too-real consequences evident in the decline of city schools and the resulting unequal distribution of wealth, prestige, power, and opportunity in America.

Conclusion

In this study, the thoughtful and well-meaning intentions of these teachers to learn more about their students’ cultural backgrounds provided for the development of culturally responsive and well organized classroom environments. These teachers are engaged in the risky business of examining their raced, gendered and classed lives
inside the boundaries of this intensely segregated urban context. It is risky because it involves deprivileging the mainstream discourse about African American children and their conscious (and unconscious) notions of Whiteness. This is a process that was more difficult for some than others in the study. They gained various insights into understanding how to negotiate their identities as white teachers and urban educators in ways that enabled them to be effective in the lives of African American children. The goal of the study was to explain how these teachers actively crossed cultural, racial and class borders in their classroom management approach while respecting the diversity of African American children and helping them to become more efficacious learners.

In the process of learning how to center diversity in their classroom management practices they learned what it meant to be a culturally responsive teacher. Although their definitions of culturally responsiveness may not exactly mirror those found in the literature, these definitions are evident in their teaching performance. The teachers’ persistence in gaining knowledge of students, their prior experiences, community involvement, and cultural backgrounds are evidence of their commitment to enhance performance. Their teaching response to the students is a highly contextual and situational process influenced by the quality of relationships they developed with the students, their families, and colleagues in the building.

The teachers’ success in operating well-managed classrooms resides in their ability to create situated knowledge, contextually developed knowledge that is accessed and used in problem solving. Rather than standing back and reproducing the status quo in urban education (i.e., large-scale academic and socializing failure), these teachers
stopped being observers and attempted to become activists in their classrooms and school so they could gain more sophisticated understandings of diversity. The teachers wanted to understand the knowledge embedded in the lives of their students and did not attempt to make judgments or criticisms of the existing forms of social and political reality. They wanted to become adept in understanding social stratifications based on perceptions of race, class, and ethnicity while avoiding the inflicted prejudices grounded in their own previously held ethnocentric beliefs and attitudes about African American culture.

While Whiteness was still coded as the norm and constructed as the dominant view on “authority, orderliness, rationality, and control” in many of the classrooms in the school, these teachers did not see their students as “Dangerous Minds” to be feared and subjects in need of control and discipline (Giroux, 1999, p. 241). They have learned to get beyond the self-imposed limitations of stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings by becoming more culturally informed. These teachers send fewer students each year to the office for correction. Instead it is a more personalized approach that takes into account students’ racial identity development and unresponsiveness to some behavioral interventions.

In closing, these teachers would readily state that their practice is not a victory narrative. There are still children in their classrooms who may well lose the opportunity to gain the educational assets necessary for upward mobility. Yet, they acknowledge the cultural beliefs and standards of the 90% African American student population in the school as valid interpretations of reality. These highly qualified teachers recognized,
validated, and demonstrated appreciation for the social capital that their students do possessed in terms of their determination to succeed against the odds, respect for adults who reciprocate this emotional attachment and personal warmth, and the resilience of their character. The teachers in these classrooms do not accept the dismissal, derogation, or silencing of students by teacher or did they chalk up racist behavior to merely cultural misunderstandings. They are activists who have taken a social justice stance and still believe in the passion found in the message of teaching:

The fundamental message of the teacher is this:
You can change your life. Who ever you are, wherever you’ve been, whatever you’ve done, the teacher invites you to a second chance, another round, perhaps a different conclusion (Ayers, 1998, p. xvii)

**Implications for future research**

The study of culturally responsive classroom management is a subject that has only recently received research attention. The findings of this study add to the scholarship on the confluence of culture (i.e., beliefs, values, and behaviors) and management in diverse urban classrooms. It looks closely at the sense-making understandings of three highly effective middle school teachers. The teachers described in this research were able to meet the personal and academic needs of their students by expanding their “cultural content knowledge” and willingness to reflect on their classroom management approaches. Further research is needed to expand understandings of pedagogy that embraces, affirms, and extends socializing behaviors in support of improved academic outcomes for African American students.
Teachers in this study were not familiar with the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy and might have been better classroom managers if they had been exposure to or preparation in culturally responsive methods. However, the findings from this research substantiate earlier research in this area, in that, these teachers, without knowledge of the theory, were validating what has been written by other researchers and theorists. If culturally responsive pedagogy is valid as a theory, subsequent research should confirm that culturally sensitive teachers do in fact have some particular attitudes and practices that align with the theory. Because most of the teachers had extensive experience in urban schooling a degree of their ability to center diversity in guiding and mediating student behavior was attributed to their “personal practical knowledge” of students and classroom situation (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999, p. 31). Further research is needed on how teachers develop and use this knowledge in urban classrooms. How do they reflect on classroom experiences about management and culture, what contextual information is most useful in interpreting events and applications of this stored knowledge?

