




Are urban teachers culturally responsive?

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Abstract

Classroom management continues to be a great concern for novice teachers. Moreover, the cultural mismatch in the urban settings exacerbates classroom management issues. This cultural mismatch is the result of the demographic discrepancy between the teacher and the student population, as well as the teachers' weak multicultural competence, reflected in the way they mitigate classroom conflict. One way to bridge this mismatch is to use Culturally Responsive Classroom Management, an approach that incorporates students' culture into teaching. In the context of today's schools, the need to help teachers develop a culturally responsive classroom management mindset is more relevant than ever. This study analyzed some classroom management strategies used by secondary mathematics and science novice teachers in their urban classrooms, as well as the extent to which these strategies were culturally responsive. The researcher interviewed the twenty-one teachers and conducted classroom observations with each of them. Results show that the participants successfully managed their classrooms by developing relationships with their students, by fostering collaboration among students, and by holding their students' accountable in following the classroom rules. An implication of this study points to the need for teacher preparation programs to help future teachers develop a culturally responsive mindset. Likewise, in service teachers need to be supported in the field in order to become better culturally responsive classroom managers. This can be accomplished by providing them with continued mentoring by teachers who possess a culturally responsive mindset.

Keywords Culturally responsive classroom management · Developing positive relationships with students · Communities of learners · Student accountability · Urban settings

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Introduction

Classroom management continues to be a great concern for novice teachers (Garrett 2014). Teacher turnover is 50% greater in Title I schools (schools with high percentages of low-income students) than in non-Title I schools; moreover, mathematics and science teachers' turnover is 70% greater in Title I schools than in non-Title I schools (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond 2017). Brown (2003) argued that managing a classroom in urban schools is more difficult than in rural or suburban schools, because teachers have to address students' cultural, ethnic, social, identity development, language, and safety needs, besides insuring students' cooperation and their academic growth. Similarly, Ullucci (2009) believed that "when we overlap issues of management with urban schooling further complications arise" (p. 14).

Demographic data show an increasingly diverse school population in both elementary and secondary settings. The Report on Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce published by the US Department of Education in 2016 revealed that in the 2011–2012 school year, 82% percent of public-school teachers were white. In comparison, only 51% of all public-school students were white. The remaining 49% were minority students: 16% were black (while only 7% of the teachers were black); and 24% of students were Hispanic (yet only 8% of teachers were Hispanic). As a result of this cultural mismatch, classroom management difficulties can escalate:

A lack of multicultural competence can exacerbate the difficulties that novice teachers (and even more experienced teachers) have with classroom management. Definitions and expectations of appropriate behavior are culturally influenced, and conflicts are likely to occur when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds (Weinstein et al. 2004, p. 26).

Weinstein et al. (2004) argued therefore that behavior is culturally influenced. When teachers and students belong to different cultures, and the teachers perceive certain behaviors inappropriate, tensions could arise. But the behavior expectations may not be the only tension in the classroom. Ullucci and Howard (2015) raised the concern that "teachers may adopt and maintain deficit and pathological thinking about the academic potential of students who come from impoverished backgrounds" (p. 172), believing that students from low-income backgrounds cannot be taught effectively as they lack the skills to become successful learners. To bridge the cultural mismatch, the researchers urged teacher educators to offer new perspectives on educating students from impoverished backgrounds to prospective teachers. Similarly, Gay (2010) advocated for educating future teachers to incorporate their students' culture into teaching.

This approach, in which teachers understand the relationship between students' culture and behavior (Cholewa and West-Olatunji 2008; Pas et al. 2016), is referred to as Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (hereafter referred to as CRCM). In this context, Mooi Lew and Fails Nelson (2016) addressed the need for teachers to consider their students' individual cultures when planning classroom management strategies. The urgency becomes then for teacher preparation programs to best educate preservice teachers to the concept of CRCM and pedagogy.

Literature review

Culturally responsive pedagogy and classroom management

One cannot talk about CRCM without discussing culturally relevant pedagogy (hereafter CRP), or culturally relevant teaching (hereafter CRT), a topic that has been vastly explored. Banks (2007) believed that the main goal of CRP is to improve the achievement of low-income students and students of color by using teaching strategies that build upon the cultural strengths of their students. For this to happen, teachers need to understand the culture of their students. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) defined CRT as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically [because it uses] cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 20).

Howard’s (2010) definition of CRP aligns with Ladson-Billings’ definition, in that he also believed that its goal was to help teachers develop dynamic teaching practices that nurture the students’ well-being on academic, social, emotional, and cultural levels. This occurs when teachers recognize their students’ varied cultural backgrounds, which impact their knowledge and skills. Similarly, Gay (2010) argued that culturally responsive teachers use “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 students” (p. 31). In addition to being knowledgeable of their students’ cultures and using the wealth of their students’ cultures to guide their instruction, Nieto (2005) argued that responsive teachers advocate for their students’ right to an excellent education. In doing so, the teachers are committed to social justice inside and outside their classrooms.

All the above researchers pointed to the significance of CRP in the classrooms, advocating for teacher preparation programs to prepare teacher candidates to teach *all* children effectively. The importance of both CRCM and CRP in the classroom was further emphasized by Weinstein et al. (2004), as the researchers argued that culturally responsive management and pedagogy influence student achievement, more so than students’ general intelligence, home environment, motivation, and socioeconomic status. Given the heavy impact that CRCM and CRP have on student achievement, Monroe (2005) argued that they should not function as separate entities. According to Monroe, when teachers develop engaging lessons, the students are less likely to misbehave. In other words, when students *act in* (the lesson), they will less likely *act out* (misbehave).

Teachers need to understand what CRCM is in order to practice it. Currently, there are but a few specific definitions of CRCM. Weinstein et al. (2004) defined CRCM as a set of values: “Culturally responsive classroom management is a frame of mind, more than a set of strategies or practices, that guides the management decisions that teachers make” (p. 27). To become culturally responsive, teachers should not simply be taught set skills they could rely upon as they address the different classroom management tasks; the focus of teacher education programs should instead be on helping the teachers to develop a culturally responsive frame of mind (Weinstein et al. 2004).

This frame of mind would enable teachers to recognize their biases and values, and to reflect on how this influences their interactions with students (Weinstein et al. 2004). Since teachers' expectations for behavior are informed by cultural assumptions, they may inappropriately judge culturally defined actions as resistant (Hambacher et al. 2016). In this respect, CRCM becomes a powerful tool for social justice, its goal being not to enforce compliance and control over students, but to provide all students with equitable opportunities for learning (Weinstein et al. 2004). According to Garrett (2009), such a frame of mind cannot be taught; it is rather developed as a result of one's life experiences.

CRCM: prerequisites, components, and strategies

Researchers furthered the understanding of CRCM by describing its prerequisites and components. Weinstein et al. (2003) discussed the three prerequisites of CRCM, namely, the understanding of "the self," "the other," and "the context." When we recognize that we are all cultural beings, and we have beliefs, biases, and assumptions about human behavior, we are less likely to misinterpret our students' behaviors and treat them inequitably. The second prerequisite is an acknowledgement of the cultural, racial, and class differences that exist among people. This knowledge should be used as a way of demonstrating a willingness to learn about the aspects of culture that are important to the students. The last prerequisite is an understanding of the ways that schools perpetuate discriminatory practices of the larger society. Teachers need to recognize that the structure and practices of schools can marginalize select groups of students.

