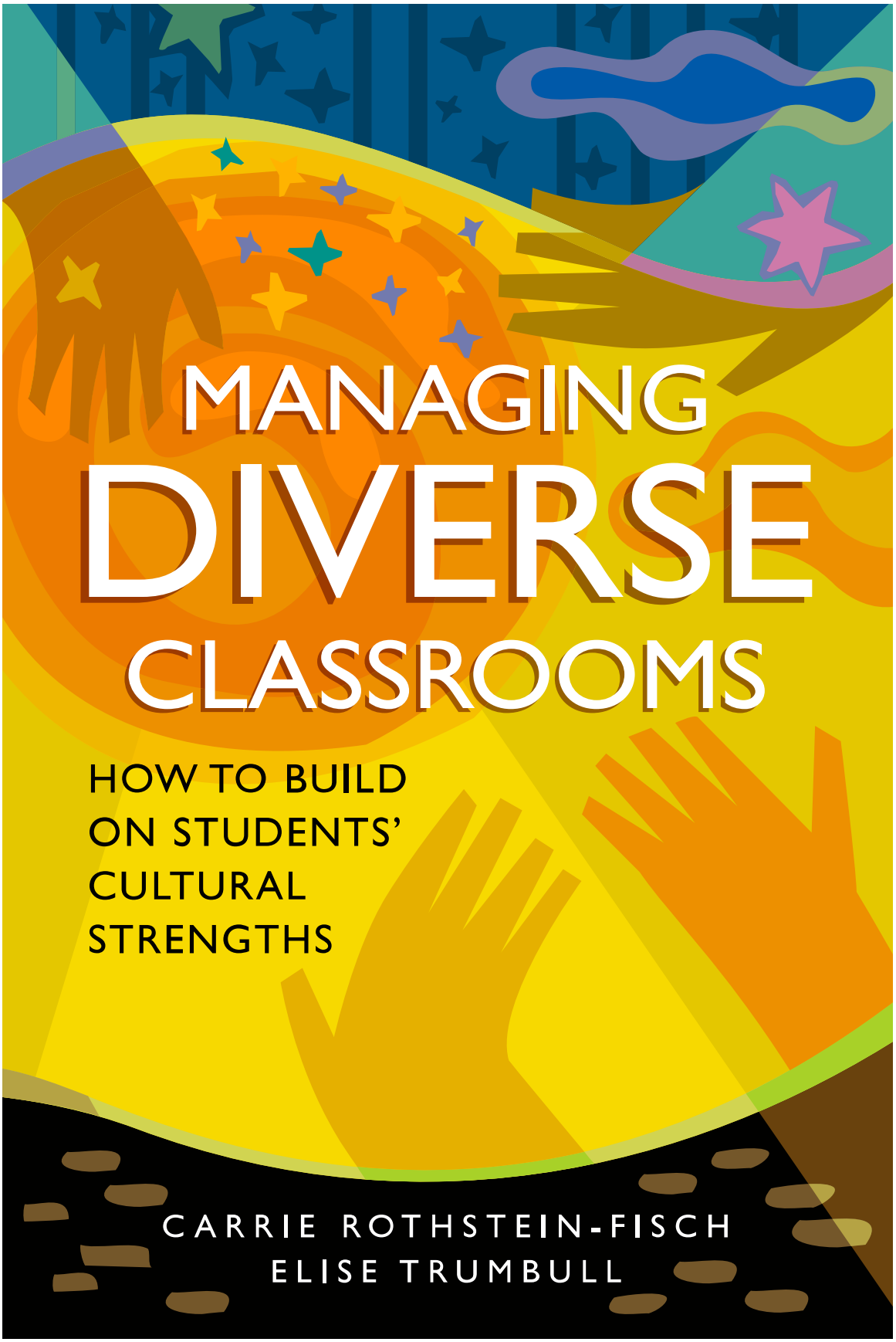
MANAGING
DIVERSE
CLASSROOMS
HOW TO BUILD ON STUDENTS' CULTURAL STRENGTHS
CARRIE ROTHSTEIN-FISCH
ELISE TRUMBULL