Another theme for possible study involves examining the relation between professional development in managing and transformed classrooms. Teachers are increasingly asked to create classrooms that go beyond viewing classroom management as primarily rules, rewards, and penalties. They must provide quality educational experiences that develop dispositions and supporting strategies related to management
and diversity. These professional development experiences could be examined for change in the teacher’s enacted management practice and improvement in student learning.

Whereas this study used teachers’ self-disclosed statements and observations to examine their sense-making understandings, a study focused primarily on classroom observations could explore the connections and possible lack of connections between teachers’ perceptions of management, culture, and classroom practice. This research could also include students’ perception of teachers’ classroom practice. Given the extensive literature on classroom management that addresses major themes such as developing rules and procedures, maintaining appropriate behavior, creating positive interpersonal relationships, managing instruction, and dealing with problems, a study on how these themes could be developed within the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy could further refine procedural aspects of classroom management in diverse settings. Such studies could concentrate on how culturally responsive classroom management varies from existing text descriptions of conventional management.

Other directions for future study might include examining the emphasis placed on caring and relationship building in this management approach. In Gay (2000), the point is made that “caring is one of the major pillars of culturally responsive pedagogy” (p. 45). Teachers themselves could conduct self-study or action research project to explore their concepts of caring and the applications in their classrooms. Researchers could also exam how teachers’ gender, race, and other identities influence their pedagogical
practices regarding classroom management and culture? Future research could also explore more closely teachers’ social identities and the influence this has on the strategies they use with diverse students.

In conclusion, social justice concerns evident in policies like zero tolerance approaches suspend, not only students, but also the concept of due process for millions of African American children. It has caused great harm to students who deserve a “second chance” at staying in school and making “adequate yearly progress” towards graduation (Civil Rights Project, 2000, p. 48). Continued research and evaluation of the disproportionate impact of disciplinary consequences on students who can least afford to be placed out of school should be funded by national and local governmental agencies and school boards. Education is not a privilege, but rather a civil right.
APPENDIX A
APPENDIX A

Script # 1: Initial meeting with teachers explaining the purpose of the research and how they were nominated for the project

Good Afternoon,

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I have asked you here today to discuss this research project that explores classroom management in an urban middle school. The project is designed to examine the perceptions, interpretations, and understandings of effective, female, urban teachers’ as it relates culture and management. Specifically, the study will look at the influence of cultural diversity on classroom management decision-making. As explained earlier, the central research question is about the sense-making understandings of White female teachers around classroom management and cultural diversity.

This is a hard question to answer. It will require courage and confidence in what you do to make instruction meaningful and relevant to the lives of children. It probes your self-reflection, inquiry, and decision-making around focused action – namely, classroom management. It involves professional behaviors that are an integral part of being viewed as an effective teacher.

This is also a necessary question. Given that research has found that effective classroom management is a powerful influence on student achievement – greater than students’ general intelligence, home environment, motivation, and socioeconomic status (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993/1994). We need to know how it works in your classrooms. Therefore, there is a necessity that we come to understand how teachers’
explanations for why things “work the way they do” is clearly articulated and made explicit. Gaining an understandings of how you situate yourself within the questions of who I am, what I believe, what experiences I have had that informed and shaped my understandings of classroom management and student diversity is important knowledge. This is information that needs to be shared with prospective and practicing teachers.

Other teachers and your principal have nominated you as effective teacher who have the enthusiasm and determination to actively engage in “difference making” in the lives of African American children. I need to know what keeps you going. What makes you able to successfully accomplish classroom management tasks that defeat others? How do you orchestrate instruction and cultural knowledge to promote academic achievement and prosocial skills with middle school African American children?