Weinstein et al. (2004) further described the five components essential to CRCM: (a) recognition of one's own ethnocentrism and biases; (b) knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds; (c) understanding of the broader social, economic, and political context of our educational system; (d) ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate classroom management strategies; and (e) commitment to building caring classroom communities. These components overlap with the prerequisites discussed above.

When talking about CRCM strategies, Weinstein et al. (2004) distinguished between classroom management, which they perceived as the teacher's ability to create a caring and respectful environment that supports learning, and classroom discipline, which encompassed teachers' responses to misbehavior. The researchers further believed that most behavioral problems could be avoided if teachers use good preventive management strategies. Such preventive strategies include (a) creating a physical setting that supports academic and social goals, (b) establishing expectations for behavior, (c) communicating with students in culturally consistent ways, (d) developing a caring classroom environment, (e) working with families, and (f) using appropriate interventions to assist students with behavior problems. All these are essential in fostering a cultural climate (Weinstein et al. 2003).

Weinstein et al. (2003) explained the significance of the ways teachers organize their classroom layout in promoting prosocial behavior: "Because racial and ethnic differences can lead to name-calling and teasing, the physical environment can reinforce

the importance of being kind and tolerant” (p. 271). Students who sit in clusters work together on activities, share materials, and help each other with assignments. In order to avoid any confusions, teachers must establish clear expectations about appropriate behavior at the beginning of the year and provide opportunities for students to practice expected behaviors. Equally significant, teachers should model appropriate behaviors for their students.

Weinstein et al. (2003) further explained that culturally responsive managers are aware of the differences in discourse style, and they are open to modifying their discourse in order to match their students’ cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, these teachers create caring, inclusive classrooms by developing relationships with their students from the very beginning. This happens when teachers greet students at the door with a smile, or when they share stories about their lives outside of school, while learning about students’ interests and activities. Teachers show they care when they allow their students to make choices in class and when they hold their students to high expectations for academic work and behavior. Lastly, culturally responsive teachers create a sense of community by anticipating the cultural conflicts that are likely to arise and promoting positive relationships among students.

Ullucci (2009) synthesized the most relevant CRCM strategies in a study of six public elementary school teachers. The teachers set up their classroom in ways to foster collaboration and discussion. Moreover, they catered to the emotional development of the students, by developing personal connections and encouraging students to share the good things and the bad things that happened to them. The benefit of developing relationships with students was also discussed by Wentzel (2006), who believed that students engaged in valued classroom activities if teachers fostered supportive and nurturing relationships with them. In turn, Brown (2003) believed that caring teachers develop relationships with their students. Caring teachers create a safe environment for their students, and they take the time to know their students. More caring teachers prioritize the students over the subject matter.

The congruent communication between teachers and students is another significant factor in determining the success of an urban teacher. According to Brown, listening is one of the most powerful means of establishing effective communication patterns with students. In addition, teachers must acknowledge the specific verbal and non-verbal communication styles that affect students’ ability and motivation to engage in learning activities. Caring teachers “consider the other’s point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us” (Noddings 2013, p. 24).

Hambacher et al. (2016) reported similar findings in their study of two female elementary teachers. According to the researchers, the teachers expressed their care for students by learning about their families and culture, and deliberately using this knowledge to plan engaging and relevant lessons to ensure their success. Teachers also showed they cared by bonding with their students on an emotional level; through this, they cultivated cooperation and engagement in learning.

Characteristics of culturally responsive classroom managers

Other researchers (Brown 2003; Delpit 1995; Villegas and Lucas 2007) focused on the characteristics of culturally responsive managers. Delpit viewed culturally responsive managers as authoritative and sensitive to the cultural norms of the students, and she believed it was unnecessary to use coercive means to control behavior. In Brown's view, culturally responsive teachers used verbal and non-verbal communication processes that were familiar to students; they incorporated cultural humor and culturally familiar patterns. Moreover, the teachers were kind but firm, communicating clear expectations without demeaning students.

According to Villegas and Lucas (2007), culturally responsive teachers possessed a sociocultural consciousness, which they develop by looking "beyond individual students and families to understand inequities in society" (p. 31). By doing so, teachers developed a deeper cultural awareness about other individuals and cultural contexts. Another important characteristic of culturally responsive teachers was an affirming attitude towards students from diverse backgrounds, seeing resources for learning in all students rather than viewing the differences as problem to overcome. These teachers act as agents of change, striving to bring educational change that will make schools more responsive to all students.

Last but equally significant, Monroe (2009) believed that culturally responsive teachers possessed a strong knowledge of subject matter, child development, and assessment. This knowledge is further strengthened by field-based placements in economically disadvantaged settings, when coupled with the interaction of a strong cooperating teacher. These teachers shared a commitment for their students to have a grasp of classroom policies; they incorporated culturally specific strategies in the classroom, and sought the help of their students' families.

Context and need of the current study

Teacher recruitment and retention is a national problem (Council on Science and Technology and the Center for the Teaching and Learning 2007). According to Newton et al. (2010), "Recruiting, retaining and preparing high quality secondary mathematics and science teachers are three of the most critical problems in our nation's urban schools that serve a vast majority of children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds" (p. 21). Guarino et al. (2006) argued that shortage of high-quality teachers in urban settings is a problem of retention. While higher education institutions alone cannot solve the retention problem, they can improve it through providing early and extensive opportunities for teacher candidates to work in urban classrooms and continuing to support them in beginning and induction years (Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005). Similarly, Newton et al. argued that in order to prepare secondary mathematics and science teachers, higher education institutions need to design programs that focus on the strong recruitment, adequate preparation, and deliberate effort in teacher retention of candidates who will teach in urban settings that face perennial shortages.

Teacher retention is also a local problem. Schools in the largest school district where the study took place are faced with teacher shortages, the attrition rate for secondary mathematics and science teachers who work in high-needs schools being over 50% (White 2015). High teacher turnover has an adverse effect on schools and students. To address the issue of teacher turnover in secondary mathematics and science classrooms in high-poverty schools, a graduate teacher residency program was designed at a mid-sized university in the southeastern United States, in partnership with the local school district.

This residency model blends a full-year classroom apprenticeship experience with Master's level course work in education, leading to a Master of Arts in Teaching, a 30-credit course of study. The residents were selected for their strong content background in a STEM-related content area, as well as their desire to teach mathematics or science after graduation for 3 or more years in high-needs schools. As part of the program, the residents attended graduate classes one day per week, and they interned in a classroom 4 days a week. This program focused on CRPM as a critical component of the residency experience.

At the university, the residents were enrolled in both foundations and content area (mathematics and science) courses. Three of these foundations courses (Classroom Management and Communication, Instructional Strategies, and Foundations of Multicultural Education) were built around CRPM and CRP. In these courses, residents learned about CRPM and CRP that support effective and appropriate interactions in a variety of cultural contexts. The other foundations courses (Assessment, Educational Psychology, ESOL methods) similarly addressed learning and assessment in urban settings, recognizing the richness of the urban students' cultural backgrounds (in terms of language, ethnicity, and SES).

While in the field, the residents were partnered with a successful mentor in a high-needs middle and high schools in the local school district. The mentors were identified by the principals as experts in the content area, as well as successful in terms of student achievement, and effective in developing nurturing relationships with their students.

