

# URBAN TEACHERS' PROFESSED CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

## Reflections of Culturally Responsive Teaching

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*Thirteen urban educators teaching from 1st through 12th grade selected from 7 cities across the United States were interviewed in this qualitative research study to determine if the classroom management strategies they use reflect the research on culturally responsive teaching. Participants revealed using several management strategies that reflect culturally responsive teaching: development of personal relationships with students, creation of caring communities, establishment of business-like learning environments, use of culturally and ethnically congruent communication processes, demonstrations of assertiveness, and utilization of clearly stated and enforced expectations. Questions arise concerning the ability of teacher education programs to effectively prepare preservice teachers for successful classroom management in urban schools.*

**Keywords:** *culturally responsive teaching; urban students; classroom management*

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**Haberman (1995) explained,** “Whatever the reasons for children’s behavior—whether poverty, personality, a handicapping condition, a dysfunctional home, or an abusive environment—classroom teachers are responsible for managing children, seeing that they work together in a confined space for long periods, and ensuring that they learn” (p. 22). Haberman’s proclamation summarizes the realization that student learning is contingent on teach-

ers' ability to create and sustain optimal learning environments. Urban classrooms can and often do present many challenges for teachers in the development of productive learning spaces. The reasons for these challenges are numerous. Crosby (1999) reported, "The new wave of immigrants of the past 25 years from Hispanic countries, from the Middle East, and from Asian countries has washed over the urban schools like a tidal wave bringing with it additional challenges, this time cultural and linguistic" (p. 104). Gibbs, Huang, and Associates (1998) reported that, "In adolescents, school phobia or truancy may actually represent fear of a violent or chaotic school environment or fear of social rejection due to some cultural, racial, or economic difference from the majority of the student body" (p. 17). Urban teachers have added responsibilities in addressing these critical issues that affect their students' needs.

Gaining students' cooperation in urban classrooms involves establishing a classroom atmosphere in which teachers are aware of and address students' cultural and ethnic needs as well as their social, emotional, and cognitive needs. As Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) stated, "Any educational or training system that ignores the history or perspective of its learners or does not attempt to adjust its teaching practices to benefit all its learners is contributing to inequality of opportunity" (p. 26). The problem lies in the fact that most urban teachers will be and are inexperienced middle-class White European Americans as Crosby (1999) indicated:

The teacher turnover rate in the urban schools is much higher than in the suburban schools. . . . The result is that urban schools, especially those in the inner cities, are often staffed largely by newly hired or uncertified teachers. These teachers, who were trained to teach students from middle class families and who often come from middle class families themselves, now find themselves engulfed by minority students, immigrants, and other students from low income families—students whose values and experiences are very different from their own. (p. 302)

The obvious challenge is encouraging preservice teachers to want to teach in the urban centers, and then educating them to respond to

the cultural and ethnic characteristics and needs of the children and adolescents who attend urban schools.

Culturally responsive teaching involves purposely responding to the needs of the many culturally and ethnically diverse learners in classrooms. It involves implementing specifically student-oriented instructional processes as well as choosing and delivering ethnically and culturally relevant curricula. Culturally responsive teachers use communication processes that reflect students' values and beliefs held about learning, the responsibilities of teachers, and the roles of students in school settings (Brown, 2002; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). I describe self-professed classroom management techniques used by 13 urban teachers. These educators' chosen practices are analyzed and compared to culturally responsive strategies proposed by a number of researchers to determine if their actions actually reflect the research on culturally responsive pedagogy.

### **RESEARCH ON CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE MANAGEMENT**

Culturally responsive management focuses on many teaching components, from as broad as choosing appropriate curricula and as specific as using congruent communication processes. Effective classroom management also involves the utilization of many essential research-based pedagogical processes as well as the ability to respond appropriately to the emotional, social, ethnic, cultural, and cognitive needs of students. Effectively managing students generally involves the ability to develop a classroom social environment in which students agree to cooperate with teachers and fellow students in pursuit of academic growth. It is a complex process that involves much interpersonal and pedagogical awareness and application of strategies in these two realms. In truth, most researchers and teachers may agree that managing student behavior while maintaining an appropriate learning environment is as much art as

it is science. Researchers have addressed both of these views of management in studying students' and teachers' behaviors.