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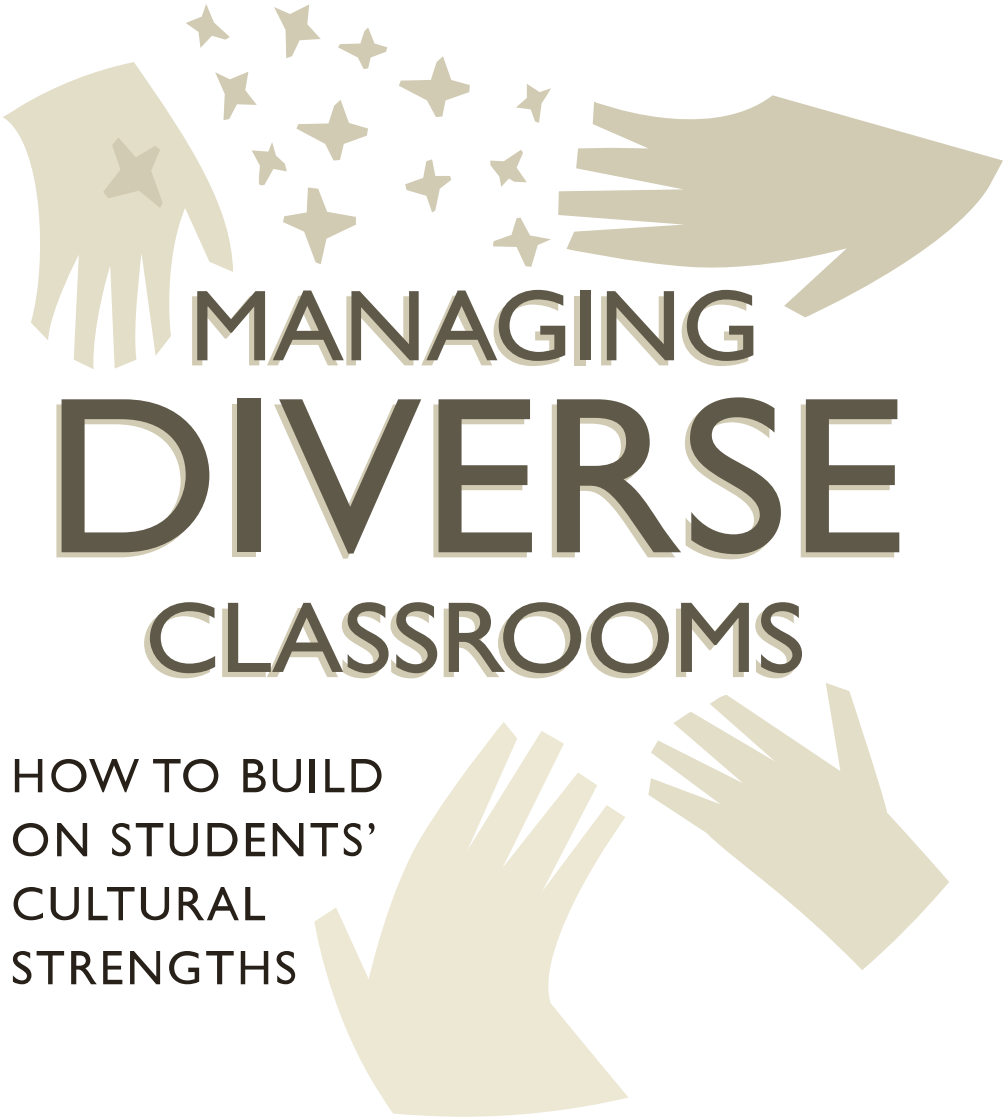

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## HOW TO BUILD ON STUDENTS' CULTURAL STRENGTHS

CARRIE ROTHSTEIN-FISCH
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To all our colleagues in education whose innovations make the most of their students' cultural strengths.

# MANAGING DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

## HOW TO BUILD ON STUDENTS' CULTURAL STRENGTHS

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In addition to fresh ideas and high motivation, writing a book requires numerous other resources. Among them are a goodly supply of optimism, a deep well of patience, and an enormous amount of collegial support. Like any book, this one is the result of many people's efforts. Our Bridging Cultures colleagues have sustained us on all counts. First among these colleagues is Dr. Patricia Marks Greenfield, whose visionary work in the field of culture and human development underpins this book and the project on which it is based. The Bridging Cultures® Project was a direct outgrowth of her research with her colleagues Dr. Catherine Raeff and Dr. Blanca Quiroz, and her leadership in the project cannot be overstated. It is particularly fitting that Dr. Greenfield has written the Foreword to the book, setting the tone and context for the representation of a body of work that owes so much to her.

Dr. Blanca Quiroz, who was a graduate student at the inception of the Bridging Cultures Project, is a founding research partner of the project along with us and Dr. Greenfield. Her insights, grounded in her personal bicultural experience as well as theory, have guided us throughout the life of the Bridging Cultures Project. Her participation has continued throughout her graduate study at UCLA, her pursuit of a doctorate at Harvard, and her first years as an assistant professor at Texas A&M University.

