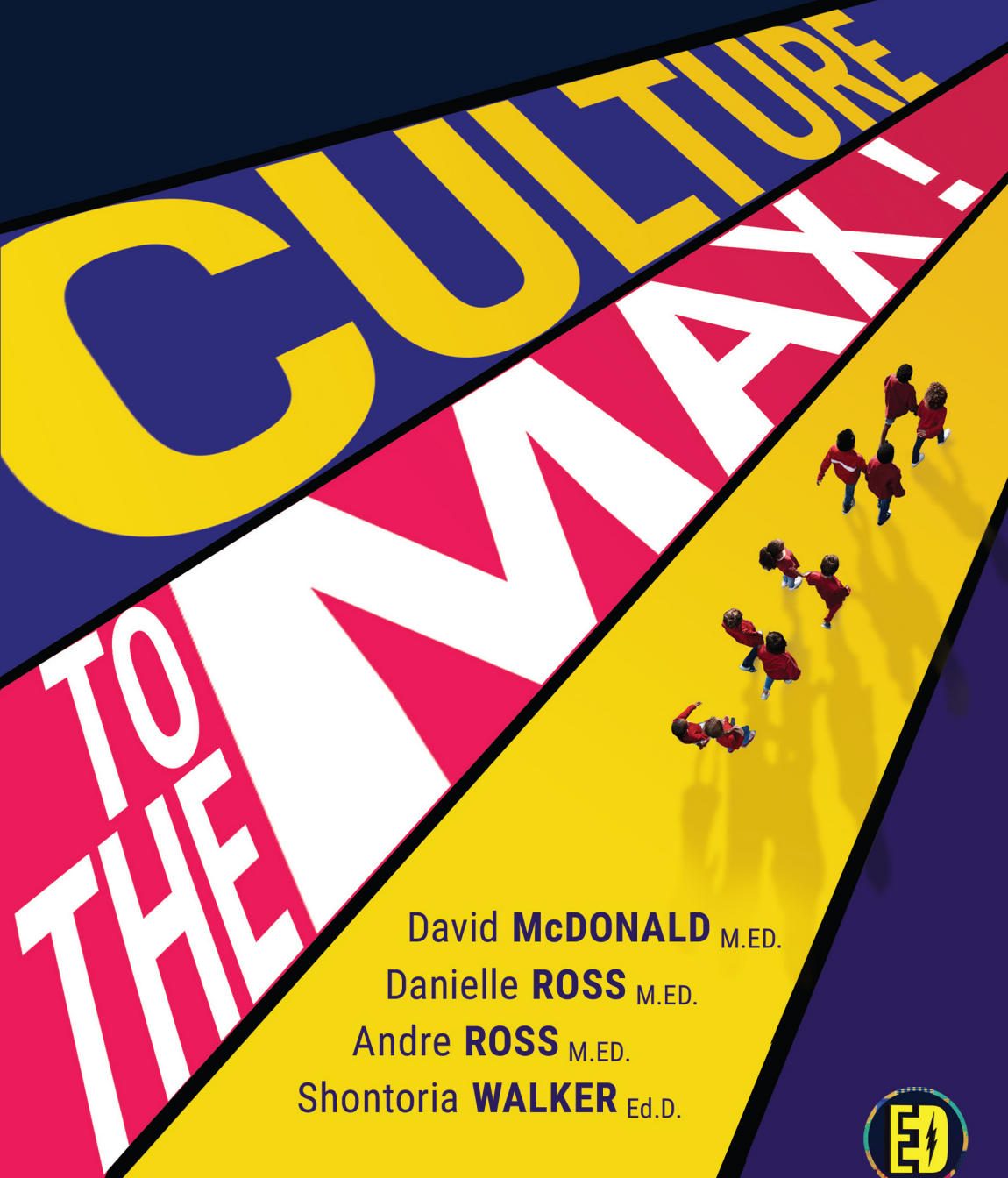


Culturally Responsive Teaching and Practice



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CULTURE

**TO
THE MAX!**

CULTURE TO THE MAX!

