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Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Strategies

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What is Classroom Management?

"Classroom management refers to those *activities* of classroom teachers that create a positive classroom climate within which effective teaching and learning can occur" (Martin & Sugarman, p.9, 1993). Research on student-directed management approach, which is rooted in the belief that students have the primary responsibility for controlling their behavior and are capable of controlling their behavior, identify teachers adopting the following classroom management concepts: student ownership, student choice, community, conflict resolution, natural consequences, and restitution (Levin, 2000). These concepts are operationalized in the routines of how students enter the classroom, what students are tasked to do upon entering a classroom (e.g., "do now"), how desks and tables are arranged (i.e., cooperative groups versus rows), and the ways in which learning is shared via communication between students. Research over the past 30 years indicates these rituals and routines as cornerstones of classroom management are critical to effective teaching and learning. In a poorly managed classroom, teachers struggle to teach and students usually learn less than they should, and there are abundance of discipline issues (Martin & Sugarman, 1993; Rose & Gallup, 2004) while a well-managed classroom provides an environment in which teaching and learning can flourish (Marzano, et. al., 2003).

Classroom Management and Disproportionality

Instituting classroom management principles has implications for the learning progress of all children, especially low-performing, poor, special education, and racial/ethnic minority children (Saphier and Gower, 1997). Cultural competence of simply soley middle-class, White students can exacerbate the difficulties that teachers may have with classroom management. Definitions and expectations of appropriate behavior are culturally influenced, and conflicts are likely to occur when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran, 2004). Misreading behaviors or communication patterns of culturally and linguistically diverse students (i.e., White, Black, Latino, Asian, Native American) can lead teachers who are unprepared to meet the educational needs of these students to see them as having a disability and request a referral to special education (Voltz, Brazil and Scott, 2003). The combination of interpreting behaviors through singular cultural lens and instructional quality contributes to disproportionality in special education and discipline (Harry and Klingner, 2006; Klingner, Artiles, et. al., 2005). Therefore, classroom management becomes an important tool in the arsenal of reducing and preventing disproportionality.

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (CRCM) is an approach to running classrooms with all children, [not simply for racial/ethnic minority children] in a culturally responsive way. More than a set of strategies or practices, CRCM is a pedagogical approach that guides the management decisions that teachers make. It is a natural extension of culturally responsive teaching which uses students' backgrounds, rendering of social experiences, prior knowledge, and learning styles in daily lessons. Teachers, as culturally responsive classroom managers, recognize their biases and values and reflect on how these influence their expectations for behavior and their interactions with students as well as what learning looks like. They recognize that the goal of classroom management is not to achieve compliance or control but to provide all students with equitable opportunities for learning and they understand that CRCM is "classroom management in the service of

social justice" (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran 2004, p.27).

There is extensive research on traditional classroom management and a myriad of resources available on how to deal with behavior issues. Conversely, there is little research on CRCM, despite the fact that teachers who lack cultural competence often experience problems in this area. Management texts may give some attention to students who are culturally different, sometimes in a separate chapter on students with special needs (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, Curran, 2004). Even the literature on culturally responsive or culturally sensitive pedagogy, which is fairly extensive, focuses primarily on curriculum content and teaching strategies, but doesn't really focus on the issue of management.

Essential Elements of CRCM

Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran (2004) developed a five-part concept of CRCM derived from the literature on culturally responsible pedagogy, multicultural counseling and caring: recognition of one's own cultural lens and biases, knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds, 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. In turn, the goal of classroom management is to create an environment in which students behave appropriately from a sense of personal responsibility, not from a fear of punishment or desire for a reward. As such the environment must acknowledge and be responsive to who are the students (cognitively, socially and emotionally), and create a safety net that equitably responds to what teachers know about their students.

1. Recognition of One's Own Cultural Lens and Biases

A helpful step for all teachers is to explore and reflect upon where their assumptions, attitudes and biases come from and to understand that how they view the world can lead them to misinterpretation of behaviors and inequitable treatment of culturally different students (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, Curran, 2004). This situation may cause a teacher to request a referral to special education when there is no disability. There are several things teachers can do to explore belief systems:

- Read and discuss Peggy McIntosh's (1988) work on white privilege and male privilege.
- Write a personal "identity story" to explore how their identities have been socially constructed and how they fit into a multicultural world (Noel, 2000).
- See where they fit on the Cultural Proficiency Receptivity Scale (Lindsey, Roberts, Campbell-Jones, 2005), a tool designed for self-reflection that will also enable teachers to examine the policies and practices of their school.