The major benefits of this residency program were (1) exposure to CRPM and CRP theory and practices in the education classes, and (2) exposure to CRPM and CRP practices in the classrooms in which they conducted their internship, as they shadowed and learned from their mentors. As a direct participation in the courses and the field, the residents learned about effective teaching and classroom management strategies that would enable them to integrate their students' culture into their teaching and to help their students make connections with real life in science and mathematics.

In addition to the two above mentioned experiences, the residents attending a one hour weekly seminar at the university that was taught by the two directors of the residency program, in which they were unpacking their experiences with teaching and managing classrooms in the field. The two directors of the residency program were also teaching the Instructional Strategies and the Multicultural Education courses, having a strong knowledge of CRPM and CRP and helping the residents to develop a stronger awareness of what it meant to become culturally responsive.

In conducting this study, I was interested to analyze the strategies the teachers identified as culturally responsive, and how they used these strategies in their classes. The following research questions guided this qualitative study: (1) What strategies do culturally responsive teachers use to manage their classroom? (2) How do they know whether these strategies are effective? My hypothesis was that due to the exposure to CRCM theory and practice in their education classes, as well as seeing how their mentors used CRCM in their field classes, all the teachers will be culturally responsive classroom managers.

Methods

Participants

The participants were twenty-one mathematics and science teachers in their first year of teaching. All participants had previously been enrolled in a graduate Teacher Residency program from a mid-sized university in the southeastern United States. There were twelve females and nine male participants of an age average of thirty. Eleven participants were Caucasians, eight African American, one Asian, and one Latina. Thirteen were mathematics teachers, and eight were science teachers. The participants belonged to three different cohorts of the graduate program. Cohort 1 started teaching in the Fall 2016, Cohort 2 started teaching in the Fall 2017, and Cohort 3 started teaching in the Fall 2018. Upon completion of the program, the participants were assigned to teach in eight urban middle and high schools in the city. Some participants from different cohorts taught at the same school(s).

These schools were selected because they met the criteria of low-income, high-poverty schools, and they were situated in the poorest area of the city. The mean annual income of the neighborhoods where the participants taught was \$25,971, versus a national median income of \$55,322. All the schools were historically black, with over 90% African-American students, 1–3% Hispanic, and 2–4% Caucasian students. The most recent data found on the Department of Education website indicate that the graduation rate for these schools in the year 2015–2016 was 75%, while drop-out rate was 3%. Moreover, 70% of the students were low income, and only 1% had limited English proficiency. The school district rated these schools with the grades of B and C, meaning they were considered average and below average performing schools. All the schools offered free and reduced lunches (Florida Department of Education n. d.).

The researcher had previously taught all three Cohorts as they were undergoing the program. The researcher informed the participants about the purpose of the study and that they could withdraw from the study at any moment. The researcher also explained the fact that participants would not be compensated for their time, and that their real names would not be used in the study, to ensure confidentiality. The researcher further explained that the raw data would not be shared with their mentors, or the directors of the residency program; the researcher was the only person with access to the raw data. At the time of the interviews and observation, the researcher had not been in contact with participants for a few months, as they were

no longer taking any classes with the researcher. Not all students from the three cohorts chose to participate in the study.

Measures and procedures

The first instrument used in this study was a teacher interview developed by the researcher. The participants answered seventeen open-ended questions that were directed at classroom management. For example, the participants were asked to describe what it meant to be a culturally responsive teacher; in what ways they considered culture when determining how to proactively or reactively manage their classroom; what strategies they had in place for minor/severe altercations, to only name a few questions. See Attachment A for the teacher interview questions.

The second instrument was a Mentor Observation Packet (hereafter referred to as MOP) developed by the school district where the research took place. In the beginning of the MOP, the participants answered eight pre-observation questions geared towards their classroom management. The first and second parts of the packet contained information to be used during the observation. A second researcher administered the MOP to ensure triangulation of the findings.

In the first part of the MOP, the researcher observed the whole class for 20 min, tallying the student engagement and teacher-to-student interactions. For student engagement, the researcher tallied the number of opportunities for students to respond (i.e., instructional questions, statements or gestures by the teacher that seek an academic response), as well as number of student disruptions (i.e., student-initiated statements or actions that interrupted the teacher's flow of instruction or interfered with the academic engagement of peers). For teacher–student verbal and non-verbal interactions, the researcher tallied the teacher's use of specific praise (i.e., statements that showed teacher approval and told the student how the praised performance met expectations), the use of general praise (i.e., statement that showed teacher approval only, like good job), and the redirections/corrections (i.e., a comment or gesture by the teacher showing disapproval of student behavior).

In the second part of the MOP, the researcher systematically scanned the room at timed intervals, focusing on a different student every five seconds and recording on-task or engaged behavior with a “+” sign, and off-task behavior with a “-” sign in a table. After having observed each student, the researcher began the sequence again, starting with the first student observed. See Attachment B for the MOP.

Both instruments, in addition to a demographic questionnaire, were administered at the beginning of the participants' first year of teaching. The data in this manuscript were part of a longitudinal study, which started in 2016 and ended in 2018. The main researcher interviewed the participants in Cohort 1 in 2016 for the first time. In 2017, the researcher returned to interview the teachers in Cohorts 1 and 2, and in 2018, the researcher interviewed the participants in all three cohorts. Another researcher conducted the classroom observations for all three cohorts, following the same schedule as the interviews. The participants in Cohort 1 were interviewed and observed on three occasions (in 2016, 2017, and 2018). The participants in Cohort 2 were interviewed and observed on two

occasions (in 2017 and 2018), while participants in Cohort 3 were only interviewed and observed in one occasion, in 2018. As the approval of the study ended in 2018, the researcher could not obtain more data from participants in Cohorts 2 and 3. Because there were more data from Cohort 1, in the current study the researcher only used the data collected in the first year of teaching for all participants for uniformity reasons. Other studies will analyze the longitudinal data (collected for three years in Cohort 1 and for 2 years in Cohort 2), analyzing any changes in the participants' understanding of CRCM.

Data analysis

The researcher conducted a content analysis of all interviews and responses in the introduction of the MOP to identify the strategies the participants used to manage their classrooms. The researcher used content analysis to classify words that had similar meanings into categories (Cavanagh 1997) with the aim "to attain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon" (Elo and Kyngäs 2008, p. 108). Interpreting the data, the researcher grouped the statements into categories, and further named these categories using content-characteristic words.

The researcher used the N-VIVO software (9th edition), a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program. To discover connections among the nodes, the researchers analyzed the refined data sets from the teacher interviews and the introduction of the MOP and they identified the CRCM strategies teachers used in their classrooms. Similarly, results from Parts 1 and 2 of the MOP were divided in two categories: student engagement and time on task.

These data generated a lot of categories, which could not all be captured in this paper, given the limitations in the length research papers in general. The researcher used the data in the five themes described below to make the case for this paper. Other categories include, for example: home-school communication and its benefits for middle school and high school students, developing teacher credibility in urban environments, culturally responsive pedagogy in urban settings, first-year secondary teachers' responses to chronic behaviors, dealing with student misbehavior in urban settings, and building relationships with urban secondary students.

Results

In essence, the data showed that culturally responsive teachers: (a) developed relationships with their students; (b) created communities of learners; (c) fostered student accountability by developing clear rules and expectations, (d) were intentional in considering their students' cultures when managing their classrooms, and (e) discussed the effectiveness of their classroom management plan. As was discussed in the literature review section, all these indicators are characteristics of CRCM.

Developing positive relationships with students

The participants fostered relationships with their students by (a) getting to know their students; and (b) showing students they cared about them.