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND PRACTICE

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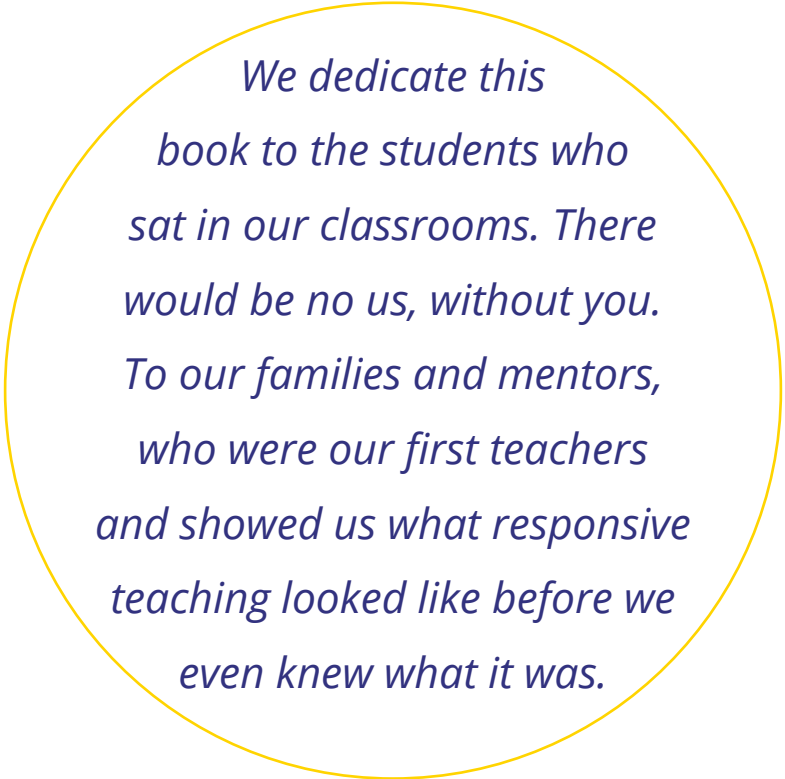
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FIRST EDITION



*We dedicate this
book to the students who
sat in our classrooms. There
would be no us, without you.
To our families and mentors,
who were our first teachers
and showed us what responsive
teaching looked like before we
even knew what it was.*

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CULTURE MANAGEMENT

DANIELLE ROSS, M.ED.

Culture, in effect, is about EVERYTHING. It directs behaviors all the time, so it produces outcomes. Culture is a multiplier to MISERY or MAGIC.

—Unknown

Culture, in effect, is about *EVERYTHING*. It directs the way we talk, walk, dress, how we show up professionally, where we choose to live, who we choose to date. It's about everything. It is funny because education is the one place "culture" was never mentioned to me or brought up. However, whether discussed or not, every school, church, club, or classroom has a culture, a vibe, that attracts a particular



crowd or group. My understanding of culture and how it manifests in an environment started within the four walls of my home being raised by a single mother. Writing this book helped me realize how everything we experience in life is connected and explains where we are currently in this moment. My style of teaching can be considered “nurturing,” “loving,” or “motherly,” and that directly relates to the experiences I had with the best teacher growing up, my mother. How I show up for students mimics the way my mother has shown up for my entire life. It’s why I set **High Expectations** for them. It’s why I teach them the importance of working together, **Collective Responsibility**. It’s why I tell them the importance of being themselves, **Authenticity**, and having healthy **Relationships**. It’s why I teach them it’s essential to care for and organize your space because it helps organize your mind. It’s why I create environments for them where they can be themselves and lead naturally, **Student-Led Management**.

Most importantly, it’s why I teach them that we must all work together to create the classroom we all enjoy, **Harmony**. The best educators can bring these connections into their work. We realize that every part of our being has

something to do with how we show up in the classroom. It is also why those teachers are naturally the most responsive because they understand the importance of knowing the whole child.

Therefore, when I think about culture management and how it lives in the classroom, it first starts with understanding who **you are** and how you bring that into the learning environment. That is when you begin to make connections to different aspects of your students' lives. From the music they listen to, to the places they eat, to worship, you see your classroom as a community where every story and identity is valued. **Culture is embedded in everything we do.** It's easy for us to see how culture exists in our jobs, homes, sports teams, or pretty much anywhere besides the classroom. Culture management is a priority when it comes to creating a responsive classroom. If your culture ain't right, how can you expect students to learn or want to do anything? I know you may be thinking, "Well, my kids like me, so my culture in my classroom is good," and while students liking you is a dividend of successful culture management, there are still aspects that **MUST** exist for your classroom to be 100% effective. Without culture, you have nothing; no classroom, no academic achievement, no love, just nothing. So, through my experiences, I hope to get you thinking about the type of culture you want to be true about your students in class or school. Because every class, teacher, and student is essential to me, and I want to see everyone win.

Culture Management refers to the teacher's ability to create a positive, inclusive, safe, and productive classroom environment for students. Effective culture management eliminates barriers and creates an optimal learning environment for students to engage with instruction and retain learning. This domain leverages brain-based theories to support the practices to foster, maintain, and rebuild classroom culture.