We are profoundly grateful to the Bridging Cultures teachers, who began as participants in our workshops on culture, human development, and education and then became co–researchers in their own classrooms and schools. They are Ms. Marie Altchech, Ms. Catherine

Daley, Mrs. Kathy Eyler, Mrs. Elvia Hernandez, Mr. Giancarlo Mercado, Mrs. Amada Pérez, and Ms. Pearl Saitzyk. These exceptional teachers have shown exquisite skill in interpreting and applying theory as well as continuously reflecting upon and refining their practices. Their innovations and thinking are at the heart of this book. All of these teachers were generous enough to share both successes and failures and to make their thoughts and actions explicit for others to learn from. We also thank their cooperating schools and administrators, who allowed them to try innovations within their classrooms and permitted us to observe.

Appreciation is due to colleagues who have encouraged us to write this book, in particular Dr. Beverly Cabello, Dr. Janet E. Fish, Dr. Rie Rogers Mitchell, and middle school teacher Mrs. Sharon Schneider. We are especially appreciative for the comments and insights on our manuscript from kindergarten teacher Mrs. Angela Werth. We believe that feedback from educators at many points in the grade continuum has strengthened the book.

Abundant thanks go also to our editors at the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Ms. Carolyn Pool and Ms. Leah Lakins. They have been unfailingly generous with their time and support, and we have found their guidance astute. It has been an immense pleasure to work with both of them.

Writing a book is inevitably taxing on the authors' families, who can never be given as much credit as they deserve. To our husbands Bryan Fisch and Jerry Salzman, we are immeasurably grateful for your patience and understanding and for demonstrating your respect for what it takes to write a book by taking on endless additional tasks of daily life. To our children, thank you for being flexible about "family time."

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# FOREWORD

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.

Patricia Greenfield
Venice, California

# INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR A NEW APPROACH

Unlike other books on classroom organization and management, this book examines the topic from a cultural perspective. Our premise is that cultural values and beliefs are at the core of all classroom organization and management decisions. In parallel fashion, cultural values and beliefs are at the center of students' responses to teachers' strategies and of students' own attempts to engage in and influence interactions in the classroom.

Books and articles on classroom organization and management have only recently begun to address the role of culture. But when culture *is* addressed in the literature, it tends to be from the perspective of encouraging teachers to recognize cultural differences in parents' orientations to child rearing and schooling. Teachers may be led to examine culture from the perspective of the outsider (that is, "*Those* people have culture") but not to regard themselves as people whose values and beliefs are inherently cultural. However, schools and teachers have cultures too (Hollins, 1996; Lipka, 1998).

School culture is relatively consistent across the United States and reflects the individualistic values of the dominant, European American culture. For instance, students are expected to show respect for others and their personal property, to stay in assigned seats, and to keep their hands to themselves (Marzano, 2003). They are supposed to be responsible for their own individual learning, even as members of cooperative groups (Slavin, 2006). Parents are encouraged to participate in their children's schooling in certain ways, such as helping with homework, volunteering in the classroom, or attending schoolwide events

(Connors & Epstein, 1995). For students, certain kinds of culture-based communication styles are sanctioned over others, especially in discussions of subject matter (Morine-Dershimer, 2006). Likewise, teachers' approaches to classroom organization and management also reflect cultural values, usually those of the mainstream institutions in which they have been schooled (see Lipka, 1998).

One model that recognizes the role of culture is described in the article "Culturally Responsive Classroom Management" (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). The authors identify three components for achieving culturally responsive management: (1) recognition of one's own cultural beliefs, biases, and assumptions; (2) acknowledgment of others' ethnic, cultural, and other differences; and (3) understanding of the ways that "schools reflect and perpetuate discriminatory practices of the larger society" (p. 270). These are essential elements for culturally responsive classroom management, but realizing them can be a daunting task for teachers. They need to know *how to* (1) examine their own cultural values, (2) develop understanding of the values of others and regard them in a nonjudgmental way, and (3) apply what they learn about cultural differences to the improvement of classroom practices, particularly in a way that is meaningful, nonthreatening, and not overwhelming.

## THE BRIDGING CULTURES APPROACH

This book attempts to address the *how to* of building on students' cultural strengths in the realm of classroom organization and management. First, we explore a framework for understanding culture that focuses on the most important and fundamental differences between two types of cultural orientations—individualistic and collectivistic. In individualistic cultures, the emphasis is on the growth and development of the individual as an increasingly independent entity who learns to meet his or her own needs. In collectivistic cultures, the emphasis is on the growth and development of an individual who remains closely connected to his or her family and makes its well-being a priority. (Chapter 1 provides more detail about the differences.) Second, we show how teachers used the individualism/collectivism framework to

understand their own cultural values and those of their school as well as those of the children and families they serve. Third, we provide many examples of how teachers put their new understanding to use in order to improve classroom organization, teaching, and learning.

