

MANAGING DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

HOW TO
BUILD ON
STUDENTS'
CULTURAL
STRENGTHS

Acknowledgments	v
Foreword by <i>Patricia Greenfield</i>	vii
Introduction: The Need for a New Approach	ix
1. A New Way of Thinking About Classroom Management	1
2. The Culture of the Group	21
3. Families: Resources for Organization and Management	48
4. Helping and Sharing—Doing What Comes Naturally	80
5. Culturally Responsive Classroom Orchestration	101
6. The Organization of Learning in the Content Areas	122
7. Classroom Orchestration of the Assessment Process	144
Conclusion	165
References	177
Index	187
About the Authors	195

A NEW WAY OF THINKING ABOUT CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Teacher 1: “I’m having real problems with my class. They keep helping each other when I want them to work independently. They touch each other, can’t seem to keep their materials to themselves, and every time I ask them a question about a fact, they answer with a story about their family!”

Teacher 2: “It must be a cultural thing.”

Teacher 1: “What does culture have to do with classroom management? I have to get the kids to behave and learn!”

What does culture have to do with classroom management? As it turns out, it has *a lot* to do with it! The goal of *Managing Diverse Classrooms* is to look at the impact of culture on classroom organization and management. Throughout this book, we examine how teachers equipped with a framework for understanding cultural differences have constructed novel ways of organizing their classrooms.

One of the most common concerns of teachers is how to manage a classroom full of students (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). After all, if the classroom is in chaos, how can learning take place? In this book, we suggest that, in order to make good decisions about classroom organization and management, teachers need to understand the role of culture in human development and schooling. Understanding the role of culture does not mean learning endless facts about a great many cultures, but rather coming to see how culture shapes beliefs

about learning and education. When teachers understand cultural differences, they begin to re-examine and redesign their classroom organization and management in many fruitful ways (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). As a result, teaching and learning become easier.

In this chapter, we lay the foundation for the innovations described throughout the book. We briefly define classroom management and culture so as to be explicit about what we mean by our terminology. In particular, we describe the intersection of classroom management and culture. Next, we introduce the individualism/collectivism framework—the system for understanding cultural differences that underlies all the innovations described throughout the book. Finally, we describe two important studies that demonstrate how cultural value systems of individualism and collectivism can influence school settings.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT?

In Figure 1.1 we define the terms used throughout the book. Both *classroom organization* and *classroom management* have the ultimate goal of making the classroom environment hospitable for learning. We agree with Weinstein's (2003) observation that "the fundamental task of classroom management is to create an inclusive, supportive, and caring environment" (p. 267). Organization, especially the social organization that includes how students communicate and interact with each other and the teacher, is also a key to an inclusive, supportive, and caring environment. Every choice a teacher makes about organization or management reflects a cultural perspective, whether it is visible or not. Likewise, the teacher's choices will affect students in different ways, depending upon how the children have been socialized within their home cultures. Thus, "effective classroom management requires knowledge of cultural backgrounds" (Weinstein, 2003, p. 268). Such knowledge is essential also to the development of caring relationships and the interpersonal skills needed to interact effectively with both students and their families.

FIGURE 1.1**Classroom Management Terms**

Classroom management—the set of strategies that teachers and students use to ensure a productive, harmonious learning environment to prevent disruptions in the learning process

Classroom orchestration—the processes of structuring classroom interactions and activities in ways that harmonize values of home and school, drawing on students' cultural resources to resolve problems, avoid conflicts, and minimize the need for discipline

Classroom organization—the ways that teachers structure classroom interactions and activities to promote learning, including communication, relationships, time, and the arrangement of the physical environment

Discipline—any action or set of actions taken by the teacher to directly control student behavior (a component of management)

Punishment—a form of discipline entailing either withdrawing a privilege or subjecting the student to unpleasant consequences

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CULTURE?

What, exactly, is *culture*? Our way of thinking about culture has been called a “cognitive” approach to culture because we are interested in the deep elements of culture related to thinking, teaching, learning, and making meaning (Fetterman, 1989). We define *culture* as “the systems of values, beliefs, and ways of knowing that guide communities of people in their daily lives” (Trumbull, 2005, p. 35). The concept of “systems of values and beliefs” is central to what we describe later in this chapter—the cultural values framework that has proven effective in helping teachers learn about two differing cultural values systems. By “ways of knowing,” we mean how people organize their world cognitively through language and other symbol systems. It includes how they approach learning and problem solving, how they construct knowledge, and how they pass it on from generation to generation. Culture is manifest in how groups of people carry on in their daily lives. For example, some people like to stay together as a family for all kinds of weekend activities, whereas others prefer to

“do their own thing.” These are not just matters of personal preference, but are guided by cultural values, as we will see.