I plan to ask questions about your teaching background, stance on classroom management, and cultural diversity. However, just as important, I plan to ask you about how student’s culture influences your day-to-day decision making about what behaviors gets recognized, rewarded, or earmarked as a concern? My intention is to learn more about your story as a teacher – how you “got it” in teaching African American middle school children.

Thank you. Does anyone have any questions or concerns?
APPENDIX B
Script #2: Opening meeting with teachers who agreed to participation in the research project after being nominated and attending an initial meeting.

Dear Teachers:

I invite you to participate in a research project to explore classroom management in this urban middle school. The project is designed to explore the perceptions, interpretations, and understandings of effective, White, female, urban teachers as it relates to their classroom management practices and the influence of cultural diversity on their approach.

Current trends in public schools and teacher characteristics indicate an overwhelming probability that African American children will experience mostly White teachers in their pre-collegiate education. It is estimated, that given the current percentage of African American teachers (7.3%), the average student who has about forty teachers (40) during the P-12 schooling years, will only have two (2) minority teachers. Therefore, I feel it is important to understand how successful White female teachers make sense of and deal with classroom management. Although the literature clearly indicates that classroom management is key to maintaining an effective learning environments and essential to retaining teachers; relatively little is known about successful White female teachers of African American children and their management strategies.

I also believe it is important that pre-service teachers understand how White female teachers, the largest single group of teachers in the nation, “get it” in creating
urban classrooms that support culture, learning, self-discipline, and pro-social behavior. I want you to tell your stories about classroom life and your practice of classroom management.

I assure you that your identity will be protected in this research project. Every effort will be made to maintain your anonymity and the confidentiality of your participation. All audiotapes will be stored in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed after a four-year period upon completion of the project. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns regarding the research. Finally, you are free to leave the project at any time without prejudice and your participation is completely voluntary.

Terrance Hubbard
APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol # 1: Semi-structured ethnographic interview questions

Introduction:

My name is Terrance Hubbard and I am a doctoral candidate in the Integrated Teaching and Learning program at The Ohio State University. My dissertation topic focuses on how White, female, middle school teachers, who primarily teach African American students, reflect on their experiences of classroom management in diverse classrooms. The project examines and describes teacher knowledge and practice of classroom management in an urban context. Before I begin the interview I would like to review the interview protocol with you and ask if you have any questions. Thank you for participating in this research.

1. Tell me a little bit about your background. Why did you want to become a teacher? Did you anticipate working in an urban district?

2. Tell me about your students? What are your students like?

3. Describe any life experiences that prepared you to teach in an urban school.

4. How do you interact with student? What works well for you in communicating with students?

5. What are your challenges in managing the classroom?

6. How would you describe your classroom management style? What do you believe “works?”

7. What are your main goals for classroom management?

8. How do you handle discipline? Are there special things that teachers of African American children should know about discipline? Would you manage your classroom different in another context?

9. How much of what you know about teaching urban children did you learn as a result of teacher training, either pre-service or in-service?

10. Do your classroom management strategies vary depending on the particular cultural group involved?
APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol # 2: Structured interview

Introduction:

My name is Terrance Hubbard and I am a doctoral candidate in the Integrated Teaching and Learning program at The Ohio State University. My dissertation topic focuses on how White, female, middle school teachers, who primarily teach African American students, reflect on their experiences of classroom management in diverse classrooms. The project examines and describes teacher knowledge and practice of classroom management in an urban context. Before I begin the interview I would like to review the interview protocol with you and ask if you have any questions. Thank you for participating in this research.

1. What types of cultural conflicts have you experienced in your classroom that might make it more difficult to have a safe, caring, and orderly environment?

2. Complete the following sentence: The best way to meet children where they are behaviorally and take them where they need to go is to…

3. Urban teachers, their students, and school exist within a broader social, economic, and political context. What influence does this statement, if any; have on your classroom management practices and policies? Are these different contexts important considerations?

4. Complete this sentence: The best way to create classrooms that support culture, learning, self-discipline, personal responsibility, and prosocial behavior is to…

5. What actions do you take to gain knowledge of your students’ cultural backgrounds (i.e., understandings of cultural heritage, behavior sanctions, rules of etiquette, value orientations, standards for achievement, learning styles, etc.)? What influence does this knowledge, if any; have on your interactions with students?