Know your students

Greg captured the essence of building relationships beautifully in his interview:

Relationships start with names, I think. Just knowing names is so essential, and I always make sure I'm clearly very upset when I don't get their name right at the very beginning so then they're like, wow, he really wants to know my name, he wants to know who I am.

The participants learned about their students initially via student surveys, which were then followed by conversations with students about their lives and/or by ice-breaking games. Most participants surveyed their students in the beginning of the semester: "I did the interest inventories at the beginning of the year. Then we play a few games, like two truths and a lie," said Carmen, while Sally reflected: "I use a student survey to ask them about themselves and then when I see them, especially in the cafeteria, I ask them, how is your day going? How are you doing in your other classes?" Mitchell also used an interest survey that was filled out by all his students, which he then read "trying to remember as much as I could, and then from that point on it mostly has been conversations with students at tutoring, or during independent work."

Greg used the information from the surveys in his class: "I do an interest inventory, and then I bring up some of those things in the lessons, so if they say they're really into football I'll put a lot of football references." In turn, Chris shared that he used an online survey to ask his students personal questions (i.e., what are their hobbies, their (least) favorite subject, etc.). He also used this information to bond with his students:

Using the surveys, I do a poll of the songs that they are into and I make a playlist. I find clean versions of these songs online and we listen to them while we are doing work. It's random and anonymous but at the same time I notice when a kid is like, hey, I put that on a survey and he actually brought it up.

Other participants talked to their students to learn about their interests. For example, Melody had casual conversations with students about pop culture: "I have talked about football and stuff...with some of my kids. You know, just like pop culture types of stuff that are going on." Similarly, Ethan found out that when asking specific questions, students opened up and shared more:

I would ask specific students, hey, what did you do this weekend? Especially with those students who might not talk as much, it's a good way for them to open up, for them to start asking questions, or you'd be getting them to do their work.

To bond with their students, some participants shared about their personal lives. Carmen, who was a newly-wed, shared photos from her wedding, while Stephen reflected: “I share things about myself when I have a free moment if they ask, as long as it’s reasonable.” In turn, Tammy commented: “I’ve made it a point to tell them about something I did over the weekend, or ask them what they did, for about a minute or two.” Dawn reflected on the importance of being real with her class, without being emotional: “I am from the Virgin Islands, so the hurricane was very overwhelming to me. So, I tell them, I apologize if I seem quick to tell you to do something, all of this is on my mind.”

Sally also talked about the importance of knowing her students at an individual level:

I’ve noticed that the louder students get more of my attention than my quiet ones. So now I focus on my quiet ones and make sure I know, yeah, you’re quiet and you’re focused, fantastic! But I need to know what’s going on at home so when you do have a bad day, I can help you with that.

On the other hand, Irene admitted that knowing her students individually, rather than as a class, was one of her weaknesses: “I should be focusing more on who everybody is as an individual. But I have so many students, and I am worried that I am never going to be that kind of teacher...or it is going to be a very slow process.”

All the above show some very important steps the participants took in order to get to know their students. However, in order to be culturally responsive, participants needed to understand their students’ home cultures. For example, Cole shared: “I try to understand that the way I think things are right are not necessarily so. I try not to get frazzled by differences in modes of communication as well as responses to authority,” while Adam tried to understand “where each of my students is coming from and to understand each of my students as separate individuals.” Similarly, Greg addressed the importance of understanding his students’ unique challenges:

Being culturally responsive does not mean giving them an easy way out because they live in a more challenging area. It means recognizing that they may have other challenges than students who live in other areas, and understanding these struggles. So, when I have a kid who is late every day, I know it is because no one in the family has a car and he has to walk to school.

Andrea also commented on the significance of understanding her students’ different home dynamics, and showing grace every day:

A student in 9th grade told me with a little attitude on the first day of school, I hope you don’t give homework, because I don’t have time to do homework...I take the bus home from school, and then I walk 2 miles to pick up my brother from elementary; and then I walk another mile to pick up my two sisters from school. Then we go home and I cook dinner and check their homework. That is when I finally get some me time.

In turn, Anna shared how she assumed that one of her students was African American: “Then the student told me her first language was Spanish...Being

culturally responsive means getting to know people besides just what you see... Everyone is not the same, and we should not judge a book by its cover.”

Show your students you care

The old adage, “Don’t smile until Christmas” has no place in the school environment; showing students that you love them bears priceless fruit. Greeting students at the door, paying attention to when they are absent, or asking them questions about their hobbies are all signs of caring. For example, Courtney greeted her students at the door with a smiley face: “How are you doing? Good morning... or if it’s been Monday coming back from the weekend, I’ll be like: How was your weekend? Did you do anything fun? Similarly, Cole asked his students about their weekend, “talking with them about other things than the work we are doing. I would ask them Did you go to the game? Did you watch any of the football games,” while Andrea took interest in their absences: “I pay attention as much as possible when students aren’t there. So, then the next day, I can say, hey Taylor, I missed you yesterday, what happened?” On the other hand, Alyssa noticed how her students felt as they entered her classroom: “So some students... if they’ve had a hard day or they come in and they’re not smiling, I kind of go out of my way to make a joke or make them want to smile.”

Participants showed they cared when they gently corrected student behaviors, like Anna did, by, “just letting them know I do this for their benefit.” Other participants allowed second chances: “I try to understand where the kids are coming from and just have constant grace and mercy every day...Allow for do overs,” stated Andrea, while Alyssa explained: “I always give them a chance to redeem themselves if they’re doing something wrong.” Caring teachers also rewarded their students for good behavior and academics. In order to acknowledge her students, Sally used positive referrals: “I send a referral to the guidance counselor or to the principal to say these students were amazing for me and this is why. So that they can be recognized by that individual.” Similarly, she used positive phone calls: “The parents are so funny, they’re like Why are you calling? and I’m like I just wanted to tell you that your child is amazing, and they’re like wait, what?”

Other participants, like Mary, rewarded her students with hugs: “I tell them from the very beginning that I love them. I give them all hugs. I can’t tell you how starved some of them are for that positive touch.” More rewards consisted of praise, encouragement, or points that students could redeem for prizes. While Chris used the ticket system to reward his students, Alyssa explained that she used a school-wide reward system: “Positive behaviors don’t go unnoticed, those students receive Hero points and some extra credit on participation if they were exceptionally well that day.”

Participants also showed they cared about their students by being part of their lives. This took the form of having lunch with students. Luke reflected: “Right now I go eat lunch with them sometimes. We also have a point scale system, and we have parties based on points. We have a pizza party for my class tomorrow so that builds relationships.” Similarly, Greg explained:

Kids come into the classroom for lunch. It started for tutoring. Now they just come and hang out. I think it really lets them know they're not just students. They're not a burden to me, it's like I actually want you guys around me. I think you guys are great people.

On the other hand, participants bonded with their students by attending extra-curricular activities. Said Anna: "I'm trying to go to more extracurricular activities," while Dawn added: "I ask for the schedules of my student athletes, so I can try to get out for that stuff." Moreover, Sam is a football coach: "I have about 10–15 football players in my classes. I attend these games."

Creating communities of learners

The layout of the classroom determines its culture: while group work fosters collaboration, individual desks organized in rows are more indicative of a whole class approach. Regardless of the setup, all participants understood the significance of easy access and the need to move freely among the students. Stephen stated: "I like that I can actually move very easily across the classroom," while Ethan commented: "That allows me to move around in the front if I have to stay there, as well as these little areas where I can zoom through so I can keep everybody in check."