#### A CARING ATTITUDE

Most significant perhaps to each child or adolescent in urban schools is the willingness and ability of an educator to genuinely touch each student's social and emotional persona. Urban students may experience a greater need than suburban students for developing close relationships with teachers (Brown, 2001). This need is based on possible feelings of alienation, struggles with identity development, and what Dryfoos (1998) reported concerning adolescents at risk who "lack nurturance, attention, supervision, understanding, and caring," and may have inadequate communication processes with adults in their homes (p. 37).

Ladson-Billings (1994) described the nature of classrooms of effective teachers of African American students: "Psychological safety is a hallmark of each of these classrooms. The students feel comfortable and supported" (p. 73). Gordon (1999) agreed in concluding, "The best urban teachers show warmth and affection to their students and give priority to the development of their relationships with students as an avenue to student growth" (p. 305).

In extensive interviews with more than 150 middle-level students in six Philadelphia urban schools, Wilson and Corbett (2001) revealed a common student need: "Essentially the students naturally zeroed in on a phenomenon central to effective urban education that researchers have labored to depict for years—the quality of the relationship between inner-city students and their teachers" (p. 88). Howard (2001) elicited African American elementary students' perceptions of culturally relevant teaching strategies within urban contexts. He discovered that students preferred "teachers who displayed caring bonds and attitudes toward them, and teachers who establish community- and family-type classroom environments" (p. 131). Urban middle-school students interviewed by Brown (1999) revealed that they clearly recognized which teachers cared about them and wanted teachers to demonstrate a more per-

sonal connection than that of the traditional teacher-student relationship.

#### ESTABLISHING ASSERTIVENESS AND AUTHORITY

Researchers indicate that urban teachers need to be explicitly assertive with students establishing an environment in which students honor their authority. Wilson and Corbett (2001) and Delpit (1995) reported that urban classroom environments should be places in which expectations are clearly stated, no excuses are permitted, and inappropriate behaviors are dealt with immediately. Weiner (1999) explained that urban teachers need moral authority to be successful: "Urban teachers' primary source of control is their *moral* [italics in original] authority, which rests on the perception of students and parents that the teacher is knowledgeable about the subject matter, competent in pedagogy, and committed to helping all students succeed, in school and life" (p. 77).

One way in which teachers can explicitly demonstrate assertiveness and establish authority is through their verbal exchanges with students. Delpit (1995) indicated that many urban children expect much more direct verbal commands than perhaps suburban or rural students may expect or receive. Delpit cited Snow et al. (1976) in explaining "working class mothers use more directives to their children than do middle- and upper-class" (p. 34). Heath indicated that children from working-class families had difficulty following the indirect requests that many teachers use because they did not sound like rules or explicit directives to them (cited in Delpit, 1985). Delpit explained that when urban students ignore commands that sound more like questions than directives, teachers may perceive students as uncooperative and insubordinate whereas students innocently fail to understand what is expected and why they are being disciplined. Delpit added, "Black children expect an authority figure to act with authority" (p. 35). Delpit described how to establish authority in a classroom:

The authoritative teacher can control the class through exhibition of personal power; establishes meaningful interpersonal relationships that garner student respect; exhibits a strong belief that all students

can learn; establishes a standard of achievement and “pushes” the students to achieve that standard; and holds the attention of the students by incorporating interactional features of Black communicative style in his or her teaching. (p. 36)

#### **ESTABLISHING CONGRUENT COMMUNICATION PROCESSES**

Creating a positive learning environment requires attentiveness to the way in which teachers communicate with students. Ladson-Billings (1994) revealed the responses of eighth-grade students from one urban school when she asked what they liked about their teacher: “She listens to us! She respects us! She let’s us express our opinions! She looks us in the eye when she talks to us! She smiles at us! She speaks to us when she sees us in the hall or in the cafeteria!” (p. 68). You may notice from these responses that students recognize nonverbal language more so than verbal responses to their behaviors and comments. They notice teachers’ facial expressions and other body movements, especially when they believe teachers should be listening to them.

