CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT FOR NATIVE LEARNERS
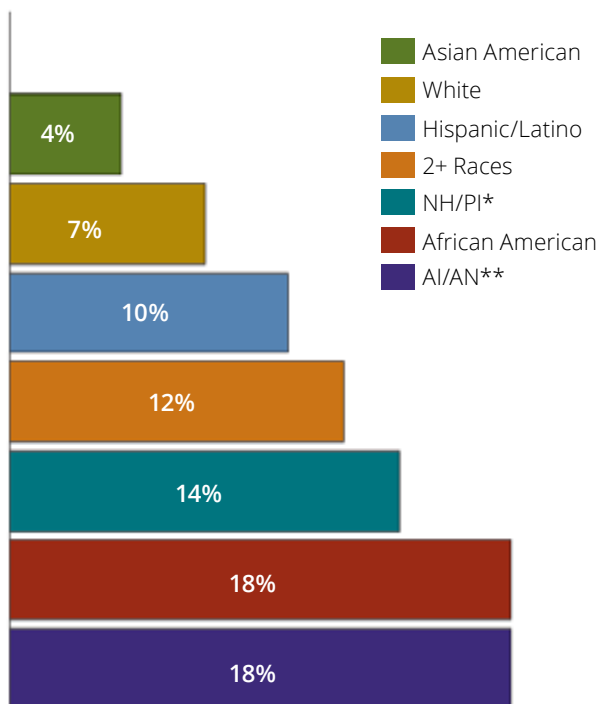

Native American students are persistently over-represented in special education locally and nationally and this disproportionality represents a significant dilemma as it indicates systemic problems of inequity, discrimination, and marginalization within education.

Classroom management contributes to this over-representation and continues to be a topic of concern for teachers, administrators, and schools. Novice teachers rank behavior discipline amongst their biggest challenges and an area that they are continuously seeking more preparation in[1-4]. Classroom management and behavior support have been consistently reported as among the most important teaching skills by both general and special education teachers[5]. Furthermore, management problems are a significant cause of teacher burnout and, in many cases, why teachers leave the profession[3-4]. This attrition is largely felt in Native communities, where teachers frequently leave only after a few years.

Culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) is an approach for all classrooms with all children, not simply for racial/ethnic minority children. More than a set of strategies or practices, CRCM is a pedagogical approach that guides the management decisions that teachers make.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION RATES for boys in Washington State by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2012[6]

- Asian American — 4%
- White — 7%
- Hispanic/Latino — 10%
- 2+ Races — 12%
- NH/PI* — 14%
- African American — 18%
- AI/AN** — 18%

*Native Hawai'ian & Pacific Islander- NH/PI

**American Indian & Alaska Native- AI/AN

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS FOR TEACHERS:

The type of classroom environment you create and encourage can either increase or decrease a student's ability to learn and feel comfortable as a member of the class.

A key factor in ensuring student success is your own understanding and appreciation of how culture shapes academic and social development. This is particularly crucial when students come from cultures different from the teachers' own.

Creating safe and productive classrooms is about building positive and trusting human relationships and in a sense this is a process that must be undertaken anew with each new group of students you teach.

Recognize your own personal biases and values, and reflect on how these influence your expectations for learning, behavior, and interactions with students.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY & CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Classroom management is more than controlling student behavior. Students who are categorized with disruptive behavior problems are usually associated with low academic achievement, poor attendance, high risk for placement in special education, and overall school failure[7-8]. Research suggests that disciplinary measures do not necessarily work, and in most cases, students continue to exhibit the same behavioral problems throughout the academic year[5, 9-10].

Most classroom management training that teachers receive embodies a disciplinary approach that reflects the perspective of the dominant culture and fails to take into account the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic needs of the diverse students they serve[11-14].

Students of color, poverty, and disability are in jeopardy of suffering the most from such unfair differential treatment and attitudes[15]. Unfortunately, misreading behaviors or communication patterns of culturally and linguistically diverse students can result in punitive disciplinary measures and excessive referrals by the teacher. This cultural mismatch may serve as a powerful reason for the present trends in the discipline gap, for example, refer to the graph on page 1 of this brief.[14, 16].

"The more variance that there is between students' cultural, racial, ethnic, and intellectual characteristics and the normative standards of schools, the greater are the chances their school achievement will be compromised by low or negative teacher expectations" [15, p. 614].

CULTURAL DIVERSITY & DISCIPLINE

Many teachers struggle with classroom management, and a lack of multicultural competence and culturally responsive classroom management practices in increasingly diverse classrooms only adds to the challenges teachers face[17]. Teacher concerns about classroom management are sometimes intensified in urban settings where "students' languages, experiences, ethnicities, religions, and abilities may be highly diverse and may or may not be shared by the teacher" [11 p. 561]. Often teachers take a more reactive approach when dealing with disruptive behaviors by removing students from instruction. This act perpetuates the vicious cycle for students who may already be struggling, who end up receiving less instruction, and could fall even more academically behind.