2. Knowledge of Students' Cultural Backgrounds

In addition to becoming aware of biases, in order to develop skills for cross cultural interaction, teachers need to become knowledgeable of students' cultural backgrounds (Sheets and Gay, 1996). Gaining general knowledge about a cultural or ethnic group can give teachers a sense of views about behavior, rules of decorum and etiquette, communication and learning styles; however, you need to be careful not to form stereotypes. This knowledge can act as a firewall against inappropriate referral to special education. Some things teachers might consider:

- Form study groups to read culturally responsive literature that reflects the identities of the students in their classrooms.

- Work with their students to develop family history projects in which students explore their cultural backgrounds and share them with the class.

- Conduct home visits and consult with parents and community members to gain insight. Some areas teachers can explore include: family background and structure, education, interpersonal relationship styles, discipline, time and space, religion, food, health and hygiene, history, traditions and holidays (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, Curran, 2004).

3. Awareness of the Broader, Social, Economic and Political Context

Many authors have written about the need to address social issues such as racial inequality and poverty if conditions in urban schools are to significantly improve (Nieto, 2003; Noguera, 2003). The educational system reflects and often perpetuates discriminatory practices of the larger society (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, Curran, 2004), and is helpful for teachers to be aware. With regard to classroom management, teachers need to examine how current policies and practices in discipline might discriminate against certain children. For example, children of color sometimes are seen as "disrespectful" when they are not being disrespectful at all in their culture (Black, 2006). This misjudgment can label a student a behavior problem and eventually lead to a request for a special education referral. Teachers can engage each other and their students in conversations about real issues that touch their lives. They might:

- Form a study circle to examine structures and policies and whether they are fair to everyone. They can look at what they see as inappropriate student behavior and discuss if they actually are incidents of student resistance to what they see as an unfair system (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, Curran, 2004; Kohl, 1994).

- Create a "critical/social justice classroom" grounded in the lives of children that involves dialogue, questioning/problem-posing, critiquing bias and attitudes and teaching activism for social justice (Peterson, 1994). For example, teachers may engage students in a discussion of school or classroom rules.

4. Ability and Willingness to Use Culturally Appropriate Management Strategies

The next step along this path is to reflect on the ways that classroom management practices promote or obstruct equal access to learning. These practices include creating a physical setting that supports academic and social goals, establishing and maintaining expectations for behavior, and working with families (Weinstein, Curran, Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Culturally responsive classroom managers filter their decision making about the environment through the lens of cultural diversity. They think about ways the environment can be used to communicate respect for diversity, to reaffirm connectedness and community, and to avoid marginalizing and disparaging students.

Some tools and strategies for organizing the physical environment may include:

- World maps that highlight students' countries of origin.
- Signs or banners can welcome students in the different languages they speak.

- Posters can depict people of various cultural groups (although care must be taken to avoid stereotypical representations).
- Children's individual photographs can be mounted on poster board and then used to create a jigsaw puzzle, reinforcing the idea that everyone comes together to form a whole.
- Display books that promote themes of diversity, tolerance and community.
- Desks arranged in clusters allow students to work together on activities, share materials, have small-group discussions, and help each other with assignments.
- Set up a "kindness box" where students can drop brief notes about acts of kindness they do or witness and periodically read one

It is important to establish clear expectations for behavior that students understand (Weiner, 2003). To avoid the possibility of confusion or misunderstanding (that can lead to disciplinary interventions) teachers need to:

- Be explicit about their expectations.
- Engage students in discussions about the class norms.
- Model the behavior they expect
- Provide opportunities for students to practice.
- Be aware of inconsistency in application of consequences.

Communicating and collaborating with families is an important, but challenging part of classroom management. When teachers and families come from different cultural backgrounds the challenges are even greater (Weinstein, 2003). Things for teachers to keep in mind:

- Some families don't see direct involvement in schooling as part of their responsibility, although they are committed to their children's education.

- Teachers and parents may have different expectations about what constitutes appropriate school behavior.
- Assume that all parents care about their children and have something to offer. Encourage families to provide insight that will help teachers teach them.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences in communication styles with parents and students.