We believe an uncomplicated framework that captures the most basic ways that cultures differ is far more useful than lengthy lists of the features of various cultures. Teachers, whose roles and responsibilities have become increasingly complex and demanding, could hardly be asked to remember all those details! Moreover, our research with teachers shows that the individualism/collectivism framework (described in Chapter 1) is immediately understandable and useful both for teachers' self-reflection and as a way to understand children and families. Ultimately, it is a vehicle for finding common ground.

Our approach and the teacher innovations presented throughout this book are compatible with a sociocultural, constructivist, and developmental view of learning as opposed to a behaviorist one. From our perspective, the organization and management of the daily life of the classroom should reflect understanding of the following:

- Students are active learners whose development takes place within particular social and cultural contexts and is influenced by those contexts.
- Home socialization practices influence how students interact and solve problems.
- Good classroom organization and management tap existing skills and dispositions while building new capacities.
- As they mature, students can take increasing responsibility for regulating their own learning and ensuring harmony in the classroom.

## THE BRIDGING CULTURES PROJECT

Our model for approaching classroom organization and management is based on a unique combination of theory, research, and teacher-constructed practices. Working with colleagues Patricia Greenfield and Blanca Quiroz, we developed the Bridging Cultures Project, a

collaborative action research project.[1] The project emerged from empirical research demonstrating the presence of cultural values conflicts in schools (Greenfield, Quiroz, & Raeff, 2000; Raeff, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2000) and a theory of cultural differences (Greenfield, 1994; Hofstede, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). Seven elementary school teachers who work with large numbers of immigrant Latino students and their families became teacher-researchers; they learned about the individualism/collectivism framework and then used that framework as a guide for designing culturally informed instructional strategies that made sense for their classrooms.

The result of the seven teachers' efforts is a mountain of innovation: a collection of strategies and ideas for classroom organization and management that are completely field-tested by teachers who have come to understand the central role of culture in learning and teaching. The teachers did not set out to explore classroom management, yet it became the first thing that they changed as a result of their new understanding of the cultural values of their students. New organizational strategies were integral to these changes in management. As we observed teachers over a period of five years, met with them semimonthly, and conducted individual interviews with them, we came to see that classroom organization and management were among the elements most strongly influenced by teachers' knowledge of cultural differences (see Trumbull, Diaz-Meza, Hasan, & Rothstein-Fisch, 2001).

## THEMES OF THE BOOK

This book has several themes—big ideas that rise to the surface on the basis of many examples. Readers may discover additional themes, but the following seemed particularly salient.

### Teachers as Cultural Brokers

When teachers have models for understanding cultural differences, they can create classroom organization and management from the

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inside out instead of responding only to students' external behaviors and guessing what might be going on inside their minds and hearts. Teachers who are knowledgeable about the culture of school and the cultures of their students can serve as "cultural brokers," helping their students and students' families negotiate new cultural terrain and become biculturally proficient (Cabello & Burstein, 1995; Delgado-Gaitan, 1996). They can also share their cultural knowledge about families with other school personnel and help to influence the development of policies that are more culturally congruent for families.

### Teachers Constructing Their Own Strategies

The Bridging Cultures Project did not have a compendium of strategies up its sleeve for teachers to learn and implement. In fact, no strategies—none whatsoever—were recommended to teachers. The idea was that, given a useful framework and some provocative research results, these capable, motivated, experienced teachers were likely to design their own strategies to make their classrooms more hospitable for their students. We still believe that nothing is as practical as a good theoretical framework that gets teachers observing, thinking, reflecting, and devising new practices that make sense in their own professional contexts.

### Making the Implicit Explicit

One problem with differences in cultural values is that they tend to remain implicit—invisible—and hence a source of conflicts that may never get satisfactorily resolved. Children whose home values conflict with school values may become very confused as to what is "appropriate behavior." When parents instruct children to listen quietly and not "bother" the teacher, for instance, the teacher may think the children are shy or limited in English proficiency. A teacher who understands that such students may have been socialized at home to be quiet and respectful is likely to both interpret and act on the students' behavior in a different way, one more aligned to what the real reasons are behind the students' apparent lack of oral participation.