Minority over representation in school punishment has been documented in the school discipline research for over 25 years[18-19]. The Civil Rights Data Collection 2014[6] reveals that students of certain racial or ethnic groups and students with disabilities are disciplined at far higher rates than their peers, beginning in preschool.

→ American Indian and Native-Alaskan students are disproportionately suspended and expelled, representing less than 1% of the student population but 2% of out-of-school suspensions and 3% of expulsions.

→ American Indian and Native-Alaskan girls (7%) are suspended at higher rates than white boys (6%) or girls (2%).

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS WORKING WITH NATIVE CHILDREN & YOUTH

• **How do the members of your organization understand and appreciate how culture shapes development?**

• **How does your organization develop genuine relationships with families, students and communities?**

• **How does your organization define classroom management and what guiding principles have been established?**

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CONCEPTS & STRATEGIES

Equipping teachers with culturally appropriate methods of classroom management is an essential element in addressing cultural disparities in school discipline. Establishing a classroom that is caring, engaging, and embracing of the social, personal, cultural, and academic needs of students is integral to learning[20]. Integrating culturally responsive strategies with classroom management becomes an instrumental tool for improving student discipline and meeting the diverse needs of all children[19, 21].

A classroom management approach should balance and integrate establishing control with creating culturally responsive classroom communities that support the participation and empowerment of Native learners.   A more comprehensive approach to management issues should be adopted by practitioners - one which includes systematic attention to outcomes related to students' personal and social development, and to values and skills related to participation in the civics of classroom life.

Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran[22] developed a five-part concept of CRCM derived from the literature on culturally responsible pedagogy, multicultural counseling, and caring: recognition of one's own cultural lens and biases, knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds, awareness of the broader social, economic and political context, ability, and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies, and commitment to building caring classroom communities. See page 4 of this brief for more information and example activities.

AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Creating safe and productive instructional environments for a diverse student population requires an expansion of the current classroom management pedagogical approach[23]. Many of the current practices rely solely on the teacher establishing control and compliance. There is a paucity of practical tools that address both the need for teachers to establish control and their needs to build a strong community.   Although teachers distinguish classroom management as one of the essential components of their practice, and despite the importance of it on effective teaching, few researchers focus on the topic, and it is often an area overlooked in teacher preparation programs[1, 3, 24-25].

Teachers are often inadequately prepared to work with the increasing numbers of such culturally diverse populations and spend energy managing and disciplining misbehaving students instead of "designing lessons and teaching students" [21, pg. 289, 16, 26-28]. Research must shift to establishing culturally responsive classroom management practices that are not representative of the dominant society but are reflective of the cultural values and beliefs specific to a school and community.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

FOR MORE RESOURCES:
→ The Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching & Learning
→ Edutopia: Relationship Building Through Culturally Responsive Classroom Management
→ Headstart: Behavior & Classroom Management & Quality Teaching & Learning Lab
→ The Equity Alliance Learning Carousel
→ The Iris Center
→ STEM Teaching Tools

ALSO SEE INDIGENOUS TEACHING TOOLS: RESEARCH BRIEFS
→ #1 Culture and Learning
→ #4 Seeing Students' Learning
→ #8 Supporting Native Learners

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TYPES OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT (CRCM)	CONCEPTS OF CRCM	ACTIONS TEACHERS MIGHT CONSIDER
Recognition of One's Own Cultural Lens and Biases	→ Teachers should explore and reflect upon where their assumptions, attitudes and biases come from and to understand that how they view the world can lead them to misinterpretation of behaviors and inequitable treatment of culturally different students.	→ Write a personal "identity story" to explore how their identities have been socially constructed and how they fit into a multicultural world[29]
Knowledge of Students' Cultural Backgrounds	→ To develop skills for cross cultural interaction, teachers need to become knowledgeable of students' cultural backgrounds[14-15].	→ Form study groups to read culturally responsive literature that reflects the identities of the Native learners in their classrooms. → Work with Native learners to develop family history projects in which students explore their cultural backgrounds and share them with the class. → Conduct home visits and consult with parents and community members to gain insight.
Ability and Willingness to Use Culturally Appropriate Management Strategies	→ Teachers should think about ways the environment can be used to communicate respect for diversity, to reaffirm connectedness and community, and to avoid marginalizing students.	→ Form a study circle to examine structures and policies and whether they are fair to everyone. → Examine what has been cited as inappropriate student behavior and discuss if they actually are incidents of student resistance to what they see as an unfair system.
Awareness of the Broader, Social, Economic and Political Context	→ Teachers should be aware of and examine how current policies and practices in discipline might discriminate against certain children.	→ Visual representation and curriculum can depict people of various cultural groups (although care must be taken to avoid stereotypical representations). → Desks arranged in clusters allow students to work together on activities, share materials, have small-group discussions, and help each other with assignments.
Commitment to Building Caring Classroom Communities	→ Students are more likely to succeed if they feel connected to school. A positive, respectful relationship with teachers can help create such an environment.	→ Initiate and cultivate out of class conversations with students to get to know them personally; spend the first few weeks of school engaging students in social games and establishing school-to-home/community relationships (see Brown, 2003[30] for an example)

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