HOW IS CULTURE INVOLVED IN ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT?

Questions of organization and management are, ultimately, questions of what is valued in a particular setting (Evertson & Randolph, 1995, p. 19). What happens in the classroom is primarily reflective of the cultural values of the school and the teacher. For example, “[w]hat teachers consider to be ‘discipline problems’ are determined by their own culture, filtered through personal values and teaching style” (Johns & Espinoza, 1996, p. 9). Of course, there are differences in teachers’ instructional and management styles (Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2006), but the underlying values motivating teachers’ behaviors are likely to be quite similar. This similarity results from two observable facts: (1) the majority of teachers are European American and implicitly hold dominant-culture values (Gay, 2006); and (2) most “other” teachers have been educated in U.S. schools, and in that process, they have been taught “the right way” to teach and manage the classroom. For this reason, teachers from nondominant cultural groups have often learned to suppress their intuitive cultural knowledge in favor of the “best practices” that they learned in school (Hollins, 1996; Lipka, 1998; Trumbull et al., 2001).

THE BRIDGING CULTURES PROJECT

The examples that fill these pages come from the Bridging Cultures Project, a collaborative action research project involving seven elementary school teachers in classrooms with large numbers of immigrant Latino students. Unlike most teacher training interventions that are short term, the Bridging Cultures Project has been a longitudinal professional development and research endeavor. The project began with three professional development workshops completed in four months, and it continued with a series of whole-group meetings,

classroom observations, and interviews over a period of five years. Although the project is described in detail elsewhere (Trumbull, Diaz-Meza, Hasan, & Rothstein-Fisch, 2001), readers of this book will benefit from knowing about the participants, the school's demographics and contexts, and the Bridging Cultures approach to classroom organization and management.

Participants

Professional researchers. Four professional researchers collaborated to develop and carry out the project: Dr. Patricia M. Greenfield, a professor of Cross-cultural Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles; Dr. Greenfield's graduate student, Ms. Blanca Quiroz (now Dr. Quiroz is an assistant professor at Texas A&M University); Dr. Carrie Rothstein-Fisch, associate professor of Educational Psychology and Counseling at California State University, Northridge; and Dr. Elise Trumbull, an applied linguist and, at the time, senior research associate with WestEd, the regional educational laboratory based in San Francisco.

Teacher-researchers. The seven teachers in the Bridging Cultures Project were all teaching in bilingual (Spanish-English) elementary school classrooms and had an interest in multicultural education. They all had ample teaching experience, ranging from 5 to 21 years, with an average of 12.7 years. Four of the teachers are Latino, and three are European American. Two teachers were born in Mexico, one in Peru, and one in Germany, although all of these four had immigrated to the United States between the ages of 2 and 8. The other three teachers were born in the United States. Six teachers are female, and one is male.

As a fortuitous bonus, the teachers represented all grade levels from kindergarten through 5th grade, and this remained true throughout the project, even with changes in grade assignments for the first four years. Three of the teachers have master's degrees (two in education, one in fine arts), and two were highly involved in the Los Angeles Unified School District's Intern Program as mentor teachers.

During the course of the project, two teachers earned their National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Certification. These were *not* average teachers! However, they were perfect candidates to help us understand and apply the framework of individualism and collectivism to educational practice in the real world. We use the teachers' real names throughout this book because it contains *their* teaching and learning innovations. They are Marie Altchech, Catherine Daley, Kathy Eyler, Elvia Hernandez, Amada Pérez, Giancarlo Mercado, and Pearl Saitzyk.

The participant selection process deserves some description. Teachers were recruited specifically because they were identified as being interested in learning more about their Latino students. We mindfully selected teachers committed to bilingual and multicultural education (and willing to give up three Saturdays for a modest stipend) in schools serving a large student population of poor immigrant Latino students from Mexico and Central America. Experience with this particular population turned out to be very important because evidence indicated that immigrants from these areas might be among the most collectivistic students in the United States (see Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Greenfield, Quiroz, & Raeff, 2000; Raeff, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2000; Valdés, 1996). This fact would increase the likelihood that knowledge of the individualistic and collectivistic systems would provide teachers with an immediate context for applying new content knowledge to a population that might benefit most. Our hypothesis was that if the framework were useful for committed teachers working with a population who had experienced conflict in cross-cultural values, then they would be able to construct meaningful new classroom practices based on their knowledge of the competing cultural values systems.