Differences in communication processes affect the quality of relationships between teachers and their African, Hispanic, and Native American and immigrant students. Gay (2000) explained that African Americans have a social interaction style referred to as “call response” in which students may frequently speak while the teacher is speaking as a response to their feelings about a teacher’s comments. These are not meant as rude disruptions but rather as an acknowledgment of agreement or perhaps concern about teachers’ comments, lectures, or explanations. Gay added,

African Americans “gain the floor” or get participatory entry into conversations through personal assertiveness, the strength of the impulse to be involved, and the persuasive power of the point they wish to make, rather than waiting for an “authority” to grant permission. (p. 91)

Educators’ negative reactions to call response may cause and accentuate strained relationships between students and teachers (Obidah & Manheim Teel, 2001).

Some Asian students smile and laugh as a reaction to their confusion or misunderstanding of language or principles they are learning. Gay (2000) noted that this is common among Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Cambodians who use *ritualized laughter* to maintain harmony and avoid challenging authority.

Many Asian American students may also avoid confrontational situations such as correcting fellow students' mistakes, or responding competitively in discussions or recitations. Gay (2000) explained that Asian students are affected by "traditional values and socialization that emphasize collectivism, saving face, maintaining harmony, filial piety, interdependence, modesty in self-preservation, and restraint in taking oppositional points of view" (p. 105). Recent immigrants who are second-language learners will most likely be relatively quiet during class times as they attempt to learn English through listening as opposed to responding to teacher questions (Cary, 2000).

#### DEMANDING EFFORT

African and Hispanic American students, in a slightly different interpretation of "caring for students," explained that they knew teachers cared when they pressured students in an assertive manner to complete assignments, pay attention, and perform better academically (Brown, 1999; Howard, 2001; Wilson & Corbett, 2001). Wilson and Corbett, for instance, described middle-level students' views that urban teachers are expected to exert explicit pressure on students to complete homework even if they provided excuses for not completing work.

Essentially, we interpreted students to be saying that the effective teachers adhered to a "no excuses" policy. That is, there were no acceptable reasons why every student eventually could not complete his or her work, and there were no acceptable reasons why a teacher would give up on a child. The premise was that every child should complete every assignment and that was the teacher's job to ensure that this happened. (p. 64)

Howard (2001) described one urban elementary student's views of teacher caring, "The student's comments would appear to reflect

a teacher practice that is essential to culturally responsive teaching, which is creating a learning environment that helps students to reach their highest levels of academic achievement” (p. 139). Teachers can create a caring learning environment through several means, and assertive and explicit demands for academic performance and cooperative behavior appear to be a need for many urban students.

Culturally responsive classroom management is connected to a teacher’s ability to use culturally responsive curricular materials and instructional processes. Research reveals, however, that even greater than those two essential components of teaching is an educator’s knowledge of and demonstration of caring attitudes and actions, congruent communication, assertiveness and authority, and demands for students’ efforts and academic production.

## METHOD

I conducted a qualitative study to determine how urban teachers implement several educational practices, such as instructional processes, communication patterns, working with parents/caregivers, and choosing curricula. Extensive interviews were completed with 13 teachers (1st through 12th grades) from urban schools in seven American cities. In this article, a specifically focused component of the broader study, I reveal data collected to determine if the classroom management strategies teachers professed to use match the research on culturally responsive teaching.

Teachers were selected for the study based on either personal knowledge of their teaching effectiveness or information gathered from colleagues in each city who recognized these teachers as effective urban educators. Each one volunteered to be interviewed for the study. A random sampling of respondents was not initiated. Findings from this qualitative analysis are not generalizable to other populations. Teachers interviewed were from the following cities working at the grade levels noted:

- two middle-school and two high school teachers from Philadelphia,
- one primary teacher from New York City, Harlem,

- two teachers from Chicago: one primary and one high school,
- two teachers from Los Angeles: one primary and one high school,
- two intermediate teachers from San Francisco,
- one middle-school teacher from Minneapolis, and
- one high school teacher from Wichita, Kansas.

