



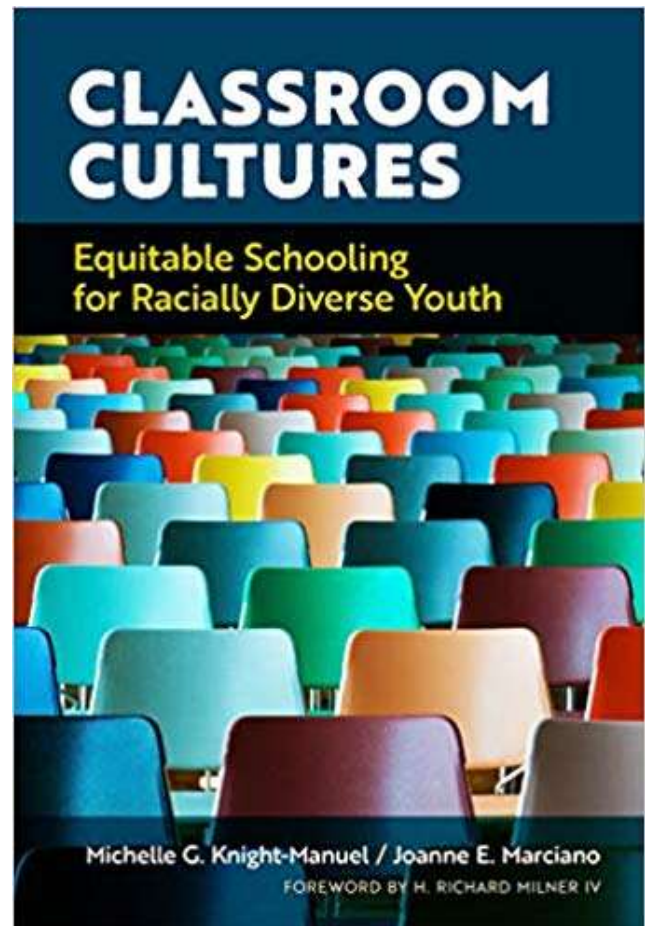
Knight-Manuel, M. G., & Marciano, J. E. (2019). *Classroom cultures: Equitable schooling for racially diverse youth*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

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While culturally responsive pedagogy within classrooms has increasingly become a subject undergoing intense study over the last few years, few studies have taken as extensive an approach as *Classroom Cultures: Equitable Schooling for Racially Diverse Youth*. Michelle G. Knight-Manuel and Joanne E. Marciano examine the beliefs and experiences of teachers and school leaders concerning cultural responsive pedagogy and the challenges that they face in classrooms and on school campuses. Knight-Manuel is an associate dean and professor of education at the Teachers College at Columbia University. Her research focuses on college and career readiness for Black and Latino youth, immigrant literacy, and culturally responsive teaching. Marciano is an assistant professor in the Department of Teacher Education in the College of Education at Michigan State University. Her research focuses on youth literacy learning, teacher and urban education with a special interest in the culturally and linguistically diverse youth school experience. With their secondary teaching backgrounds,



these professors add esteemed and reliable voices to the discussion of cultural relevance in post-elementary settings.

In a country with such shifting demographics as the United States, it is imperative that teaching practices be examined and perspectives be explored to address several issues facing school leaders, teachers and students, but particularly students of color. Research shows that racial backgrounds of classroom teachers across the United States remain highly unbalanced compared to the demographics of the students they teach. Eighty-two percent of the workforce is white, and it is projected that 55% of students will be youth of color by the year 2024 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). *Classroom Cultures* provides timely and relevant connections between culturally relevant pedagogy in classrooms and campuses and the Black Lives Matter and the #MeToo movements.

According to Knight-Manuel and Marciano, there are four reasons for urgent national change to address race and culture in our schools: (1) racial turmoil between police and communities of color; (2) a shift in the percentage of students of color who have migrated to suburban communities and white students returning to city schools; (3) global migration leading to immigrant communities in major metropolitan areas, which has led to xenophobic rhetoric; and (4) the increasing K-12 students of color population (p. 3). There are additional factors, especially teacher perspectives, beliefs, and expectations regarding these students, that collectively lead to disproportionate outcomes (i.e., lower graduation and college enrollment rates) for youth of color versus their white counterparts. Herein lies the case for culturally responsive pedagogy.

Knight-Manuel and Marciano use the conceptual framework of Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) to define Culturally Relevant

Education according to three important tenets: (1) Student Learning and Achievement, (2) Cultural Competence, and (3) Critical Consciousness/Sociopolitical Awareness. The book centers around Knight-Manuel and Marciano's research study on a Culturally Responsive Education Professional Development program provided at 28 New York City Schools as a part of the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI). The purpose of the program was to increase the knowledge of teachers and school leaders so as to support Black and Latino students. The study sought to determine how teachers viewed culturally responsive education and how this professional development program influenced their beliefs and practices. *Classroom Cultures* focused on the viewpoints of both white teachers and teachers of color. Through the experiences shared by the teachers involved in the professional development program, Knight-Manuel and Marciano crafted an easily read, concise but informative, and research-supported guide for those individuals in secondary education seeking support in bringing cultural relevant education to their classrooms and campuses.