Some participants organized their classroom in centers. In general, centers included a teacher-lead section, a technology section, an independent section, and a test corrections table. In Tammy's classroom, students rotated in centers:

Desks are facing this way because normally that's the technology group. This is my teacher lead group. After that they will be released to technology, we have some programs like Iready...I allow them to work with someone and they might work with one other person.

Centers were also located in Mary's classroom:

The class is sectioned in three parts. If we do activities on the computer, then those desks will be faced toward the wall because it is independent practice. Whenever they work on "Math Excel" or "Algebra Nation" it is independent; they are faced toward the wall, so that if I work with a small group, I can see their screens to make sure they are on task. During testing, I move the desks and they are in rows.

In other classrooms, students were in groups of 4s, 6s, or 8s. According to Alyssa: "Science really isn't an individual type of topic, it's a topic where everything we've ever learned was done in groups, people working together. I want to maintain that throughout the year." This is how Diane justified the small group structure in her class:

In my last two classes, a group of four was too many. It was like a party social time, I couldn't get done what I wanted to get done. There are two groups that I will probably keep to four. Everybody else will probably go to groups of three.

In turn, Ethan stated: “I have the desks in groups of four so that they can collaborate with each other, usually I have them ask other three before me because it requires more involvement.” Similarly, Adam grouped his students in small groups of two or three, “That way, they can do independent work and they come together and help each other in groups of four.”

Other participants preferred larger groups. Sally, for example, had “three groups of six at the front and a smaller group in the back of four,” while Dawn had groups of eight: “We are going into groups of eight. Part of it is to make sure I have enough space to move around. I really want to start using the back for more small groups and game activities that I am thinking of doing.”

Other participants organized the desks in rows and constantly changed the layout to match the activities: “For this age group we start off in rows to let them know that I expect everybody to be working. As we go through the year, I will start doing pairs and triplets,” said Chris. Similarly, Andrea stated: “I change my classroom around almost on a daily basis. I am very fluid in the way my classroom dynamic is.”

Cole, Anna, and Greg split their science classroom in two large sections: a lab section and a group section. Greg’s room was arranged like an amphitheater:

We have all curved desks in the front row, the second row and then a third row; they’re all close together. They are somewhat facing each other and it’s more of a dialogue situation. I’ll also do groups with seven desks in the front and then 5–5, 5–5.

Some participants had assigned seats, like Irene did. This strategy helped Irene to better remember her students’ names: “Originally I had groups of four and I could not tell who was doing what...So I had to do that, the names were done class by class.”

On the other hand, Mary confessed that she randomly assigned her students to seats:

Sometimes I come in and say everybody on the front row is group 1, second row is group 2. Other times, I come in and say everybody in column 1 is group 1. Sometimes I come in and say you, you, and you are group 1...Even if they luck out and end up in the same group with someone that I know they will not work well with...I just take them out.

The participants also used the following strategies to create communities of learners: designing activities where students work together; having clear expectations for group work; making students accountable for their learning; and showing generosity/kindness towards one another. In order for students to collaborate, teachers need to create opportunities for students to work together. For example, Greg’s students played Cahoots: “I’ll always have students working together on that because I feel like if someone knows something and the other person doesn’t, they can start to realize they can rely on each other for help,” while Alyssa’s students were a ‘football team’:

It becomes a team, so then this group if they all don’t have it together, I’m like, alright, you need to make sure that he’s on the same page as you. I just kind of

let them know, you need to help out your teammate, because we're a football team.

Sometimes, students chose their partners: "I let them choose sometimes," said Carmen, while other times, teachers partnered up students with other students they would not usually collaborate with. For example, Melody said: "Working with someone who you don't necessarily talk to or like is important...you are going to do that because it is a life skill that you need." Similarly, Carmen stated: "You may not like them but you're going to learn to like them. When you grow up, you're going to work with people you may (not) like."

Collaboration went smoother when participants set clear expectations for group work. For example, Courtney expected every group member to participate, nudging her students: "to make sure that everyone in your group talks, make sure that everyone contributes." Moreover, Mitchell and Mary talked about assigning group members specific roles: "There are usually multiple trials and samples at each station, each person can have a specific job, in addition to being a data recorder or cleaning up," said Mitchell. In turn, Mary reflected: "In my groups there is a lab leader, who switches every time we do stations. One of the responsibilities is to make sure that no one is left behind in your group." Similarly, Sally explained how she always changed the group leaders: "It's somebody different most times."

Participants also created communities of learners by holding their students accountable. Dawn said: "It is not like one person really doing the work and then the other just copying. I have really seen them take on that leadership and really help each other out." Similarly, Ethan reflected: "if someone did not understand something, then the others will pick up the pieces, and it was kind of a discovery learning for all of them, but in groups."

Moreover, Sally explained how encouraged the 'ask three, then me' routine in her class: "This person finished first, I've checked theirs and it is correct, so you guys are going to help each other...So can you help her get started since you've already done it right. Ask three, then me is big." Similarly, Tammy shared:

I tell them that in groups, Ok, you can't talk to me, you can only talk to your group; you can't ask me any questions until it's my turn to speak again, so I won't answer any questions. It forces them to use each other and use their own brain.

On the other hand, Chris and Mitchell's students were responsible to catch up with missing work and cleaning the classroom: "I do have the kids working with each other when they are missing something, and I try to use that as much as possible" said Chris, while Mitchell echoed: "They are cleaning up and setting up the lab themselves; when they get there, they need to put all the reactants together in the way that it needs to happen." Mary's love for collaboration is obvious in her comment: "I encourage it highly...work together, teach each other, help each other. Everyone knows what is going on. No one leaves that table with blanks on their paper. This gives them a sense of accountability for each other."

More importantly, students were taught to respect one another while collaborating. Mary encouraged kindness:

Having more than just respect for each other...actually being kind to each other, joking with each other. Because they think being respectful is not beating someone to a pulp. We have to undo all of that...No, that was not enough. Go and say thank you. Go back and apologize. Help each other out.

Chris encouraged generosity:

I praise the kids who do it: Thank you for helping him, that is really cool that you are doing that. I like the fact that you are letting him work with you. When they do, I am like, I really appreciate it that you helped me out.

Moreover, Tammy rewarded displays of generosity: "I have a class store and I get them points. When it's time to work with someone I just reiterate, if you're working with someone this is how you earn your money."

Fostering student accountability

Developing effective rules

The following categories are comprehensive of most of the rules the participants developed for their classrooms: (a) be respectful (be nice to subs; no profanity; no unauthorized electronics); (b) be ready (be prepared to learn; be in the now, keep an open mind); and (c) be responsible (leave your place better than you found it; be on time and on task).

The participants believed that in order for rules to be effective, they needed to be taught in beginning of the school year, modeled and monitored periodically. Melody summed up the best the significance of teaching students the rules when she said: "Those are my class rules and I am pretty strict because those are things that are going to take you places not just in my classroom, but they are habits that you need as a teenager and as an adult." Most of the participants developed their rules in the beginning of the year. Carmen and Luke were the only ones who involved their students in the development of the rules. Luke said: "We created the rules at the beginning of the year. Now they are posted up there on the board." Carmen reflected: "These are the rules that we've developed with my students."