ESTABLISHING HARMONY

While many teachers use their summer to rest, relax, and travel, and let me be clear, I enjoy a good HOT GIRL SUMMER, but in this work, the grind never stops, so I use my summers to ideate the environment I want to create for my students in the fall. It comes with a lot of reflection and student feedback, which hint, hint, you should get in the habit of doing. Ask your students how they feel in your classroom or school and stop guessing. It is this genuine feedback that helps me be better and to create learning environments that students enjoy. I typically have to start with a **theme** or a **mantra** I want my students to live by that year. In the past, I have used motifs such as #NONSTOP or "Speak Your Truth," and my favorite one, which is the current theme for my school this year, "WE are the VILLAGE." See, I think this way because

it is easier for me to do everything else once I am rooted in a goal, a mission, and a focus for the year. Then everything else falls into place. The colors, posters, quotes, assignments, etcetera all come alive once I know the common goal. And with that, I am taking the first step in establishing Harmony in my classroom.

Harmony: The culturally responsive educator nurtures positive emotions in students that will support their learning and ensure that all students feel safe, cared for, and welcomed. The teacher supports students in developing a positive self-image and beliefs about others.

For many educators, Harmony comes as a reward or job well done at the end of the academic school year when the kids adore the teacher and vice versa. You hear, “We are finally a family” or “The kids finally like me.” Well, for me, that’s too long to wait. I want to establish Harmony in my classroom from day one because with Harmony comes peace, and peace is every educator’s dream in a middle school classroom.

So that’s why I am big on themes, and I always encourage educators to start there, whether as a school, content area, or grade level, figure out the collective goal or focus that we want to establish with students and start utilizing them on day one. Let me give you an example. Consider the theme, “WE ARE THE GAME CHANGERS.”

In my third-year of teaching, I was a grade-level chair. It was such a huge accomplishment because, for the first time,

I was getting the opportunity to establish a culture and build a team. My consideration around the theme we would focus on started with the individuals on my team. I was new to the school, with a fresh perspective, super excited about leading new initiatives and doing something different. By certification, the first-year math teacher on my team had a unique and fresh perspective, having taught in Inglewood and Watts. Watts, Los Angeles, the epicenter of the Watts Riots in 1965, where the goal was to end police brutality, housing discrimination, lower unemployment rates, and inequality in school resources and funding; a place that was built on culture and a people who consistently fought to keep it alive. Then there was the science teacher, a veteran, with one of the most structured and unique classes I had ever seen. She was looking to be on a team that was finally about something; about change. The three of us made up a dynamic team.

Then there were our students, all of whom would be new to the charter school. We would take students from all over the Dallas area since it was not a requirement for the students to live in the surrounding zones in order to attend. We had no information about their backgrounds, academic progress, nor behavior tracks. However, there was something fun about having the opportunity to give these students a fresh start, something new to look forward to. Despite anything that may have happened in their past academic careers, this new year would be a year of hope for them. That is what we were invested in building for these students. Which is where our theme for the academic school year originated, “WE are the Game Changers”! It only made sense! We explained the meaning

behind the saying to our families and students on day one because we believed this was the class that would change the game. The game is education and just like any sports reference, if we give our all and stay 100% committed to the goal, we can change the game. While working to ensure there is a pipeline of game changers in education, or community, families, and students were clear that our drive and our focus would be all about them. Going above and beyond average to exceed expectations. That was our dedication to them.

From there, I committed to making the theme come alive in our hallways. From the bulletin boards to the photo wall. I even got my team custom referee shirts. If you asked any of our students what our theme was, they knew, and that is because my team did an excellent job showing them why they were game changers. It reflected in their attitude, you best believe at any school event, the 6th-grade team was the most respectful and polite, but when it was time to do our chants and cheers, that's when you saw us come alive. It was reflected in their work ethic. They never gave up and always strived to do better. It was reflected in their confidence. At any moment we had visitors, our 6th-grade class officers were there to greet them and give them a tour of the campus. Our young students personified the mantra in a way that was recognized by any individual or leader, whether district or regional, that walked through the front doors of our school building.

You see, there was a collective purpose; a mission; a goal, and we all were a part of it. Because we expected the same

from each and every individual on our team from the educators to the students, there was no deviation. We all wanted it to be better because of the strength of our start and our understanding of the ultimate goal. That is what Harmony is, an agreement, a collective purpose. Students need Harmony in school. They need to feel a part of the team and have a sense that they are working towards something greater. At times I think we are doing school all wrong. Students travel from core subject to core subject, class to class, feeling isolated and mundane, and there is no connectedness, no Harmony. We must manage the culture of our schools in a way where students gain a sense of pride that exudes Harmony. They see why their success matters for themselves but also for the community at large. When leaders intentionally create Harmony, the students, no matter the age group, will follow and rise to the occasion.

SETTING HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND CLASSROOM SYSTEMS

Let me start by saying this. High expectations are not simply giving students rules and directions to follow. I remember at my new teacher training when I began in the educational field. Everyone was emphasizing having high expectations for students. They defined it as being “stern” or “cold” with students so they would comply with everything the teacher said.

