



## Identifying Classroom Management Strategies by Focusing on Diversity and Inclusion

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# **Identifying Classroom Management Strategies by focusing on Diversity and Inclusion**

## **Abstract**

Classroom management refers to those activities of instructors that create a positive classroom environment within which effective teaching and learning can occur. As our classrooms get more and more diverse, traditional classroom management techniques seem less effective. It must be noted that diversity and inclusion is very important in a classroom regardless of the makeup and demographics of the students enrolled. Diversity lacking classroom management strategies may have negative effects on students' learning. Students may perceive that they do not "belong" in the classroom which can lead to decreased participation, feelings of inadequacy, and other distractions. Instructors may make flawed assumptions of students' capabilities or assume a uniform standard of a particular group of students based on their race, ethnicity, religion, etc. Instructors may themselves feel out of place based on their own inscriptive traits (i.e. differences based on class, privilege, etc.). Identifying and acknowledging these notions of difference and how they affect the classroom allow both students and instructors to see the classroom as an inclusive place. This study focuses on identifying effective classroom management strategies highlighting diversity and inclusion. The authors utilized survey, interviews and a meta-analysis of literature and identified five classroom management strategies: 1) creating a supportive physical environment, 2) establishing clear expectations of behavior, 3) communicating students in a culturally responsive ways, 4) creating a caring and inclusive classroom and 5) managing problematic behaviors - that can maximize inclusiveness in a classroom and enhance learning environment.

## **Introduction**

Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as "using 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 them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming" (Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive management focuses on such teaching components as choosing appropriate curricula and using congruent communication processes (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Effective classroom management also involves the utilization of many essential evidence-based pedagogical processes and the ability to respond appropriately to the emotional, social, ethnic, cultural, and cognitive needs of students. Ladson-Billings (1995b) and Gay (2002) posited that when teachers have deep knowledge and understanding about power and privilege and are connected to various identities related to culture and background, they are in a position to demonstrate cultural caring and build a learning community which support student success. Cultural diversity infused strategies enrich the environment where individuals live and likely contribute to greater creativity (Lazear, 1998; Ottaviano & Peri, 2006). On the other hand, diversity lacking classroom management strategies may have negative effects on students' learning (Roksa, et al., 2017). Students may perceive negative experiences of not "belonging" in the classroom which can lead

to decreased participation, feelings of inadequacy, and other distractions (Griner, 2012). These negative experiences - which may reflect hostile, hurtful or tense interactions with students who are categorically different from them - can impair student learning and cognitive development. Instructors may make flawed assumptions of students' capabilities or assume a uniform standard of students (often referred to as racial color blindness). Instructors may themselves feel out of place based on their own dominant cultural traits. Despite the fact that some progress has been made to reduce gender bias and racism in college classroom, recent trend and literature suggest that fragment of it still exists. Engineering and engineering technology programs at universities have historically been mostly white male. And sadly, female students have been perceived as less competent than their male counterparts in technical areas. Such divisive mindset can create discouraging and unproductive learning environment. Identifying these difference and how they affect the classroom allow both students and instructors to see the classroom as an inclusive place. According to the general belief of Richard Holder, President and CEO of NN Inc., 80% of companies believe their overall business would increase if their staff had more international experiences and an appreciation for cross-cultural differences (Richard Holder, Personal Communication, November 10, 2017). In addition, Marissa Horne, Director of Employee Technology for American Airlines states that "When we intentionally bring together individuals from different backgrounds with different experiences and perspectives, we all succeed in achieving our shared goals". As a result, we may need to use additional teaching and classroom management strategies from those we have been using with the dominant culture (Marzano, 2004). This study focuses on identifying effective classroom management strategies highlighting diversity and inclusion. Through survey and interviews, the authors have identified several classroom management strategies that maximize inclusiveness in a classroom and enhance learning environment.

## **Method**

The authors teaches graduate and undergraduate courses which typically have students come from a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The authors were curious about how effective college professors developed a classroom management system that encouraged cooperation, addressed diverse students' ethnic, cultural, and social needs, and led to genuine learning. The authors' curiosity led to the implementation of this qualitative study with five of his colleagues (hereafter referred as instructors) from his department who typically teach classes which are cultural diverse. Among the five instructors, three were white, one is native Bangladeshi, and one is African American. The instructors' experience ranges from 6 to 30 years with an average of 18 years as educators. There instructors teach wide ranges of courses in electronics, construction, biomedical and industrial engineering technology. The author prepared a set of questions (see appendix) and each instructor was interviewed separately and their responses were recorded for analysis.

