



# MANAGING DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

HOW TO BUILD  
ON STUDENTS'  
CULTURAL  
STRENGTHS

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## FOREWORD

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My mentor Jerome Bruner was fond of saying, “Nothing is so practical as a good theory.” *Managing Diverse Classrooms: How to Build on Students’ Cultural Strengths* by Carrie Rothstein-Fisch and Elise Trumbull proves his point. Starting with a theory of two cultural pathways of development—one collectivistic, the other individualistic—Rothstein-Fisch and Trumbull demonstrate that teachers can use a theoretical paradigm to generate manifold ways to manage a classroom in culturally compatible ways.

When Elise Trumbull was at WestEd in San Francisco, she had the vision to see the potential of our research, showing that a cross-cultural conflict in values between Latino immigrant families and the schools was the heart of the problem of formal education for the families’ children. Elise contacted me about our research that documented this conflict in preschool and elementary school, and a collaboration was born. Carrie Rothstein-Fisch, from California State University, Northridge, immediately joined us, contributing her professional expertise in preservice teacher training. This is the team that has produced this tremendously useful and important volume, making culture and cultural diversity the heart of classroom management for the very first time.

*Managing Diverse Classrooms* not only shows the value of theory for the practical everyday needs of teachers, it also shows what teachers can do with empirical research. When we gave our first workshop, we found that teachers had an “aha!” experience when our research findings showed them that parents had different goals for child development than they did. For example, they learned that

helping one another was a very high priority for Latino immigrant parents, whereas, in the same situation, teachers favored independent achievement. Before that, most had assumed that there were right and wrong ways to do things at school and with the school. They had never realized that what was right from the school's perspective could be very wrong from the parents' perspective.

From this "aha!" experience, as readers will see, Bridging Cultures teachers forged a partnership with us that has lasted to this day, more than 10 years later. The teachers began to use their understanding of the two cultures to develop new classroom management practices; their practices became our research findings and "results," a most unusual but rewarding type of research. It was rewarding because the ongoing development of new practices showed that the training had "stuck" and it showed its generativity in producing classroom changes ranging from increased parent involvement to modifications in class procedures and rules. It is these practices that *Managing Diverse Classrooms* documents and shares with other teachers and educators who may experience the same clash of cultures in school settings.

In today's test-heavy environment, these results are not necessarily considered to be important "effects." However, I believe that Bridging Cultures will be the Head Start of this decade—a key factor for keeping Latino immigrant children in school. They will stay in school because Bridging Cultures will allow them to do so without losing respect for or distancing themselves from their parents. Children from Latino immigrant families, Native American children, or children from other collectivistic backgrounds will not have to make an either/or choice between two value systems because their schools will show, through the classroom management practices revealed in this book, respect for the collectivistic value system they often bring with them. Bridging Cultures classroom management is a bedrock on which scholastic achievement can rest within multicultural schools.

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