All participants had their classroom rules displayed on the walls, serving as reminders of appropriate behavior. Some taught the rules by having conversations with their students. For example, Dawn spent the first day going over rules, routines, consequences, and expectations: "I will go over four different activities. I usually do PowerPoint for my lessons so I will have one slide that states, this is what I expect for today." Similarly, Sally and Ethan taught the rules first week of school: "The first two weeks of school we discussed rituals, routines, and expectations. I have my class rules posted above my board," said Sally, while Ethan explained: "The first two weeks we went over what it means to be respectful, responsible...if they start being too talkative and I have to stop my lesson, I go back to what it means to be respectful." Adam taught the rules by "talking about them in the beginning of the school year. I try to reiterate them every week." On the other hand, Mary's students took

the rules home with them, “they are written in their syllabus that they take home the first day.”

Moreover, Tammy acted out the rules in order for students to learn them: “At the beginning of the school year we acted them out like, what is being kind and graceful? What is responsible? What does resourceful mean? And we just talked about it and that’s basically how we did that.” Similarly, Greg stated: “We have a teaching episode about that as a whole group. That way, afterwards I can address it on an individual basis, were you being respectful to that student? No, you weren’t. Okay, how can we do to address this?” Michal commented: “My class rules and expectations were explained and role played at the beginning of the year, which helped many students get used to them.”

Effective rules were periodically monitored and reinforced. Sam said: “I go through them almost every day. They are up there now,” while Adam stated: “After the hurricane the first day back was like the first day of school all over again. So, we had to remind them of rules and expectations.” Luke explained how he reviewed the rules “every time a new student comes in.” Similarly, Irene revisited the rules every week, and Diane echoed: “I communicate the rules every day. And sometimes I have to go back over them...the respect one especially. The talking...especially when I am talking.” Mary and Stephen talked about the significance of reminding students of the rules when they break them: Mary said: “I have brief conversations whenever my rules are broken. I think that is big in making sure that they know the rules...that they see the rules.” Stephen added: “Rules and expectations are posted on the board and I address specific students or the whole class when they are not met,” while Greg also stated:

When they break class procedures, I ask them to remind me of my expectations so it is reiterated with the class. When rules are disobeyed by a large number of students, I do a think aloud to help reinforce what is acceptable behavior.

Developing expectations

The participants communicated their expectations clearly and on multiple occasions, both in writing and orally at the beginning of the semester. The following four categories are comprehensive of all of expectations developed by the participants: (a) persevere (don’t give up; keep trying; try your hardest every day; push through challenges); (b) show interest in learning (ask questions; strive for excellence; take responsibility for your actions; show initiative in and outside of class); (c) have fun (act with good vibes only; joke with each other); and (d) interact with the teacher and fellow students (work together; teach each other; assume leadership roles).

Intentionally considering students’ cultures when managing the classroom

When asked how they considered their students’ culture when managing their classroom, some participants made a strong connection between the students’ culture and classroom management, while for others, this connection was weak, or

non-existent. The participants who made specific connections with the students' culture addressed the following: the use of language (profanity), responses to fighting, the culture of roasting, the call our response, social interaction, use of jokes, and quiet protests. Other participants also discussed how coming from the same culture with their students gauged their responses to student behavior.

The most common problem seemed to be the use of strong language (profanity, disrespectful language) between student–student or student–teacher. Andrea shared:

It is the age, the culture...Some kids say, my parents curse all of the time, and that is why I curse. I called home, and sometimes that is true. Other times it is not the case, so I have to consider the home culture when I'm determining whether or not this is a big deal.

In turn, Adam taught his students about the time and the place for use of language:

There are somethings I try to limit, like profanity. They are starting to get it. I understand that outside of this building it's probably how they're going to speak normally, so I just have to make them understand the time and the place. It is a youth thing. The youth determines the culture.

Some participants made peace with the use of disrespectful language by not taking things personally, like Chris and Cole did. Cole shared: "Some even say, I shouldn't have said that in front of you. The words that I find disrespectful are part of their every day. So, I try to understand the context and gather what they are saying, versus the words they're literally saying." Similarly, Chris explained:

They talk to adults the same way they talk to their peers. They don't get it at all, because they have just not been taught it. So, I had to learn that. I take that into consideration a lot and I think that this has helped me a lot with just not taking it personally. It is a work in progress.

Moreover, some participants were confronted with the culture of roasting. Greg reflected:

I recognize that in this culture, it's not like we're getting aggressive and we're trying to hurt each other; it's more a right of passage, we do this to show who's the biggest man. Growing up, I would consider some of these things aggressive and rude; but they are not considered aggressive and rude here. I just have to put my fears of them getting too aggressive aside and realize that they probably didn't mean it like that. One of the things that my kids say every year, they call me black. Mr. T you are black, you're not white. I guess that's a compliment.

Similarly, Andrea commented:

They throw around the word *jit* all the time. That is their slang. It means 'dumb little boy'. They are saying it back-and-forth to each other. When they are calling each other that, I am paying more attention to the tone. If the tone is coming off as disrespectful and insulting, that is when I say something.

Besides understanding the culture of roasting and the use of young language (slang) in general, participants discussed considering their students' culture when using the call out response in their classroom, a strategy which invites student participation without teacher acknowledgment to speak. This is how Courtney used this strategy: "It helps to state my classroom expectations from the beginning. I use the call out response because they are big on that. If I do the call and response, the expectation is that everybody responds." Similarly, Melody shared:

We do the call out response in science a lot of times. When they know the answer, they get really excited and they want to share. Sometimes I will say, I don't want to see hands when I ask this question, so that way they know beforehand that is what I am looking for.

Some participants had students who wanted to quietly protest police violence by kneeling, rather than standing for the Pledge of Allegiance. Understanding the significance of this gesture for the students, Diane reflected:

When we do the Pledge of Allegiance, I told them to get up. If you feel the need to take a knee, go for it. But you cannot sit in your seat. It is the school policy that you stand. You can stand up and recite the pledge, or stand up and do nothing, or take a knee if you want to. I don't have any problems with that.

In turn, Carmen shared: "They have not been standing for the Pledge of Allegiance. But we have talked about why they are not standing, about what their beliefs are. I'm not doing it just because does not work." Similarly, Sam's students refused to stand during the national anthem. Sam explained that after having class discussions about the NFL players kneeling during the national anthem, he allowed his students to express this right: "A quarter of my class refuses to stand up during the national anthem. If they can explain the reason for doing it, rather than just going along with their friends, I am ok with it."

On the other hand, Carmen and Luke talked about considering culture when de-escalating conflict in their classroom, be it fighting, or just verbal altercations. For example, Carmen felt comfortable in de-escalating fights, and making sure her students understood the expected behavior: "They always say, well my mom said that if they say something, I can hit them...I know that may be part of the culture, most of my kids come from the same background. But we handle that in a non-violent way." Similarly, Luke shared how he de-escalated the situation:

A lot of times, instead of breaking it down, they step up if you approach them in an aggressive way. Because I know that is their culture, I tend to not go that route. I don't raise my voice because if I raise my voice, they are going to raise their voice.

Mitchell made another interesting point, as he reflected on the connection between a culturally responsive lesson and classroom management: "I think about culture proactively a lot as I plan my lessons. If my lesson is culturally responsive and it interests them, obviously you have fewer classroom management issues

just because they're doing what they're supposed to." Moreover, recognizing that students need social interaction, he created opportunities for students to work in groups: "I know my kids are going to want the talk at some point, so that comes into play when I do group work, that keeps them time to socialize in class while still doing work."