I noticed that there was an absence of the student-teacher kinship, community or two-way street necessary to achieve high expectations. Once I began to practice this one way that I had been given to have high expectations for my students, I felt and looked crazy walking into my classroom unauthentically, trying to be and present myself as someone I was not. As a result, I noticed that it had become difficult to build the type of relationships I wanted to build with my students. Nothing seemed genuine and because I was told we were only seeking compliance when exhibiting high expectations for our students, the inauthentic manner of being matriculated transmitted to the students. When discussing high expectations, we specifically mean your systems, procedures, restorative practices, and incentives. It is not your behavior charts or reflection folders that you have created at the beginning of the year and have not changed or updated based on student data and feedback throughout the academic school year. Setting high expectations embodies a mindset of a teacher who believes that every single one of their students can achieve great things, despite how they may have shown up two or three years prior in another class, despite what another educator may have said about them, despite any negative commentary that they may have internalized from family or society. High expectations are more than simply a checklist of qualities you are seeking from certain students. It starts with the educator first. You set high expectations by first believing that all students can meet them.

High Expectations: The culturally responsive educator explicitly communicates high expectations for students academically and socially. The leader ensures expectations are reflective of students' home culture and identity.

At the start of every class, my students stood on their chairs, and they would recite our classroom mantra that read:

I am intelligent

I am capable

I can do anything I put my mind to

I matter

You matter

We can, and we will be, world changers.

Students needed to say this every day before we started the class because it set the proper mindset for learning, and it reminded them that regardless of what happened before they entered this classroom, it did not matter. In my class, I saw them as world changers. Why did I want them to believe they were world changers? Because then they knew I believed in them, but it was necessary that they believed in themselves. A world changer doesn't fight, give up, or lose momentum. A world changer believes in themselves, their community, their vision, and their dream.

High expectations are rooted in everything. How students enter the class, how they speak to each other, as well as systems, such as the homework collection process, are intentionally designed to set clear and consistent expectations for students. Unfortunately, educators lose a huge opportunity when they are not intentional and reflective about the expectations they have in their room. Ask yourself why is this important? Why do I want them to do this? One way you can think through this process is by preparing the rationale of why you are embedding high expectations within the makeup of your classroom and explain it to students as you are outlining the systems and expectations in class. In your reflection process, identify unnecessary systems. Do away with those and only keep the systems that have a high impact on the effectiveness of your classroom. And yes, it is okay. Not having a procedure or system for every little thing does not make you a lousy teacher. Not having a rationale and clear purpose for the system does.

Consider leaving some things up for discussion when you are beginning to decide what you want your class or school to look, sound, and feel like. Again, it does not make you a bad teacher if you don't have all of your expectations and agreements lined out on the first day of class. Consider implementing a student voice in this process. Allow them to say the things they want to be true about their classrooms and have them agree to it. It is easier to hold someone accountable to their own words rather than someone else's. Here is an example of the classroom agreements my 6th graders made up in my class:

MRS. SMITH'S CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS: THE 7 MAJOR KEYS

- 1 Be ON TIME and PREPARED to Learn.
- 2 Take ownership of YOUR ACTIONS.
- 3 RESPECT IS A MAJOR KEY.
- 4 Use appropriate language: no put downs, cussing, or other inappropriate words neither in our classroom nor in the hallways.
- 5 Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself.
- 6 NEVER GIVE UP, "I Can't" is NEVER an option.
- 7 Remain POSITIVE, do your BEST, LEARN, and have FUN.

See, they “get” it! All the way down to “Keeping hands, feet, and objects to [themselves],” which before teaching 6th grade I did not think was necessary, but oh boy, it sure is! It was less of me and more of them, which also showed them I believed that they could create high expectations for themselves and hold themselves accountable, and they did. As a teacher, my role is to facilitate and allow students to lead in their natural ways. So, even in this process of creating these expectations, my students led the way. One student served as the scribe, writing down their peer’s suggestions, and other students helped facilitate the discussion, while everyone was

involved in the process of agreeing to these 7 “Major Keys.” Teaching them to sign their contract to expectations solidified their commitment to excellence at the bottom of the paper. It is a beautiful moment for me, as the teacher, to sit back and watch students operate in their strengths, even on the first day of class.