## **Result: List of Classroom Management Strategies that Encourage Diversity and Inclusion**

Examination of the five instructors' responses revealed the use of several management strategies that reflect the literature on culturally responsive teaching. Five primary themes that emerged from the interviews are described here.

### **I. Creating a Supportive Physical Environment**

The physical environment can be used strategically to communicate respect for diversity and inclusion, to reaffirm connectedness with community, and to avoid marginalizing and disparaging students (Jones & Fuller, 2003). Simple rearrangement of the place where students learn and engage using a world map highlighting students' countries of origin, a sign or banner welcoming students in the different languages they speak or posters depicting people of various cultural groups – can create an inclusive environment.

*In a design thinking class, one instructor asks students to bring artifact that is unique to their culture or ethnicity and use them to describe different design concepts. This helps students understand the value of cultural diversity and engage them into discussion about cultural issues which promote inclusion.*

In addition, a physical environment can also promote social engagement, interaction and behavior (Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007). Rearranging desks in clusters, for example, allow students to work together on class activities, share course materials, have small-group discussions, and help each other with assignments. Because racial and ethnic differences can sometimes lead to hostility, the physical environment can reinforce the importance of being kind and tolerant (Delpit, 1995).

### **II. Establishing Clear Expectations for Behavior**

Among other effective classroom management strategies and approaches in diverse classrooms, several educational researchers stressed the importance of establishing clear expectations or norms for behavior (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003; Brown F. , 2004; Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007). During the interview process, this has emerged an effective strategy that is working well.

*All the instructors interviewed in this study said that they establish several rules of conduct at the beginning of the semester such as “Class attendance is required”, “I expect you to prepare for class and to participate in class activities and discussions”, “Treat the other members of class the way you would wish to be treated”, “Avoid academic misconduct (plagiarism, cheating etc.)”. They make sure that students understand what the norms mean in terms of specific behavior.*

This is especially critical in culturally diverse classrooms, since different cultures hold different views about appropriate behavior (Hershfeldt, Sechrest, Rosenberg, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2009).

Many Asian students, for example, tend to be shy and quiet in class, and they consider it inappropriate to make eye contact with teachers. On the other hand, most American students are taught to value active classroom discussion and to look teachers directly in the eye to show respect, while their teachers view students' participation as a sign of engagement and competence (Rosenberg, Westling, & McLeskey, 2010). Some students may smile during intense discussions or reprimanding. The student may have been taught to react in this way so as not to offend the teacher/person of authority in the discussion. Instructor may expect students to sit quietly and "listen when someone is talking," but some African American students may be more active and outspoken making comments without raising hand, may get up and walk around, or more social with classmates (Skiba, et al., 2006b). In order to avoid the possibility of confusion or misunderstanding, instructors need to be explicit about their expectations, engage students in discussions about the class norms, model the expected behavior, and provide opportunities for students to practice.

### **III. Communicating with Students in Culturally Responsive Ways**

Differences in communication styles can have a direct impact on students' behavior and it seems that culturally responsive instructors have a deep understanding of those differences. It has been noted that African American students from working class families are more accustomed to straightforward orders from authority figures than to the indirect communication strategies (Delpit, 1995; Melnick & Meister, 2008). Whenever instructors choose to use these indirect communication strategies, they need to provide students with explicit lessons on how non directive verbal interventions are actually "code" for direct commands.

*Instructors interviewed in this study mentioned that email communications to some middle-eastern students sometimes seemed less effective, these students preferred face to face communication. So, taking few minutes in the class explaining what they need to do for an assignment or project produced better result.*

Effective instructors of culturally diverse students acknowledge both individual and cultural differences enthusiastically and identify these differences in a positive manner. This positive identification creates a basis for the development of effective communication and instructional strategies. Social skills such as respect and cross-cultural understanding can be modeled, taught, prompted, and reinforced by the instructor. For example, teaching students the differences between their home, school, and community settings can help them switch to appropriate communication styles for each context. For example, an instructor may talk about the differences between conversations with friends in the community and conversations with professors and administrators at school and discuss how each communication style is valued and useful in that setting. Developing a mutually respectful relationship with students requires considerable knowledge of their communication styles-both verbal and nonverbal. Recognizing the differences, responding as a listener, and designing instructional activities that reflect students' needs are critical to a productive classroom learning environment (Brown D. F., 2003).