Finally, some participants talked about how their own culture helped them build connections with the students. For example, Mary shared:

Most of my life I was learning my culture and living it. For the last couple of years, I've been breaking it down, trying to figure out, why do I do that? Why is that a custom in my family? Once I get the opportunity in my class to do that, it gives me the insight into how to address it with my kids. In the African-American culture, kindness looks like weakness. And we are not good with the weakness. I know that because I come from that. So, I tell them, look, I understand why you're doing that. I come from rougher streets than you. I did the same, and it didn't work for me; this is a better way, give it a try.

Luke also explained how could relate to his students, as he lived in their neighborhood:

I am aware that my students come from different backgrounds...I am especially aware of their socioeconomic background. I think about their culture and where they are coming from. I grew up in this neighborhood so I consider their background, their SES, and their environment when I teach.

Similarly, Anna reflected on how her interaction with her students is different than would be with another group of students, just because she shares their culture.

I think that if I had a different demographic it would be different; I treat my students as if they were my children and I think sometimes they see me as their mom, because I've been called mom. That just comes with me being familiar with the culture. I'm not stereotyping my students, because I don't know everything about their upbringing, but I do have a relationship with them which has most likely progressed because we share a similar culture.

On the other hand, some participants had a more difficult time to reflect on how they consider their students' culture while managing their classrooms; these reflected on how managed their classroom in general. For example, Alyssa talked about not calling out her students in the hallways, as a way to not embarrass them:

If I see them in the hallway, if they want to come up and talk to me it's fine, but I won't make them come to me the hallway, I won't embarrass them like that. Also, just using the humor and stuff that's relevant to them, showing them a little bit about me.

Similarly, Stephen discussed how he challenged some of his students, while providing more support to others:

I trust them more with what they need to do. It's like, you know what you need to do, so get it done. With the ones that need a bit more coaching, I tend to be

more explicit with what they need to do in order to be successful in here, on the test, and later in math.

In turn, Dawn shared another broad proactive strategy, namely taking her students' suggestions regarding classroom activities into consideration:

They drop good suggestions in the suggestion box. They are adamant about doing team work, competition, and playing games, doing math sprints. I want to get input from them, so that I can actually make them the most productive and engaged in the classroom.

When probed by the researcher to answer the culture part of the question, Dawn responded: "As far as the culture, I am still figuring it out as I go." In a similar tone, Sally reflected:

I don't think about it consciously. I try to decide if they are being a middle schooler or if they are being serious. Are you talking about someone's weave, or about how they're wearing sketchers, not Jordans? When they make references like that, I will tell them, we are not going to do that.

On the other hand, Tammy admitted:

I don't know how to answer this one. I guess incorporating music is a part of the classroom culture. I try to find positive lyrics and put them up, so when they're not paying attention to me, they can go ahead and read some positive lyrics from people they like. I guess that's me being proactive.

Discussing the effectiveness of the classroom management plan

The participants believed they were successful if misbehaviors decreased over time and if, in turn, acceptable behaviors increased: "My classroom management plan is effective because the negative behaviors in my classes are reduced and my positive behaviors increased over time," said Stephen; "Students improved... they previously were behaviorally negative," echoed Greg. On the other hand, Courtney mentioned having fewer disruptions in class and being able to call the whole class back without losing too much instruction time, while Anna stated: "My plan is effective; I have fewer disruptions in class and I am able to redirect those distractions without much time lost in the lesson." In the same vein, participants talked about students being able to self-regulate as a measure of a successful classroom management. Stephen reflected: "My plan is effective particularly when students are reminding each other of what is required or pushing each other to get back on task," and Chris echoed: "My students take part in regulating themselves and others."

Productive collaboration was another measure of success. Sally shared: "My students are on task, working collaboratively and positively with each other. They are following my expectations, are engaged," while Alyssa reflected: "When students are on task and engaging with the lesson, I know it was effective." Mitchell added: "My students are focused and on-task for the majority of class." Chris and Irene also discussed the importance of student engagement: "Students are

engaged and motivated to learn,” said Chris, while Irene commented: “Students are able to discuss the content covered that day.” Moreover, Greg added the need for his students to feel comfortable in the classroom: “Students are laughing, smiling, participating.”

To triangulate the effectiveness of the classroom management plan, another researcher conducted classroom observations with all the participants. The results were categorized into two groups: student engagement and time on task. To account for student engagement, the researcher observed the whole class for a period of twenty minutes. The student engagement was recorded only for twelve participants in the first and second cohorts. The researcher noted that forty-six disruptions, redirections and/or corrections took place during the observation (an average of 5.5%). The number of praises, both general and specific was higher, a total of eighty-seven (an average of 10%). Moreover, the researcher observed on/off-task behaviors for ten minutes, focusing on one student for five seconds and restarting the cycle after all students were observed. On average, students were on task 71% of the time, and off task 29% of the time. These data support the claim that the teachers used effective strategies in managing their classrooms.

A break-down of responses by gender and ethnicity is presented in the table below. These results were captured from the two categories in which the participants’ responses were more diversified, namely developing positive relationships with students, and intentionally considering students’ cultures when managing their classrooms. In the other two sections (creating communities of learners and fostering student accountability), the results showed that the teachers were successful in both categories (Table 1).

Table 1 Participants’ gender and ethnicity and their responses in developing relationships with students and considering their students’ culture when managing their classrooms

Participants	Developing relationships with students		Considering student culture when managing class		
	General/whole class	Specific/individual students	Strong/specific connections	Weak/general connections	No connections
Females	11 (out of 12)	9 (out of 12)	7 (out of 12)	3	2
Males	7 (out of 9)	7 (out of 9)	7 (out of 9)	2	0
Caucasians	10 (out of 11)	6 (out of 11)	7 (out of 11)	3 (out of 11)	1 (out of 11)
African Americans	6 (out of 8)	7 (out of 8)	5 (out of 8)	2 (out of 8)	1 (out of 8)
Asian	1 (out of 1)	1 (out of 1)	1 (out of 1)	0 (out of 1)	0 (out of 1)
Latina	1 (out of 1)	1 (out of 1)	1 (out of 1)	0 (out of 1)	0 (out of 1)

Data are reported by numbers, rather than percentages, due to the relatively small sample size

Discussion

Schools continue to be daunted by a cultural mismatch between the teacher force and the student population. This mismatch can exacerbate the classroom management difficulties. The participants attempted to bridge this mismatch by knowing their students and by implementing strategies that enabled them to foster a community of learners. The above results show that overall, most of the participants were successful in developing positive relationships with their students, which helped them better understand their students and their individual needs. Moreover, participants created communities of learners by fostering collaboration in their classrooms, and they held their students accountable by developing clear rules and expectations for classroom governance. Some were more specific in their answers, while others were more general, or responded more briefly.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the participants understood that CRCM began with developing positive relationships with their students. While some participants talked about developing relationships with their students in more general terms, such as getting to know them via surveys, using some of the survey data in their classrooms, understanding aspects of their students' culture (Weinstein et al. 2003), others talked specifically about understanding their students as individual learners, like, for example, learning their students' names in the very beginning of the semester, or interacting with quiet and shy students.

The bond they created with their students was further strengthened by caring about their students. Some examples of caring are more general, such as greeting students at the door, rewarding students for good behavior, or holding all students to high standards, and allowing for second chances (Gay 2002; Howard 2010). As a result, their students engaged more in educational activities, as they perceived their teachers as caring and nurturing (Wentzel 2006). On the other hand, other participants showed they cared about their students by intentionally taking interest in specific student absences, observing how students felt when they entered the classroom, giving students hugs (which is quite unusual in the secondary setting), or attending extra-curricular activities.