As we continue discussing High Expectations, I must bring up classroom systems here and explain why they are essential. You see, a teacher that does not have a proper plan for the way they want students to engage in their class is allowing the option for students to not be successful. In addition, what story does a teacher tell by not being intentional about how their classroom will operate as a running system? Every big business is intentional about how they want their company to run. There is some type of purpose for how day-to-day operations may affect personnel or customer care, quality of services, and even employment output. Therefore, the same intentionality and thought process that goes into the way you think about your expectations is the same intentionality and thought process that should create systems. Listen, there may be a teacher out there who says, “Systems are not necessary.” Know, you are speaking to the choir. Heck, in my first-year of teaching, the only system I had was to “raise your hand when you needed to go to the sharpener.” My mindset changed when I realized I was doing my students a disservice when I did not tell them how things operated in this classroom. In a way where we

all were very clear of our roles and no one stepped on the other toes, per say. Like a well-oiled machine. I first noticed it when students would randomly get out of their seats to throw away their trash. I would hear myself say, “Why are you getting out of your seat without permission?” However, I also thought to myself, Danielle, did you ever tell them they could not get out of their seats? Was I explicit in my explanation? Did I even consider their response to my correction of the behavior when I was not even clear on what it would be in the first place? So, how could I be upset when they did not operate the way I wanted them to when I never told them. Before you go the route of saying, “Telling students what to do and how to do it is oppressive,” I would like for you to try going to a classroom where no systems exist and explain to me how the way students operate in that class isn’t oppressive. Don’t worry. I’ll wait. I am sure there are plenty of videos on YouTube.

All jokes aside, make the systems, teach students the systems, and explain why these systems are essential and how they help the classroom run like a fully functional, operating machine. I hope you are still with me and connecting to how all of these things matter to building a positive culture management system for students. It is the little things that count in how we want our schools to feel. There is so much positivity that comes from a classroom or school where students know what is expected of them, and they operate in a way that shows high self-respect for themselves and the

school community at large. Here are some examples of procedures you may want to create to guide students in their classroom:

<p>Arrival/ Entering classroom</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Greet teacher at the door 2. Grab your materials and sharpen pencils if needed 3. Turn-in any homework assignments 4. Place backpack in designated location 5. Set-up your desk to be ready for the lesson 6. Follow instructions for beginning activity
<p>Homework</p>	<p>Place homework into the homework bin immediately when entering the room. Homework will be returned with grades to students.</p> <p>Students should keep all work until final grades are received. Students will also be given updates on grades and should check accuracy of scores in the gradebook prior to final grading submission.</p>
<p>Borrowing materials from students</p>	<p>If borrowing pencils or materials from another student, no one else should hear you ask to borrow that material.</p>
<p>Where to find assignments (if late/absent)</p>	<p>Locate the "Absent Work" files and pick up assignments from the day(s) you missed. Please talk with the teacher for further details about assignments and for help with work.</p> <p>For homework that was assigned on the day that you missed, you will get two school days for every day missed to complete the assignment.</p>

When a student has a question

I greatly encourage asking questions. We also are about creating a generation of problem solvers. Here are the steps when you have a question:

Think to yourself about possible answers/solutions

Check the board and your resources (Student Notebook, Word walls, Anchor Charts, Dictionary, etc.)

Ask a neighbor or a friend

[If necessary] Research information

Then. . . Quietly Raise Your Hand for Teacher Assistance

ORGANIZING YOUR SPACE

During my mother's lectures about keeping the house and my room clean, she would always say, "Your space says a lot about who you are as a person. What do you want people to think about you?" At the time, I did not realize how this would carry me to understand that the space I created reflected the person I was, and this was very true when it came to my classroom. I have seen many classrooms over the years, and one thing I always noticed was that the classroom always took after the teacher. For example, Mr. Hill, a 6th-grade history teacher, who could be described as "nerdy" and well, "boring," has a classroom where students sit in rows facing the

front. He did have pictures of Black and Brown leaders on the wall and one bookshelf in the back full of all his favorite African American authors. The goal in his class was for students to pay attention and, most of the time, be quiet, so they could learn from him. As soon as I walked into his classroom, that is the energy I felt first-hand.

Then there was Mr. McDonald, the 8th-grade reading teacher. Mr. McDonald could be described as “energetic,” “fun,” and “creative.” In his classroom, students sat in groups, with each table named after a powerful symbol. His theme was “Leaders of Today, Legends of Tomorrow,” and his classroom mantra tied in tightly with this theme. You could see images of Black and Brown leaders in his classroom, including the very students who sat in his class. There was also a subtle combination of red, green, and black, like the Pan-African flag. The goal in Mr. McDonald’s class was for students to collaborate and see representations of themselves. As soon as I walked into his classroom, that is the energy I felt.

Now, let me ask you. As a student, which classroom would you rather be in? Which teacher do you already like more? In which classroom do you think you will learn the most? I do not ask these questions to be funny or sarcastic because, for some, there may not be anything wrong with Mr. Hill’s classroom, and you are right. There isn’t. However, when we think about the experience we want students to have as a result of the space we create, which classroom produces a more positive classroom culture? There is no coincidence that Mr. McDonald’s students were the highest performing in the district while Mr. Hill maintained his 56% passing rate,

which was simply good enough for him. It is not a coincidence that Mr. McDonald had the highest student satisfaction scores at the end of the year compared to Mr. Hill, who scored about 9th on the campus. Have I proven my point? Your classroom is a reflection of YOU. What do you want students to feel when they enter your space?