Among the teachers interviewed, one is native Sri Lankan, one is African American, two are Hispanic American, and nine teachers are White. Respondents' years of teaching experience ranged from 2 to 33 years with an average of 16 years experience. The demographics of each teacher's classroom include students from African, Hispanic, Native, and Asian American backgrounds as well as a wide variety of recent immigrant and refugee students. The majority of students these teachers encountered received free lunch as an indication of socioeconomic status of the neighborhoods in which they lived.

Five of the interviews were audiotaped, and tapes were transcribed. Eight interviews were conducted by telephone, and notes were written during these approximately 3-hr interview sessions. Transcriptions and written interview notes were analyzed using the constant comparative method to identify specific themes that emerged from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

I developed a nonscheduled interview guide (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Thirty-four questions were asked concerning several components of classroom practice, student-teacher relationships, curricular emphasis, and management strategies. Among the primary classroom management questions asked were the following three:

1. How do you interact with students?
2. How would you describe your management style?
3. What works well for you in communicating with students?

## FINDINGS

Data were analyzed in a descriptive manner rather than a quantitative analysis to provide an in-depth view of how teachers successfully managed their classrooms. The analysis of data revealed five

primary themes that are presented individually with teachers' explanations and quotes that represent the majority of those interviewed.

**DEVELOPING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND MUTUAL RESPECT THROUGH INDIVIDUALIZED ATTENTION**

The first and primary characteristic described by most of these 13 teachers is the importance and value of providing individualized attention by developing a personal relationship with each student. Teachers take time out of each day to communicate individually with many students on nonacademic matters. Anita, a middle-school teacher for 27 years in the same Philadelphia school, described her philosophy of teaching:

I make a real effort to be involved in my children's lives, and if I have to, to be involved in their home lives by providing some of the things they need. I don't just look at them as bodies to be educated—I look at them as people that need to be nurtured.<sup>1</sup>

Anita added, "Kids feel that if you really don't care about them then they're not going to care about you."

Several techniques are implemented by these teachers to develop meaningful relationships with students. A Los Angeles high school teacher, Adrienne, replied, "I do a lot of hugs—I use body language. I rarely raise my voice. I treat them with respect. I'm friendly, but not their friend." Her students are primarily African American with a smaller percentage of Latino students.

Jeff is a high school teacher from Wichita, Kansas. His school has an even percentage of African and Hispanic American students at about 30% each. Many of the Hispanic students are from migrant families and are quite transitory throughout the year. Jeff responded to this question by admitting, "I try to get to know as many kids as possible on a personal level; so, when I see them in the hall, I can ask about their families. I try to see them in other settings outside of school."

Pete, a Philadelphia high school teacher, is responsible for teaching second-language learners (SLL). Several of his students each year are refugee students who are experiencing the added

stress of attempting to adapt to a hostile community and school environment while living with the psychological scars of surviving a war zone in their native lands. Pete described the classroom community he develops: "I like to create a friendliness and kind of security and belonging that has been my focus above the academic stuff. The academic stuff is there but that can't happen unless students feel safe, valued, and secure."

Susan, an elementary teacher from San Francisco, echoed similar ideas, "I welcome kids when they come into the room. I always take attendance and lunch count myself to be sure to make contact with every child."

Mutual respect for students was described by teachers as demonstrating a personal interest in each child and creating a safe and secure environment for students in their classrooms.

#### CREATING CARING LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Self-descriptions of management styles varied among respondents; however, these were the common themes:

- Teachers demonstrate their care for students in many ways.
- A community of learners is created so students feel like a family.
- Teachers develop business-like atmospheres.

All of these teachers mentioned in their interviews their strong commitment to an ethic of caring for students. Pete, the Philadelphia high school English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) teacher, described the relationship he develops with his students and how his demeanor and attitude affect the class:

My classes are a mirror of me. Whenever I've walked into a class happy, positive, and upbeat, I've never had a problem. But, I've never walked into a class ready to go toe-to-toe with someone and not had a problem. And how quickly they [students] pick up on it is amazing.

Although there are many components to managing a classroom successfully, Pete places the caring piece into perspective saying, "It doesn't matter what good content you have, or what good curriculum you have, or what exciting lessons you have; if you don't care

about students and they know that, you don't have a chance to get to them."