5. Commitment to Building Caring Classroom Communities

Students often make decisions of what they do in class based on their perception of whether or not the teacher cares about them (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran, 2004). Students are more likely to succeed if they feel connected to school and a positive, respectful relationship with teachers helps create such an environment. Poor classroom management threatens school connectedness because a poorly managed classroom cannot provide a stable environment for respectful and meaningful student learning (Blum, 2005.) Marzano (2003) concluded that good teacher-student relationships are important to effective classroom management and there is much research to support the belief that good student-teacher relationships enhance learning (Rodriguez, 2005; Tomlinson and Doubet, 2005; Brown, 2003). For example,

- Rodriguez (2005) describes his experience as a math teacher in an alternate, urban high school where many of the students brought with them a history of bad experiences with teachers. One way he promoted good relationships was to respect the perspectives of his students. At the end of each class he asked students to critique his teaching in their math journals by providing a guiding question, such as "How did I do as a teacher today?"

- Brown (2003) examined the culturally responsive classroom management strategies of a group of urban teachers who developed caring learning communities. Some of the things they did were to initiate and cultivate out-of-class conversations with students to get to know them personally; spend the first few weeks of school engaging students in social games and establishing school-to-home relationships.

- Weinstein, et. al., (2004) suggest teachers set the tone by greeting students at the door with a smile and a welcoming comment; expressing admiration for a student's bilingual ability and commenting enthusiastically about the number of different languages represented in class and beginning each day with a morning meeting where students greet one another by name and discuss upcoming lessons.

- Marzano (2003) wrote that "virtually anything you do to show interest in students as individuals has a positive impact on their learning" and makes several suggestions, including: greeting students outside of school, such as at extracurricular events or at stores; singling out a few students each day in the lunchroom and talking to them; being aware of and commenting on important events in students' lives, such as participation in sports, drama, or other extracurricular activities.

The Potential of Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) as a CRCM Approach

We have focused primarily on how teachers can become more culturally responsive classroom managers but this work is also imperative in the school context. Schools across the country increasingly are adopting the system of school-wide positive behavior support, an approach designed to prevent inappropriate behavior and teach appropriate behavior systematically. Positive behavior support offers a method for identifying the environmental events, circumstances and interactions that trigger problem behavior, developing strategy prevention and teaching new skills. The plan includes all students and staff, including teachers, administrators, cafeteria workers, bus drivers and custodians and is applied consistently throughout the school – classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, bathrooms, playgrounds and the school bus.

There is data pointing to the success of PBS overall, and the research has evolved to show it can be designed to be culturally responsive (Duda & Utley 2004). The PBS approach emphasizes the use of culturally appropriate interventions which consider the unique and individual learning histories of the individuals involved in the PBS process and approach – the children, families, teachers, and community people (Sugai et. al., 2000). Noting there are concerns about PBS because of who is making the decisions about what are appropriate and inappropriate interventions, Klingner and Artiles, et. al., (2005) see potential in PBS when approached from a multicultural perspective. They believe that school-wide PBS interventions should be proactive and promote a positive, culturally responsive climate that is conducive to learning by all, similar to the approaches needed for a culturally responsive classroom. Teachers, administrators, and support staff should:

- Understand that perceptions of behavioral appropriateness are influenced by cultural expectations. In other words what is perceived as inappropriate varies across cultures, and that behaviors occur within larger social and cultural contexts.
- Connect with students in ways that convey respect and caring.
- Explicitly teach rules and expected behaviors within a culture of care.

- Provide a continuum of support.

- Involve families and the community in positive, mutually supportive ways.

Resources

Books

Building Culturally Responsive Classrooms: A Guide for K-6 Teachers. Delgado-Gaitan, Concha. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2006.

Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools. Singleton, G., Linton, C. Corwin Press, A Sage Publications Co., Thousand Oaks, CA, 2006.

Classroom Behavior Management in a Diverse Society. Grossman, Herbert. Mayfield Publishing Co., Menlo Park, CA 1995.

Training & Tutorials

Classroom Management: Building Relationships for Better Learning; Professional Development online from ASCD http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.fd9e9cb8a6fe5846111d0a10e3108a0c/ Under Instructional Strategies.

Embracing Diversity, Respecting Others; Professional Development online from ASCD http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.fd9e9cb8a6fe5846111d0a10e3108a0c/ Under Instructional Strategies.

Resources on Disproportionate Representation

Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE) http://crede.berkeley.edu/

The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) http://www.nccrest.org/

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