Organization of Space: The culturally responsive educator establishes a physically inviting classroom where decor, posters, flags, and other educational materials featured throughout the classroom reflect the cultural diversity of the students and the school community. The teacher arranges classroom space optimally for social interactions including small group discussions, presentations, movement, and teacher-student collaborative space.

DESK SETUP

Arranging student desks and other furniture is a critical component of organizing your space as well. The way you set up your desks is vital to how your class will run. For me, my students always had to be in groups because this meant fewer papers to pass out and more of an opportunity for student collaboration. Some teachers tend to avoid this setup because it creates too much opportunity for students to talk without permission but, why avoid the inevitable? Leverage

the opportunity for students to collaborate about your content and topics in class. I have even given students opportunities at the beginning of class to have a “social minute” because they deserve a chance to catch up with their peers just like we do as adults.

Having students in groups also presents the opportunity for **Student-Led Management**.

Student-Led Management: The culturally responsive educator involves students in democratic decision-making around expectations, discipline, and policies that impact the learning environment. The teacher leverages students to critique and shape all classroom systems.

I will discuss this more later, but specifically, as it ties into the organization of space, it creates an opportunity for student-led roles, where students are the center of the decision-making process in your classroom. These roles are not just your “materials manager” or “timekeeper”; it goes beyond that. For example, the *Accountability Leader* makes sure everyone in their group has what they need to be successful on the assignment for that day. They also make sure students are on task and finishing their work. Then there is the *Organization Leader*. This student’s job is to make sure the space and materials are kept for their group. This also means that they were responsible for ensuring the space was left better than they found it, organized, and all materials were

ready for the next class. Every student played a role, and all students were accountable for a group, a team, a name, or symbol. There is power in this type of system. It shifts the ownership of the learning space from just the responsibility of the teacher, who most often is the center for all learning, to the students, who do not often get the opportunity to have these responsibilities. It instills pride in all students, but specifically those students who may struggle with reading, or have challenges speaking aloud to the group, who are seeking their place of belonging in the learning environment.

After you decide on having students in various types of groups for consistent collaboration, then you will see that your culture management is 100% better. Take the extra step and think about group names to inspire a collective effort. In my first year of teaching, my group names were Black and Brown celebrities, people that I believed that my students could connect with such as Tupac, Selena, Oprah Winfrey, and Drake, for example. I'll admit reflecting on it. The goal was to produce collective effort and work responsibility. Each one of these icons, whether past or present, represented a cultural shift in media and music and I knew my students would recognize the symbolism in their groups which made them even more excited to engage in the learning. As time went on, I shifted to using powerful characteristics as my group names, such as Excellence, Power, Courage, and Loyalty. Students eventually embodied their group names in a way that built character inside and outside of the classroom. Imagine a student, when asked, "What group do you belong to in Ms. Smith's class?" And they respond, my group name is "Courage! I am

courageous in everything that I do and even when I get fearful at times, I believe that I can because I have teammates who are just as bold and brave as I am!" Thinking about all of this brings me joy as I reflect on the experiences students had due to the intentionality of the space created by me, their teacher. It all matters! You are not just limited to having students sit in groups to facilitate meaningful student collaboration. Consider a U-shape desk arrangement to promote discussion or even table pairs for a lesson where students will need the help of a partner. A lot of student frustration or disengagement comes from students feeling like they have to do the assignment or project on their own and when they struggle, they do not have the tools and skill to endure. Partnership and collaboration in the classroom fosters strength and once students realize they are not in this alone, you will definitely see a positive impact on engagement.

Additionally, it is okay to change your space multiple times a week. I loved the look on my student's faces as they walked into

As you read this, stop at this moment. Take out a piece of paper and draw different ways you want to set up your classroom. Then, think about what type of lesson would match the setup: heavy discussion, groups for the win. Socratic seminar, U-shaper is a way to go. Direct instruction for new material, rows that are connected and facing the front is a win! Regardless of how you think about it, the way you arrange your desks matters.

the classroom and noticed that there was a new desk setup. I would hear them say, “What are we going to do today?” or “Yay, we are doing something fun” even if it was just going to be going over test responses, there was joy in the way they sat, something new and different to look forward to, something that caught them off guard.