Secondly, the participants understood that because culture is deeply imbedded in teaching, teaching has to be 'multiculturalized' (Gay 2002). This occurs by establishing continuity between the modus operandi of ethnic groups and school cultures in teaching and learning (Spindler 1987; Weinstein et al. 2003) and by developing engaging lessons (Hambacher et al. 2016). All the participants were successful in designing environments that fostered collaboration and discussion (Gay 2010; Ullucci 2009). Students were engaged in small and large groups, as cooperative learning was one of the most common strategies encountered in many cultural systems. Most importantly, the participants understood the significance of a fluid classroom setup, which they periodically reorganized to meet the needs of the classroom activities. The participants also understood that collaboration went smoother if they set clear expectations for group work and student participation. Instilling in their students the importance in helping one another via tangible or intangible rewards (i.e., classroom points, parties, praise), participants

developed communities of learners, where members were kind to one another (Weinstein et al. 2004).

Thirdly, setting the tone of the classroom from the beginning of school and being consistent in handling behavior sets the stage for success (Hambacher et al. 2016). All participants developed clear classroom rules, and they made sure that the rules and expectations were clearly understood by discussing their need and practicing them with the students (Brown 2003; Weinstein et al. 2003). In addition, a few participants fostered student accountability by involving their students in creating the classroom rule, showing they value their input (Noddings 2013).

Fourthly, some participants reflected on how they intentionally considered their students' culture, as they understood its connection with classroom management. These participants recognized the cultural implications of the use of language (profanity) in their classrooms, they reflected on their biases regarding discourse patterns, and how these biases guided their interaction with their students (Weinstein et al. 2004). Similarly, participants talked about understanding roasting as a part of their students' culture.

Other ways participants were intentional about considering culture in their management approaches include their ability to de-escalate fighting and verbal confrontations, to provide opportunities for students to collaborate, or to use the call out response (Spindler 1987; Weinstein et al. 2003). Moreover, three participants also discussed how coming from the same culture with their students gauged their responses to student behavior. On the other hand, three participants were not able to answer if (and how) they considered their students' cultures when managing their classroom, even when coached by the researcher on what this might look like.

Fifthly, the participants measured the success of their CRCM by an increase in acceptable behaviors and a decrease in misbehaviors, and by students working productively with one another. Findings indicate that overall, the participants were successful, as on-task behaviors were more common than of off-task behaviors. In addition, the participants praised their students more than they corrected their behaviors.

Lastly, my hypothesis was that due to the exposure to CRCM theory and practice in their education classes, as well as seeing how their mentors used CRCM in their field classes, all the participants would be culturally responsive. Given the small sample size, it is very difficult to generalize the impact of the participants' gender and the ethnicity on their classroom management. However, a simple look at the participant responses, as well as the data in Table 1, shows that my hypothesis was wrong: not all participants were CRCMs, or better said, they were not 100% CRCMs.

Table 1 presents a break-down by participants' gender and ethnicity, showing that when developing relationships with students, almost all female (9 out of 11) and male teachers (7 out of 9) used specific strategies to develop relationships with their students, on top of using other more general strategies. A look at the participants' ethnicity reveals that overall, about half of the Caucasian participants, all but one African-American participants, as well as the Latina and the Asian participant used specific strategies to develop relationships with students. Secondly, when considering their students' culture to manage their classrooms, data reveal that the same number of male and female participants (7) specifically discussed the connection

between classroom management and their students' culture. In turn, three female participants, and two male participants made weaker connections between the two factors, and three female teachers made no connections.

Overall, the participants' gender was not a significant factor in the teachers' understanding of their individual students and their challenges, or in their ability to connect their students' cultures to classroom management. By contrast, more minority participants (8 out of 9) than Caucasian teachers (6 out of 11) formed connections with individual students, making intentional efforts to understand their struggles, home dynamics, and personal needs. Similarly, more minority participants (7 out of 8) than Caucasian teachers (7 out of 11) made stronger connections between student culture and classroom management. In this respect, when teachers related to their students' cultural backgrounds, they had an advantage in establishing positive relationships with their students (Au 2009).

Can teachers who are outsiders to the students' cultures be culturally responsive? Au (2009) believed that all teachers can successfully use CRT when teaching diverse students: "Although teachers who share their students' cultural backgrounds may have an advantage in establishing positive relationships and providing students with effective instruction, other teachers can definitely learn to adjust their teaching to become more effective." (p. 180) Similarly, Howard (2010) reflected:

A teacher's ability to understand students is not restricted by his or her race; it is tied to a willingness of educators to know and understand the complexities of race and culture, develop a healthy sense of their own racial identity and privilege, develop a skill set of instructional practices that tap into cultural knowledge (p. 74).

Being a culturally responsive teacher is linked to the teacher's affective filter, not to their skin color. This implies that teachers investigate their own attitudes and beliefs about other cultures, in an effort to analyze their preconceived notions of the abilities of minority students, and see past their stereotypical underachievement (Grant and Asimeng-Boahene 2006).

Conclusions and implications

Due to the fact that teaching and learning are shaped by cultural influences, it is incumbent that teachers develop an understanding of their students' cultures, in order to minimize any tensions that might arise in their classroom. In turn, this understanding guides their classroom management. When teachers establish continuity between the modus operandi of ethnic groups and school cultures in teaching and learning, they ensure that their students are successful both at school and at home.

It may be too early to call the twenty-one participants in this study culturally responsive, as CRMC is strengthened by time and teaching experience. But what they lacked in experience, they compensated in their willingness to relate to their students. Moreover, most participants made intentional efforts to recognize their students' cultures when managing the classroom.

This conclusion bears the following implications. Firstly, in order to gauge whether the twenty-one teachers continued to be culturally responsive, I would need to conduct more interviews with them to engage in conversations about what it means to be a culturally responsive teacher, allowing the participants to reflect on ways to be intentional about using the wealth of their students' cultures into their classroom management. Future longitudinal studies could further contribute to the research in the field of CRCM. Such studies could capture, for example, the change (if any) in teachers' understanding of CRCM in their first 2–4 years of teaching, and whether this change determines their classroom interaction.

Secondly, in the context of today's schools, the need for teachers to develop a CRCM mindset is more relevant than ever. The onus is on higher education institutions to help candidates understand that classroom management is not a toolbox, but rather a mindset. Teacher educators need to model it in their classrooms, by understanding that education centers around the needs of the students, and not vice versa. As such, classroom management becomes fluid and it is determined by the classroom dynamics and culture.

Thirdly, as teacher retention continues to be a problem, support in inductive years is vital for the teachers' well-being. This support can be from former mentors (if hired at the same school), the teachers' cohort members (who may face similar challenges), the school community (i.e., principals, area teachers, other teachers). Last but not least, residency program directors should continue to provide the teachers with constant support in their first three years of teaching.

Given the increased diversity in the student population, CRCM should become the reality of today's schools. Gay's (2018) statement bears a sense of urgency: "Finally, students and teachers should become scholars of ethnic and cultural diversity, and generate their own curriculum content." (p. 194) Ultimately, teachers, educators, parents, and students are all responsible to create equitable learning environments. All it takes is the willingness to do so, and the action to pursue this desire.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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