6. How did you develop your classroom management approach? What experiences, cultural knowledge, community values, and cultural norms of the students’ do you use in your approach?
APPENDIX E
Interview Protocol # 3: Structured Interview

Introduction:

My name is Terrance Hubbard and I am a doctoral candidate in the Integrated Teaching and Learning program at The Ohio State University. My dissertation topic focuses on how White, female, middle school teachers, who primarily teach African American students, reflect on their experiences of classroom management in diverse classrooms. The project examines and describes teacher knowledge and practice of classroom management in an urban context. Before I begin the interview I would like to review the interview protocol with you and ask if you have any questions. Thank you for participating in this research.

Interview questions:

1. To the best of your knowledge, please describe in what ways your classroom is a diverse classroom (i.e., gender, race, culture, ability, etc.)?

2. What classroom management practices do you think “work” with your students? How did you come to this understanding?

3. Can you describe a specific example when the classroom management approach you used was effective with the students in your classroom? What made this a successful experience?

4. What challenges have you encountered when managing your classroom that relate to the cultural of your students?

5. How have you designed your classroom management strategies to facilitate success in working with students from diverse backgrounds?

6. What expectations do you have for classroom behavior and responsibility? And, how do you communicate those expectations to students?

7. How do you typically handle discipline issues in your classroom?

8. If at all, how do you think your race impacts discipline in your classroom? If you think it does, can you think of a time when your race worked for your and a time when it worked against you?

9. How does culture play a role in discipline issues?

10. What would your ideal classroom management moment look like?
APPENDIX F
APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol # 4: Focus Group Questions
Introduction:

My name is Terrance Hubbard and I am a doctoral candidate in the Integrated Teaching and Learning program at The Ohio State University. My dissertation topic focuses on how White, female, middle school teachers, who primarily teach African American students, reflect on their experiences of classroom management in diverse classrooms. The project examines and describes teacher knowledge and practice of classroom management in an urban context. Before I begin the interview I would like to review the interview protocol with you and ask if you have any questions. Thank you for participating in this research.

1. How is knowing who you are as a person, understanding the contexts in which you teach, and questioning your knowledge and assumptions about students important in shaping your classroom management approaches?

2. What approaches are most appropriate when students in one particular classroom come from a variety of cultural backgrounds? Is it feasible for teachers to vary their management strategies and ways of speaking to accommodate students from different backgrounds?

3. How does your classroom management practice differ; if any, from the conventional management approaches you learned in your teacher education program (e.g., those emphasizing behaviorism)?

4. During the school year, how do you engage students in discussions about the class norms, be explicit about your expectations, model the behaviors you expect, and provide opportunities for students to practice appropriate behaviors?

5. Describe what it means to “get it” as an urban teacher? What experiences helped you feel you “got it” in reaching your students?

6. What influence does your culture, identity, knowledge, and worldview (i.e., who I am, what I believe, and what experiences I have had) influence your classroom management decisions?
APPENDIX G
APPENDIX G

Data Sources and Contexts for Exploring Teacher’s Classroom Management and Culturally Understandings

Data Sources

Ethnographic Interviews
Biographical Interviews
Observations of teaching (every week 15 weeks)
Classroom Maps of Walls (Walking the Walls)
Informal Conversations/ (teachers, peers)
Formal Interviews of teachers (beginning, middle and ending)
Interview Transcripts
Debriefing Conferences about Interviews
Survey of Major Classroom Management Themes
Focus Group Meetings on Culture/Race/Management
Cultural Questions on Teacher’s Backgrounds
Informal Conversations/Principal
Formal Interview of Principal
Field Notes
Observation Comments
Video Taping
Documents
Literature Review

Contexts

School Classrooms
Hallways/Lobby
School Time Out Room
Parent Conference Meeting
School Office
Teachers Lunchroom
School Gym
Front of Building – Bus Dismissal/Arrival

Data Sources by Research Questions

1. What meanings do the teachers construct about their students, themselves, teaching, classroom communication and management? How do these meanings shape and inform their management practices?
• Biographical Interviews
• Ethnographic Interviews
• Observations of Teaching
• Informal Conversations
• Formal Interviews
• Debriefing Conferences
• Focus Group Meetings
• Field Notes
• Document Collection
• Classroom Maps of Walls

2. How do these teachers develop a well-grounded classroom management framework that uses student’s experiences, cultures, community values and cultural norms? When did these teachers feel they “got it” in creating productive well-managed classrooms?