MATERIALS MANAGEMENT

The last piece of organizing your space is thinking about where your materials live and how students access them daily. This is another reason why I prefer my classroom to be in groups. It is easy to organize materials because everything lives in the group. When I place my materials out for students, I practice collecting and returning the materials just as a student would to ensure that the process is seamless. If I notice something that is not seamless, I change it to make the process easier for the students and me. Where there is confusion, there tends to be chaos and managing your materials is one of the areas we want to ensure has as little chaos as possible. Therefore, this is a practice you should try as a teacher. After you place all of your materials out and you have gone through how students will get what they need daily, try acting it out as a student. This is meaningful when thinking about maximizing class time and making sure students can gather what they need in ample time. Think about all parts of your classroom, from storage of materials to where students go to

sharpen their pencils. All of this matters to the classroom as a system. As you think about student materials and organization systems, make a list of systems that need to exist in your classroom. Here is a list of systems and procedures you may want to create for your students.

- **Entrance procedure:** Think about what materials students need access to daily and how they will get them upon entering your classroom.
- **Pencil sharpening procedure:** Even if you think you do not need this procedure, let me be the first to let you know that you do.
- **Paper pass in and out procedure:** Something as simple as the way we pass out papers can leave room for confusion, disruption, and wasted class time. Think about this as a system that can happen without you.

STUDENT-LED MANAGEMENT

As I wrap up this piece around classroom organization and setup, I want to talk about student-led management systems. Let's imagine two classes, Classroom A and Classroom B. Classroom A is heavily centered around the teacher. The teacher passes out the materials, picks them up, and organizes them. The teacher is primarily responsible for the redirection of student behavior and pretty much makes all

the decisions in the classroom. When there is an opportunity for feedback, the teacher is happy to give students feedback on their work or anything else about the class; however, the teacher never allows or opens the opportunity for students to provide feedback to either the teacher or their peers. Respect in this classroom looks like the students are compliant with the rules without an understanding of the why behind them, and little to no discussion about the impact of instruction on their learning. Students often do not talk about the content or experiences in the classroom beyond the time they are together within the classroom.

Classroom B is very loud, but productive. Students are constantly having conversations in class, about the task, of course. Students have roles in the classroom. You can see one student organizing the materials at each table, another student welcoming their classmates as they enter the room, and even a student redirecting off-task behavior. Reminding their peers, “You have 5 minutes to finish the Do Now.” In this classroom, the teacher often asks students how they want to engage in their lessons. The teacher facilitates a short conversation, and the students choose. There are also many opportunities for students to give feedback. The teacher asks every day at the end of class, “How would you rate today’s learning experience?” Students share their feedback, and the teacher adjusts accordingly. Students often have discussions around their experiences in class beyond class time. Some students even connect in the evening to go over missed notes to help their friends stay on top of things.

Again, I use these two examples to describe the experience students are having in these classrooms. Neither classroom is considered “bad” or “wrong,” but there is a stark difference between the two. Student ownership: a GIFT that every teacher should cherish. It is the “this is how we do it” attitude that every student embodies, even in your absence. Student-Led Management makes this mentality exist. Allowing students to lead in their natural strengths while also leveraging the different skills students bring into the environment. When students feel a part of the success of a classroom, they are more likely to take ownership of what is accomplished in that environment. Your classroom should be a space where students feel a part of the environment. You do this by giving them roles and bringing them in on important decisions that need to be made. Student-Led Management teaches students responsibility, commitment, and courage. When you have a role, you understand that what you do matters to making this space thriving. As you begin to brainstorm different ways students can lead in your classroom, here are some roles we have found helpful in the past.

- **Paper Leader:** Responsible for passing out all important information students need for class. Also responsible for making sure everything is prepared and ready for the next class.
- **Academic Leader:** Reads the learning focus for the day and facilitates checks for understanding with the class to assure they know what is to come. During class, this

leader also supports other students in understanding the concepts of the lesson.

- **Team Captain:** A nominated role by the class. This student meets every student at the door and welcomes them in. The student is also responsible for assuring everyone is on tasks and works hard during the lesson.

You can do as many roles as you feel are necessary for your classroom environment. That is the fun part! You can also choose to nominate or select student leaders. When I utilize this in the classroom, I do both. I select students based on their leadership in class, and sometimes I allow them to run in classroom leadership campaigns while their peers vote for the best candidate. However, do you know what the best part about student-led roles in the classroom is? It is the fact that YOU HAVE LESS TO DO! When you can count on your students to run the show without you, what a relief that is.

THE WRAP UP

So, I know you may be thinking, “The Wrap-Up! We are just getting started!” And I agree with you. There is so much more we can talk about on this topic of Culture Management. Maybe I will save the rest for another book. Perhaps, we will see. If you do not read anything else in this book, at least read this section because you can rest assured that without these critical things, you can kiss the thought

of becoming a responsive teacher goodbye! These critical components of Culture Management are **Collective Responsibility, Relationships, and Authenticity**.

Collective Responsibility: The culturally responsive educator creates a community-centered learning environment where students are expected to be individually and collectively accountable for successes and failures. The teacher structures environments for cooperative learning and group activities.