Collete teaches high school English in Philadelphia and described what she believes about connecting with her students: "I really believe you have to make that social and emotional connection with kids in order to get inside their heads. You have to get to their heart before you get to their head. The fact that you care makes them see you differently."

Teachers who create a community of learners enforce the attitude and belief that, "When we're all in this room, we're here to help one another; any behavior that threatens this value will be addressed and discouraged." One of the teachers who Ladson-Billings (1994) interviewed "insists that her students form a viable social community before they can become a viable learning community" (p. 40). Colette, from a Philadelphia high school, described one of her community-building activities:

We play this game at the beginning of the year. Each person introduces themselves, and then states something they have done that they think no one in the class has done. I always tell them to keep it clean! I tell them about myself first, just to get them talking. I try to get them to laugh, because when you laugh, you're more receptive. I try to create an atmosphere of trust.

Jackie, who taught for a while in a New York City elementary school in Harlem and has taught in Philadelphia for more than 5 years, offered this advice:

You have to be real. I cannot pretend that I am from Harlem or Washington Heights. Their experience is not my experience. I think convincing them that what I have to say is important is the key. That happens through consistency—through just being honest. Trying to fit in to be one of them never works. I always follow up and keep my promises to them. Doing exactly what you say you'll do means something to students. They experience so many empty promises.

Many urban youth lead challenging lives outside of school based on their responsibilities for raising siblings, working to make money for the family several hours a week, or raising their own families. Despite all these responsibilities, some teachers are reluc-

tant to permit students to make simple decisions about their behavior, what they study, or how they learn best. Urban students with these kinds of responsibilities outside of school resent being treated like preschoolers when decision-making opportunities arise. Shanika, a middle-school teacher in Philadelphia, described the life of one of her fifth graders:

One of my students was in court last week. She's on probation for shoplifting. She has a hard time accepting authority. The school psychologist informed me that she is basically the mother figure for the family. Her own mother relies on her to take care of all of the other children—including a baby the mother has now. So, when this student comes to school and someone tells her she can't go to the bathroom, she gives you a look that says, "What are you talking about? I take care of everyone at home!" I think it's like that for a lot of kids. I'm starting to feel that they are not badly behaved or they don't respect authority, but they are given a lot authority at home. They can fend for themselves. It's unrealistic now for them to come in and be expected to respect someone else's rules.

Many students are ready to take control over circumstances of their learning. School is an appropriate forum for these democratic processes to be shared. Hyman and Snook (2000) emphasized this idea:

By using democratic processes in parenting and teaching, we help children develop internal controls based on the social contracts negotiated among parents, teachers, and peers. Teachers in democratic classrooms emphasize cooperation, mutual goal setting, and shared responsibility. Students behave because it is the right thing to do and because they respect the rights of others. (p. 495)

Learning is a highly emotional process, and the kind of classroom learning environment that teachers create does affect a students' emotional state of mind. Establishing a safe community within a classroom may be perceived as off-task instructional behavior; however, these actions actually lead to a productive learning environment. Wilson and Corbett (2001) placed the value of focusing on the learning environments in perspective: "These classroom environment differences had little to do with gradations

of individuals' acquisition of knowledge or with nuances in the content covered; instead, environmental characteristics determined whether the majority of students learned anything at all" (p. 42). Jeff, the Wichita high school English teacher, provided some valuable advice: "You're there to teach kids, not subjects. We often forget this point."

#### **ESTABLISHING BUSINESS-LIKE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

Students want to be treated with respect and provided an opportunity to grow. Adrienne, the Los Angeles high school teacher, has on occasion dismissed students from her room. She builds a business attitude in her room when it is time for learning, and her students do often support it as she describes, "One student said to me, 'Can't we get rid of this student? She's bothering me.'" Adrienne described the management style in her high school classroom:

My students know that I really want what's best for them. I give a lot of praise, and they know it's real. I'll say to students, "If you're in my class, you've made a decision." They have an external locus of control, and I try to help them take control of those factors they can affect. I say to them, "If your behavior affects someone else's learning, you're out of here." I also send students out when they're not ready for class.

Adrienne creates the learning environment that students described to Wilson and Corbett (2001) and that Delpit (1995) promoted in which expectations are clearly stated, no excuses are permitted, and inappropriate behaviors are dealt with immediately.