• Biographical Interviews
• Observations of teaching
• Informal Conversations
• Formal Interviews of teachers
• Interview Transcripts
• Debriefing Conferences about Interviews
• Document Collection
• Survey of Major Classroom Management Themes
• Focus Group Meetings
• Field Notes
• Literature Review
• Observation Comments

3. What influence does the teacher’s situatedness (i.e., culture, identity, interpretation and knowledge – “who I am, what I believe, and what experiences I have had”) have on their management decision-making?

• Ethnographic Interviews
• Biographical Interviews
• Informal Conversations
• Observations of Teaching
• Formal Interviews
• Debriefing Conferences
• Focus Group Meetings
• Field Notes
• Cultural Questions on Teacher’s Background
### Culturally Responsive Classroom Management


#### Establishing Expectations for Behavior
- Explicit about their expectations
- Engage students in discussions about class norms
- Model the behavior they expect
- Provide opportunities for students to practice.
- Recognize that differences in discourse style can have a direct effect on students’ behavior

### Culturally Responsive Teaching

Ladson-Billings, (1994)

#### Cultural Competence
- Students are part of a collective effort designed to encourage academic and cultural excellence, expectations are clearly expressed, skills taught, and interpersonal relations are exhibited.

**CRT is Comprehensive**
- Develop intellectual, social, emotional, and political learning.

### Theme from Study: Teacher Confidence

- A highly developed sense of confidence and personal efficacy (i.e., beliefs regarding teacher’s ability to positively affect student outcomes) supports effective social skills outcomes.

### Data/Findings

“If a child is going to do something in my classroom that I don’t agree with then I tell them that and I tell the parent that also. I am not going to allow that behavior in my classroom. I don’t say please for doing my job. You don’t have to make excuses for doing what your need to do. You stand up and you do it.” (Jackie)

* * * * *

### Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, Curran (2004); Powell, McLaughlin, Savage, & Zehm (2001)

#### Creating Caring, Inclusive Classrooms
- Planned efforts to cross social borders and develop caring, respectful relationships
- Forge positive relationships with students by sharing stories about their lives outside of school.
- Learn about students’ concerns and opinions
- Invite students to make choices and decisions about class activities.

### Culturally Responsive Teaching


#### Caring
- Teachers demonstrate caring for children as students and as people.
- Caring is a pillar of culturally responsive pedagogy. It is manifested in the form of teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about students’ human value, intellectual capability, and performance responsibilities.

**Sense of connectedness.**

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• Deliberately model respect for diversity
• Work to create a sense of community – anticipating cultural conflicts and promoting positive relationships among students.
• Communicating and collaborating with families.

Concerned adult who command respect, are respectful of pupils, and who through caring, require students to meet high academic and behavioral standards. Explicitly teach and model personal values – patience, persistence, responsibility to self and others (Foster, p. 576)

Theme: Relationships – Developing genuine relationships based on care, trust, and respect with African American students is essential in attaining higher levels of classroom management.

Data/Finding: “You have to let them know that I care about you. They have to know that you care” (Wuise). I build relationships, they need to see that you are willing to give extra time, to invest in them and work hard for them. They know that I care about them and how well they are doing” (Jackie).

* * * * *

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

Culturally Responsive Teaching
Gay (2000)

Dealing With Problem Behavior

• Reflect on the kinds of behaviors they judge to be problematic and consider how these are related to race and ethnicity.
• Examine the ways that race and ethnicity influence the use of disciplinary consequences.
• View behaviors as reflections of cultural norms, remains calm and non-defensive and considers a variety of more constructive options.

Validating and Empowering

Culturally responsive teachers strive to become knowledgeable about the cultures and communities in which their students live. They acknowledge the legitimacy of different ways of speaking and interacting. Demonstrate ambitious and appropriate expectations and exhibit support for students.

Theme: Interventions – Guiding, mediating, and scaffolding students’ culturally informed behavior is a more feasible approach to classroom management than controlling and manipulating student behavior.

Data/Findings: If I can get them to the side and talk to them in a calm voice I am much more successful. If I stay calm and have a very calming tone when I am talking to the, then I feel they respect that and they can come down to where I am and tell me what’s going on with them” (Jackie).
LIST OF REFERENCES


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