#### **IV. Creating a Caring and Inclusive Classroom**

There are many factors that affect the success of culturally diverse students in their classrooms. Of all of the factors, the personal and academic relationships between instructors and their students may be the most influential. This relationship has been referred to as the “core relationship” of learning. When instructors and students come from different cultural backgrounds, planned efforts to cross social borders and develop caring, respectful relationships are essential. From the very first day of school, teachers can set the tone by greeting students at the door with a smile and a warm, welcoming comment. Greeting second language learners with a phrase in their native language can be especially affirming. Teachers can also forge positive relationships with students by sharing stories about their lives outside of school, learning about students’ interests and activities, inviting them to make choices and decisions about class activities, and listening to their concerns and opinions.

In addition to establishing caring, respectful relationships with students, culturally responsive instructors work to create a sense of community. This means anticipating the cultural conflicts that are likely to arise and promoting positive relationships among students. It is critical that teachers deliberately model respect for diversity by expressing admiration for a student’s bilingual ability, by commenting enthusiastically about the number of different languages that are represented in class, and by including examples and content from a variety of cultures in their teaching. Finally, it is important to remember that caring also involves communicating high expectations and holding students accountable for high quality academic work.

#### **V. Managing Problematic Behaviors**

One thing all instructors want is discipline in their classroom and as little disruption as possible. However, all instructors eventually have to deal with problem behaviors in the classroom. In those situations the instructors may be not be aware what it means to be culturally responsive. A Culturally responsive instructor uses the lens of diversity to reflect on the kinds of behaviors they judge to be problematic and consider how these are related to race, ethnicity and cultural background. For example, African American students tend to be more intense and confrontational than White students and they may jump into heated discussion instead of waiting for their “turn” (Irvine, 1990). Instructors of dominant culture are likely to see these behavioral patterns as examples of rudeness and disruptiveness, and likely to respond with anger, and to invoke punitive measures. Alternatively, instructors who view such behaviors culturally infused are better able to remain calm and non-defensive and use a variety of more constructive options such as discussing classroom norms and the need for taking turns in large groups. Indeed, they may actually come to see the benefits of allowing intensity and passion to be expressed in the classroom and broaden their definition of what is acceptable student behavior (Delpit, 1995).

### **Conclusions**

Student bodies in campuses around the country reflect great variations in culture, ethnicity, social and emotional health, and socioeconomic conditions. Attempting to meet these students’ needs

requires that instructors develop an awareness of and explicitly respond to their ethnic, cultural, social, emotional, and cognitive characteristics. Culturally responsive instructors recognize their biases and values. These instructors create caring classroom communities by showing a genuine interest in each of their student. They gain student cooperation by being assertive through the use of explicitly stated expectations for appropriate student behavior and academic growth. And these teachers demonstrate mutual respect for students through the use of congruent communication processes. Culturally responsive instructors understand that the ultimate goal of classroom management is not to achieve compliance or control, but to provide all students with equitable opportunities for learning. The National Academy of Engineering believes that a core need of engineers is to be able to work with a diverse, multi-national and multidisciplinary workforce. Therefore, educational institutions should create an environment that promotes diversity and inclusion. Below are few suggestions for instructors who inspire to create a culturally responsive classroom.

1. Develop a statement in the syllabus that describes the environment that you are aspiring to create in the classroom
2. Think about what topics may be a trigger. Define the learning goals of those topics and have them connected to the course
3. Guide students to develop skills for productive conversation. Create a trusting, safe and supportive environment for the discussion of difficult topics
4. Be an example of what you expect students to do, investigate, question and reflect on your own biases.
5. Seek training to promote and practice diversity and inclusion.

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## Appendix

### Interview questions

1. What were your perceptions and beliefs about students such as White, African, Hispanic, Middle-eastern, Asian and similar groups who are different from you?
2. Was your perception changed after you start to having them in your classes?
3. Did you make any changes to your teaching and classroom management styles to better serve these students?
4. What adjustments did you make?
5. How those adjustments impacted students' learning and success?