Polly, who teaches 9th and 10th graders who have failed to do passing work prior to entering her high school in Chicago, described her management style as

tough love—I use it with students and teachers. I tell students, "I'm here to help you. I'm not going to let you slide! You're not going to get away with acting the wrong way or not doing the work." We use very structured routines here. Students know what to expect down to every little detail.

Many of Polly's students have police records from gang activity and other illegal actions that may explain the structured environment that exists in her school.

Anita, a Philadelphia middle school teacher for 25 years, explained her business-like attitude on managing students:

I think my strong personality comes through to my students which says, "You're here to learn, and this is what you're going to do." If students don't seem to understand that then I contact their parents right away and let them know, "I went to school here." I'm not asking them [students] to fly out windows. I don't ask them to do anything I wouldn't ask my own children to do.

The experienced teachers were adamant about how they established these business-like learning environments while managing to maintain mutually respectful relationships with students. All but one of the novice teachers (teachers with fewer than 3 years of experience) explained how they failed to create clearly stated expectations and enforce those during the year.

#### **ESTABLISHING CONGRUENT COMMUNICATION PROCESSES**

Effective teachers encourage congruent communication processes with students and are able to create meaningful bonds with their students based on genuine social interactions. Several teachers mentioned that their students needed many opportunities for socialization as a part of instructional activities and designed learning experiences that promoted socialization and discussion. Teachers of second-language learners were particularly conscious of students' need for verbal interaction during class time.

Lisa, whose first-grade students in a Los Angeles elementary school are primarily recent immigrant Mexican Americans, uses some class time to permit students to settle disputes with their friends:

They're always into arguments with each other. I use conversation to get them to think about their behavior and to learn to negotiate;

even with me on certain issues. I expect them to talk. That's how they learn the language.

Pete, who teaches high school second-language learners in Philadelphia, described some of the activities that he initiates for his students, many of whom are refugees:

I get my students moving around and interacting with each other during class. I allow students the freedom to talk to each other and exchange ideas. When you're learning language, you have to allow students to speak it. This year we did a unit on fables, and the students wrote and illustrated them. Then we invited kindergarten students in as judges as my students performed their fables in front of them.

Differences in communication styles and expectations of oral behavior can also affect the quality of the relationship between teachers and their African, Hispanic, and Native American and other immigrant students. Adrienne described her African American high school students from Los Angeles, "Conversation is their primary priority. It's so unconscious. They are from very verbal environments. I find that they can handle side discussions and engage in the main discussion at the same time. They're not talking to be disruptive." Realizing this characteristic can help urban teachers develop appropriate instructional activities that build on these interactions instead of discouraging socialization among students.

Listening may be one of the most powerful means of establishing respectful relationships with students. As I was waiting to interview Colette in a Philadelphia high school, several students came into the room. Colette caught them at the door to tell them that she needed to speak to me during her planning period this particular day. Students frequently come into her room during their study halls and lunch periods to chat with her. Colette explained:

I talk to them, I'll listen to them. A kid told me, "I can tell you anything." I don't have any boys [children of her own], and these teenage males want to talk to me about personal stuff. Why are they telling me? Don't they have anybody at home to talk about this to? I think it's just an indicator that they feel comfortable. I think they know that I care about them.

The power of explicitly addressing communication processes between students and teachers cannot be overlooked if teachers desire student cooperation.

**TEACHING WITH ASSERTIVENESS AND  
CLEARLY STATED EXPECTATIONS**

One particularly troubling weakness among novice teachers is their lack of assertiveness with students. Often teachers expect student obedience and to be treated with respect merely because they are teachers (Obidah & Manheim Teel, 2001). The reaction from teachers is then the use of a mild-mannered approach with students in which teachers make requests and expect students to respond with enthusiasm merely because they use the word, "please." The four novice teachers (fewer than 3 years experience) who were interviewed admit their initial reluctance to establish high expectations for behavior and academic achievement and the resultant challenge that presents to their classroom order. Jeff, a high school English teacher from Wichita, spoke of his first year reluctance to establish clear expectations:

I started teaching here when I was 21 years old. My students' brothers and sisters were older than I was. When I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, my students would tell me. I had a hard time establishing authority.