The book is composed of seven chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. Each of these chapters offers a reflective section on the last page offering the reader and small groups possible questions for talking points after reading the chapter. Chapters 2 through 6 all begin with an "Inquiry Focus" and an "Opportunity" offered by the authors. Each "Inquiry Focus" includes the emphasis and objective of the upcoming chapter in the form of a question. This question constitutes the focus of the section and is answered by the end of the chapter. The Opportunity statement that follows provides the reasoning behind the importance of addressing the Inquiry Focus. The chapter includes sub-Inquiry Focus sections that advance the focus of the chapter. Additionally, each chapter includes an "Everyday Practices in Context" section where the authors share their own

experiences in culturally relevant methods while working with middle and high school students as well as with pre- and in-service teachers, giving the reader a glimpse into real-world application of the tactics described in the book. Finally, each chapter includes a section where the chapter topic is connected to classrooms, school culture and college access, a holistic approach that applies to all aspects of direct interaction with culturally diverse students.

Classroom Cultures explores the importance of teacher identity, self-reflection, and experience as gateways to understanding the perspectives of their students. The book reviews the ideology of “colorblindness,” which impedes a teacher’s ability to see race as a contributing factor in equity and social justice in education (Rosenberg, 2004). Knight-Manuel and Marciano affirm the negative effects of “colorblindness” in policy and practices as described by authors Annamma, Jackson and Morrison (2013), Neville Gallardo and Sue (2016), and Ullicci and Battey (2011). The authors do not only focus on perspectives of white teachers, but also delve into the perspectives of teachers of color, comparing and contrasting their approaches and participation in professional development activities, personal vignettes, and group discussions. Of note is an activity given to teachers in the professional development program to create a “web of identity” (p. 20). Sample pictures of teachers’ products are shown to compare teacher perspectives by race, reinforcing the idea of multiple-identities and exhibiting how this theme reflects the real-life situations of teachers and their diverse students in classrooms across the country.

The theme of self-reflection runs through most of the chapters of the book. The main idea is that educators must reflect on their own identities, educational experiences, and biases before being able to take steps toward being more culturally conscious. Knight-Manuel and Marciano stress the necessity of

educators seeing from the perspectives of those from different cultural backgrounds while simultaneously seeing from one’s own perspective, checking the stereotypes of all individuals, but especially of Black and Latino students. One noteworthy example is a short story about a teacher who denied three Black students entry into her class when they arrived late for a test, using their education as punishment (p. 38). The authors do a good job of breaking down the perspectives of the teacher and the students and challenges the reader to consider their own stereotypes by countering the story by replacing the three Black male students with three women of another race.

What sets this book apart is the straightforward approach to an uncomfortable and controversial subject. Instead of speaking in generalities, Knight-Manuel and Marciano include language used by teachers by including clips from interviews. They candidly describe stereotypes and cultural misconceptions held by educators they encountered, some who were not aware of their biases. These jarring narratives bring to light the discomfort many teachers feel discussing their misconceptions and making changes in their approaches to make their interactions with their students more culturally relevant. It is also clear that the barriers to embracing cultural relevance must be addressed in a straightforward manner because the stakes are so high.

Classroom Cultures also connects narratives with research and action items. The intended audiences are teachers and school leaders of culturally diverse student populations. Since the book contains an entire chapter on supporting Black and Latino students in making decisions about college, the book is better suited for middle and high school educators. This book was written for those interested in research-based approaches to becoming culturally relevant for the sake of their students’ successful futures. Readers will be able to relate to the teachers’ stories and

appreciate the guiding questions as an aid to making changes on their campus. Additionally, scholars and researchers will appreciate the appendices with a methods section and a full chart of participant demographics.

Knight-Manuel and Marciano conclude *Classroom Cultures* with specific recommendations for teachers and school leaders. The recommended changes are meant for large-group change; however, the authors include some for individuals to make alone as they find other like-minded educators to support them.

Using teacher vignettes, research studies, student artifacts and interviews, the authors effectively interlace theory, experience and plan of action in this a focused guide for any educator seeking direction in the field of culturally relevant education. Albeit a multifaceted issue, cultural relevance in the classroom is a necessary next step to equity in all schools for all students. *Classroom Cultures* is a valuable guide for the practice of culturally relevant pedagogy, and this reviewer will be keeping it close at hand.

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