Relationships: The culturally responsive educator processes of establishing meaningful interpersonal relationships with all students and fostering healthy interactions between students. Teacher-student relationships extend beyond the bounds of the classroom as the teacher shows genuine interest in each student.

Authenticity: The culturally responsive educator celebrates the social, cultural, and linguistic differences among students openly and explores these differences with students. The teacher encourages students to represent themselves authentically (verbal communication, body language, cultural expressions, etc.) and they model this with students.

These three live together because you cannot have one without the other to create the optimal environment for students. Here is how I see it. If you choose (and I say choice because all of this is a choice) to bring your whole self into the classroom, speak your truth, and allow students to bring theirs, you are **authentic**. This authenticity leads to strong **relationships** with students as you get to know one another and build a bond, teacher to student and student to student. When you have connections, you have everything. And with everything, you foster **collective responsibility**. Where everyone has each other's back, and no one turns on the other! You literally cannot have one factor without the other because they work together to produce magic.

A FINAL STORY

If you cannot be yourself in your classroom, what's the point? Remember, at the beginning of this section. I talked about my first learning experiences coming from my mother. I brought this to the forefront because it is who I am and how I came to be that way. As educators, the best thing we can do for students is to "be ourselves." Don't worry, it seems complicated to do, but if we can commit to it, the results are remarkable. For example, in my class, we have many discussions about anything and everything: Immigration, pop culture, government elections, you name it! One day, during the reading of *Esperanza's Rising*, there was a discussion about the "border" and what its depiction in the text represented:

freedom. Some students had different understandings of this and, as their authentic selves, wanted to know more. One student, a Black male, raised his hand and said, “Well, if they cross over the border without documentation, doesn’t that make them illegal?” My chest sank to my stomach, and I felt an urge to respond, but I did not, and what happened next was unbelievable. Another student, a LatinX female, reacted quickly. “Well, if they made the process easier, no one would have to sneak over! My family struggled to get here, only to arrive with nothing and nowhere to start. We have worked for everything we have, and so NO, crossing the border doesn’t make us ILLEGAL!” Other students comforted her, but I appreciated the apology from my male student, who did not fully understand the breadth of the topic. I wanted to cry at that moment because as I watched the students facilitate the conversation amongst themselves, I realized how I had fostered an environment where students could be their authentic selves. Enough to understand each other and walk away with a better understanding of each other’s cultural background and journey.

You see, authenticity means you do not have to sugar-coat things with your students because they respect and understand each other. Everything is not perfect, but there is a level of respect that allows them to be their genuine selves. Through me as their teacher, you see, allowing them to be themselves, they spoke up for what they believed, even if it meant others would not understand them. Within that, there is a **collective responsibility** to see each other through true windows and mirrors. Where I, as the educator, am allowing a student to not only learn about themselves through

discussion, exploration, and text, but also through mirrors, for the students to discover more about others who are different from themselves. That is what the ultimate classroom culture looks like to me. They learn just as much from me as I learn from them while also learning from one other.

SUMMARY

Culture Management, not to be confused with classroom management, is the process by which the educator cultivates an environment of shared success, shared challenges, and shared triumph, where students understand that the learning environment is not only about academic achievement but is also about character development and community building, where the priority of the classroom is everyone's responsibility to ensure that the classroom is operating at its maximum functionality. Where the teacher is no longer the center of the classroom. Culture management does not mean that we negate the academic expectation of our students. It means that to ensure that our students, specifically students of color, will attain academic victory, we must ensure that we are permitting them to bring their authentic selves into the classroom while we, as educators, model that authenticity for them where our students are eager to lead their peers and know that they are just as accountable for the management of the classroom as their teachers are. The students understand that collectively we are stronger as a unit than we are as individuals, so think about it like this (Parker, 2003). Every district and campus's

vision statement is designed and created by leadership teams and administration staff. Once this vision is crafted and shared with the school community, the idea is that every educator, every staff member, and every individual that serves students becomes invested in a shared vision. The district may attempt to build this investment through professional development, team builders, and staff retreats to ensure that every individual employed in the district is on the same page. Now, let's take this same concept and apply it to our classrooms. Crafting a shared vision and ensuring that each individual who walks into that classroom environment is invested into the community, into the culture, into the way that you all work and operate every day, which is key to a sound, culturally responsive classroom (Revell, 2021).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Take some time to reflect and make a plan for **Culture Management** in your classroom using the guiding questions below:

- 1 In what ways have you often mistaken culture management for classroom management?
- 2 How have meaningful, interpersonal student-teacher relationships challenged or affirmed your position as an educator?
- 3 In what ways have you authentically celebrated culture in your classroom?
- 4 How do your classroom systems and routines reflect diversity, equity, and justice?

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