Shanika, who teaches in a Philadelphia middle school, noted, "I started off very softly with my management issues. I didn't set any limits, and so I had a hard time the rest of the year."

The experienced teachers who were interviewed were well aware of the need to establish and uphold clear expectations for behavior and to enforce their expectations. They were also aware of the need to act assertively with students. Diane, an experienced fifth-grade San Francisco teacher, explained her transformation from easygoing to an assertive teaching personality:

I developed my inner teacher voice. One woman, Gilda Bloom, calls it, "Find your inner bitch." It means you mean business, and its got to come from your toes." I respect my students, and it takes a

while to build that trust. You have to be consistent with kindness and respect for students. I always treat them fairly.

Colette, the Philadelphia high school teacher, provided this advice for novice urban teachers:

I think somebody that really wants to be an urban teacher has to have heart; but they have to have chutzpah, too. You can't come in here all soft voiced and meek and mild. They're going to eat you up and spit you out. And those kids can sense whether you're afraid of them or not. I said in a joking manner, while I was wearing a Burger King crown one day, "I am the queen in here!" They have to know that you expect things of them because sometimes these kids don't have anything expected of them at home. They're like ships awash in the sea of life.

Delpit (1995) reinforced Colette's beliefs as she described the expectations of many African American students:

Black people often view issues of power and authority differently than people from mainstream middle class backgrounds. Many people of color expect authority to be earned by personal efforts and exhibited by personal characteristics. In other words, "the authoritative person gets to be a teacher because she is authoritative." Some members of middle class cultures, by contrast, expect one to achieve authority by the acquisition of an authoritative role. That is, "the teacher is the authority because she is the teacher." (p. 35)

Acting with fear toward students is perhaps a more dangerous reaction by teachers in urban classrooms than failing to establish clear expectations for behavior and academic progress. Weiner (1999) provided this warning to teachers who demonstrate fear of their students:

When teachers are intimidated by their students, they're unable to address behavior straightforwardly because their fear is paralyzing. In my experience in working with new teachers who are afraid of their students but unwilling to admit it, the strategy most adopt is to ignore the misconduct. Children know when teachers fear them and resent it because the fear is demeaning in its reversal of appropriate adult-child relations. The misbehaving child is not receiving suitable guidance from the adult in authority, and he or she realizes it perhaps more quickly than the adult. (p. 76)

A challenging aspect to managing students is establishing an appropriate balance of power in a classroom. Teachers must maintain authority status and provide students with some decision-making authority while avoiding power struggles with students. Shanika, who is in her 2nd year of teaching in a Philadelphia middle school, described how she falls into power struggles with students:

Some kids acting out just want power. Then, when you give them attention, they're taking the power away from you. I definitely fall into that with certain students. They just push my buttons. Then I sometimes say something to embarrass them in front of the class. That's cruel, and it's engaging in a power struggle that really wastes everyone's time. That's something I really want to work on—how to communicate with students when they're really in their thing. I really don't want to kick students out.

Power struggles between teachers and students often result in more hostility and a complete lack of respect between the two. It is wise for teachers to avoid power struggles initiated by students. Students have power, and as they enter middle school and advance to high school their power base increases as they attempt to impress peers and other classmates by initiating arguments with teachers. Effective educators recognize students' power and defuse it by ignoring a student's attempt to engage in an argument, or providing the student with an escape route to save face in front of peers. Colette shares her view of handling power issues with students, "I don't get into any pissing contests with any kid. I learned that early on. I just think to myself, 'This situation has more power than my arguing about it will.'"

The suggestions from these teachers regarding the importance of being assertive and the advice to provide opportunities for students to become involved in a democratic sense in classroom processes may appear to some as opposing possibilities. Teachers must act assertively in responding to inappropriate behavior and as they establish explicit guidelines for behavioral and academic expectations mutually with students. Assertive behavior is required as teachers enforce expectations as a way of following through with

classroom policies and protecting students physically, socially, and academically.