## Listening to Teachers' Voices

The innovations from Bridging Cultures teachers are the heart of this book, and many of them are presented in the teachers' own words. Teachers' voices are not filtered to achieve a consistent editorial style. The examples of practice presented in the book are teacher-designed, field-tested practices designed by real elementary school teachers to better serve their largely immigrant Latino student populations. The level of insight exhibited by the teachers as they digested the research and theory and experimented with new practices in their classrooms was impressive. And their synergistic exchanges when they met as a group were incredibly rich with ideas on topics such as the use of small-group activities, monitors, discipline, family communication, and the organization of instruction and assessment. It is fair to say that the four professional researchers were impressed at the quantity and quality of the teachers' insights and changes in practice!

The data we cite come from classroom observations and field notes, in-depth interviews, notes from group meetings, videotapes, and informal conversations (in person, by phone, and via e-mail). Through these varied means, we believe we have accurately captured the thinking and practice of the seven dedicated educators with whom we worked. We cite the teachers by name because they have served as colleagues and researchers in their own right rather than anonymous subjects in the project.

## Implementing Innovations in Homogeneous Versus Heterogeneous Classrooms

In the majority of the Bridging Cultures classrooms, students were from immigrant Latino populations, and although teachers reported that many were born in the United States, the data available to us suggest that few of their parents were. In some classrooms, all of the students were Latino; other classrooms included some African Americans and a few European Americans. Thus most of the students were from collectivistic cultures. (Latin American cultures tend to be

far more collectivistic than the dominant, European American culture [Hofstede, 2001]. African American culture, too, is more collectivistic than the dominant culture, though it has been described as also having some strong individualistic elements [Boykin & Bailey, 2000; Nelson-LeGall & Resnick, 1998]).

Overall, the practices described throughout this book reflect a turn away from the individualistic practices of most classrooms. The intent is not an effort to eliminate them completely, but to bring them into balance with the collectivistic practices of the homes of the students.

When teachers in more heterogeneous classrooms try out some of the practices we offer, the results may differ from those observed in Bridging Cultures classrooms. Teachers will need to consider what mix of organizational and management strategies work best for their students. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to argue that collaboration, helping, and sharing are not important for all students. At the same time, some students may need explicit coaching on how to work more collaboratively. It is likely that in culturally heterogeneous classrooms some mix of individualistic and collectivistic strategies will be most effective. Even the Bridging Cultures teachers do not use exclusively collectivistic organizational and management strategies, as mentioned, because they believe their students need to be able to learn to operate in an individualistic society as well as in a collectivistic family. They wish to develop a bridge that facilitates learning in both directions.

The key to making good decisions about organization and management, as we emphasize, is to develop an awareness of the important values of school and home cultures so as to avoid putting students in the position of choosing one system over the other. This tension was identified by one of our Bridging Cultures teachers, Mrs. Amada Pérez, who was born in Mexico. Speaking of herself and her siblings, she said,

> [We came to feel that] the rules at school were more important than the rules at home. The school and the teachers were

> right. As a child, you begin to feel the conflict. Many of my brothers stopped communicating with the family and with my father because he was ignorant. (Rothstein-Fisch, 2003, p. 20)

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Chapter 1 introduces the individualism/collectivism framework and key concepts related to classroom organization and management. Chapter 2 shows how the "power of the group" is drawn upon to maintain a focus on instruction and a harmonious interpersonal environment. Chapter 3 discusses how classroom organization and management can be built upon knowledge of families' cultural value systems and how this allowed Bridging Cultures teachers to vastly improve home-school relations. Chapter 4 shows how students' values and skills of helping and sharing were tapped to keep classrooms humming with meaningful learning activities. Chapter 5 gives many examples of how classroom management, or "orchestration," was accomplished through strategies that relied on students' collectivistic values. Chapter 6 deals with the organization of learning in the content areas, with special attention to language arts and mathematics. Chapter 7 addresses classroom orchestration as applied to student assessment. Finally, the Conclusion examines several important issues, including new directions for classroom orchestration and recommendations for future research.

It has been challenging to organize this book into discrete chapters because new ways of thinking about classroom organization and management are integral to many aspects of educational programs. In addition, the cultural strategies that teachers have used are interrelated and integrated throughout their instructional programs. For example, collaborative group work, helping, and sharing—all compatible with students' collectivistic values—often occur simultaneously and can apply to many aspects of instruction. Thus the same example may appear in several places in the book, but can be analyzed with regard to different issues.

Two additional points of clarification may help readers. First, it is important to know that over the five years of the project teachers' assignments occasionally changed, though they remained at the elementary school level. We cite the grade level in many of our examples, but to avoid redundancy, we have purposely omitted it where it doesn't seem as critical to the example. Second, when we cite an example of a practice or an extended teacher quotation that has been published previously, we give the published source. When a quotation is not attributed, it comes from our field notes, observations or group meetings, interviews, or videotaped workshops.