School Demographics and Contexts

The seven teachers taught at six different schools. All the schools are in Southern California: five teachers taught at four schools in

the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), one teacher taught in Ventura County (about 60 miles north of Los Angeles), and one teacher taught in the city of Whittier (in southern Los Angeles county). The teacher from Ventura County taught at a school where a vast majority of students came from immigrant or migrant farm worker families. These children lived in the most rural area, and because of the association of collectivism with rural residence and an agricultural way of life, we consider them to be the most collectivistic of all of our classroom groups. Two of the seven teachers taught in one of the lowest-performing schools in Los Angeles, based on standardized test scores. Two other schools were located in high-crime, urban neighborhoods.

Approach to Classroom Organization and Management

Overall, the purpose of the project was to foster culturally responsive teaching and learning opportunities for immigrant Latino students and their families, the population served by the participating teachers. The project used a cultural values framework to see if teachers' understanding of the deep meaning of culture would have implications for teaching and learning.

The Bridging Cultures Project emphasized two things: (1) supporting teachers to deepen their knowledge of cultural values systems and the role of those systems in human development, schooling, learning, and teaching; and (2) offering teachers an opportunity to adopt "a self-reflective stance whereby the contribution of their own attitudes, values, and taken-for-granted cultural patterns" (Bowers & Flinders, 1990, p. 7) and those of their schools can be examined. It was this combination of a powerful but accessible cultural theory and the innovations of the Bridging Cultures teachers that motivated us to write this book.

Many teachers feel frustrated and overwhelmed when it comes to acquiring cultural knowledge. Describing her perspective before she participated in the Bridging Cultures Project, Mrs. Eyler said

I wanted to understand my students better, so I started studying Mexican culture. Then I realized that the children in my class came from so many distinct regions of Mexico, Central and South America, each with differing histories and traditions. I knew that I would never know enough. I had to give up trying.

Though many teachers may have had at least some opportunity to learn about cultural issues in education, whether through preservice courses or professional development workshops, they are not likely to have had access to a theoretical framework that is both easy to grasp and immediately useful for understanding arguably the most important distinctions among cultures. The individualism/collectivism framework is just that. We have come to call it the “Bridging Cultures framework,” but in truth sociologists and anthropologists have seen the explanatory power of the framework for more than 50 years—although they have not always used the labels “individualism” and “collectivism” (Waltman & Bush-Bacelis, 1995).

Using this streamlined framework, with only two elements, the Bridging Cultures teachers were able to generate an almost endless array of successful strategies for working with the students and families they served. The framework and the examples we present should stimulate readers to generate their own innovations that make sense in their particular school communities. In fact, the framework is most useful when it is used as a guide to learn from students and families directly about the details of their own lives.

INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM: TWO CONTRASTING VALUE SYSTEMS

Research suggests that two broad cultural value systems, individualism and collectivism, shape people’s thoughts and actions in virtually all aspects of life (Greenfield, 1994; Hofstede, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). Figure 1.2 lists some of the most important contrasts between individualism and collectivism.

The fundamental distinction between these two systems is the relative emphasis placed on individual versus group well-being. “While self-realization is the ideal with many individualistic cultures, in the collectivist model, individuals must fit into the group, and group realization is the ideal” (Waltman & Bush-Bacelis, 1995, pp. 66–67). It is not a matter of valuing one or the other—individual or group—but rather the degree of emphasis accorded to each.

FIGURE 1.2
The Individualism/Collectivism Framework

Individualism	Collectivism
Representative of mainstream United States, Western Europe, Australia, and Canada	Representative of 70% of world cultures (Triandis, 1989), including those of many U.S. immigrants
Well-being of individual; responsibility for self	Well-being of group; responsibility for group
Independence/self-reliance	Interdependence/cooperation
Individual achievement	Family/group success
Self-expression	Respect
Self-esteem	Modesty
Task orientation	Social orientation
Cognitive intelligence	Social intelligence

Before proceeding further, we caution once again that every culture has both individualistic and collectivistic values. The dichotomy we present is a distillation of the “general tendencies that may emerge when the members of . . . [a] culture are considered as a whole” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 225). Great variation exists within a culture, just as any one person will exhibit both individualistic and collectivistic behaviors at different times. The elements that constitute culture are not separate and static but rather interactive and constantly evolving (see Rogoff, 2003; Shore, 2002). Of course, within