Democratic opportunities are provided to students when they are invited to become involved in decision making regarding classroom policies, curricular choices, assessment options, and other classroom decisions that affect their motivation and interests. Using democratic decision-making opportunities should not create a breach in the rules that are established to protect the classroom community and sense of cooperation among students that is needed for learning to occur.

Effectively managing students, although guided by effective practice and research, also involves a series of highly fluid and dynamic actions by teachers that often cannot be predetermined due to the nature of humans. All of these 13 urban teachers have developed awareness and a certain savvy with some management principles required to create a cooperative spirit within their students.

## CONCLUSION

Researchers in the field of culturally responsive teaching have provided educators with specific strategies for addressing the learning profiles and needs of a diverse population of students (Cary, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Weiner, 1999). The majority of students who reside in and attend schools in the urban centers of America are a highly culturally, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse population. More than 80% of the teachers who will enter these urban classrooms will be primarily inexperienced teachers who are middle-class White European Americans (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

I interviewed 13 urban teachers for the current study to determine if and how they establish a classroom management system that reflects the needs of learners whom they encounter each day. Evidence exists that every one of these 13 teachers uses a number of specific management strategies that support culturally responsive pedagogy.

A significant finding is that all the teachers interviewed were primarily nonpunitive in their approach to handling disruptive behavior. They relied on their strong relationships with students built on trust rather than fear or punishment to maintain a cooperative learning environment. Each teacher demonstrated mutual respect for students through congruent communication patterns that honored students' ethnic and cultural needs. Teachers spoke of creating caring learning communities and demonstrating genuine interest in each student.

All the teachers with at least 5 years of experience (nine) established clearly stated expectations for behavior and used an assertive demeanor when necessary to establish their authority as a teacher. These same teachers also described how they established a business-like classroom learning environment with explicitly stated expectations for student behavior and academic progress.

The novice respondents (four teachers with fewer than 3 years of experience) spoke of the difficulties they faced their first couple of years. These difficulties were created because of their explanations of their failure to establish an assertive stance and an accompanying set of clearly stated and enforced expectations that guided students toward better academic performance and behavior.

The question that arises as a result of the current study for researchers and teacher educators is whether preservice and in-service teacher training can prepare teachers to respond in culturally responsive ways through their chosen management strategies to the needs of urban students. I found no conclusive explanation for how these teachers learned to accept and demonstrate culturally responsive management strategies other than learning through their direct experiences in urban schools. In searching for an explanation for these teachers' acceptance and demonstration of culturally responsive management one common characteristic was noted for some respondents: six of the respondents grew up in urban environments. The other seven teachers, however, had no exposure to urban schools prior to entering the profession. None of the 13 teachers received any specific training or education in culturally responsive teaching strategies. An encouraging note is that all these educators

entered the profession as certified teachers indicating specific training prior to becoming teachers, unlike many recently hired urban teachers who are not certified when they begin their teaching careers (Archer, 2000; Crosby, 1999; Wong, 2000). It appears, therefore, that at a minimum, some urban teaching experience is required to adopt and implement the attitudes and behaviors associated with culturally responsive management techniques.

What is known is that the urban centers are frequently in urgent need of teacher replacements. The New York City public school system was searching for 8,000 teachers for the fall 2001 academic year; Los Angeles—5,000; and Chicago as many as 1,500 new teachers for the fall 2001 academic year (Banner, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Many urban teachers will quit during or directly after their first year of teaching most likely for reasons associated with failure to effectively manage a classroom of such diverse learners (Wilkins-Canter, Edwards, & Young, 2000).

Novice urban teachers must quickly comprehend how to effectively develop a classroom of mutual respect and cooperation if they intend to positively affect students' learning and survive professionally in an urban classroom. Many universities and colleges offer urban education courses, urban field experiences, urban education emphases, and minors in urban education to preservice and in-service teachers. Professors who teach in these programs must be aware of the value of the theoretical viewpoints as well as the practical components of culturally responsive classroom management as described in the voices of experienced urban practitioners. Much of the success of novice teachers in urban environments depends on their ability to develop positive classroom learning environments through the implementation of culturally responsive classroom management practices.

#### NOTE

1. Some of the data found within this manuscript are also cited in the book *Becoming A Successful Urban Teacher* (2002) written by the author.

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