CHAPTER 3

Cultural Consonance, Dissonance, and the Nuances of Racism

I guess you're looking for racial bias in referrals. But all the students here are Black!

—School administrator

TO SAY THAT discrimination is systemic or "institutional" is not to say that individuals bear no responsibility for it. In the case of schools, it is in the privacy of the classroom that each individual teacher bears the responsibility of being the mediator of the larger ecology. In this chapter we ask, How does institutional racism play out in the classroom?

One of the first reactions we received from school personnel in many schools was exemplified by the quotation that introduces this chapter. Many school personnel believed that the concept of overrepresentation was not relevant in schools where Black or Hispanic students predominated. In answer to this comment, we pointed out that although ethnic disproportionality in special education referrals will not exist *within* a school that has all Black or all Hispanic students, a high rate of referral from that school contributes to the overall pattern of disproportionality within the school district and the state.

Reflecting on the above quotation, however, brings us to a deeper understanding of the complexity of racism. The commonsense notion behind school personnel's view was that racially discriminatory practice cannot be found within a racially homogenous population. Certainly, in the absence of a second ethnic group it is not possible to say that one child was referred over another because of race. However, it is still possible that professionals' views of a child may be influenced by aspects of the child's racial identity that become interwoven with historical stereotypes of low intelligence, stigmatized behaviors, poverty, or detrimental family circumstances. In such a situation, a high rate of referral to special education may be related to prejudices based on combined racism, classism, or cultural hegemony. Further, the possibility of racism becoming internalized by its victims has also been noted (K. B. Clark, 1965; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000), with the implication that individuals may engage in race-based discriminatory practice against members of their own group.

Our findings were not identical in all schools. In some schools we saw clear-cut examples, even patterns, of educational practice that seemed to be affected by racist or classist preconceptions. However, in most schools the findings were ambiguous, even contradictory, as we observed across and within classrooms. Thus, as we discuss various aspects of this theme, we will offer vignettes illustrating different findings, but only in rare cases will we argue that any one of these represented a general pattern.

RACISM AS A STRUCTURAL ISSUE

Despite our nation's official ideology of equity, data on inequity in public services, including education (Darling-Hammond & Post, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2001) and health (National Academy of Sciences, 2002), indicate the ongoing impact of the legacy of racist beliefs on the social, political, and economic structures of the society. How does this legacy become perpetuated?

Most scholars addressing racism currently describe it in terms of an insidious ideology whose presence is so pervasive as to be invisibly present in the lives of most people (e.g., Tatum, 1992). Essed (1991), arguing that the distinction between individual and institutional racism is a false dichotomy that obscures the role of individual agency, proposed the term "everyday racism," as the intersection of micro- and macrosociological dimensions of racism. Practices and meanings that have developed as a result of "socialized racist notions" (p. 52) become normative within our daily routines and appear as the "common sense . . . rules for perceiving and dealing with the other" (Bonilla-Silva, 1996, p. 474).

The idea that racist practice may be so interwoven into the affective landscape of classrooms as to be hard to isolate and document gives rise to several questions: Exactly how do racist attitudes infiltrate the classroom? Is there an important difference between personally held prejudice and discriminatory practice? If a teacher holds racist beliefs, will it be evident in the kinds of decisions she makes about children? Will it be evident to the children themselves? Will it affect their performance? Irvine (1990) answers these questions in the affirmative, stating:

> Part of the puzzle of black non-achievement has to be related to this predicament: Some teachers are in classrooms with black and low-income students whom they prefer not to teach and, even worse, do not like as individuals. (p. 48)

There have been many approaches to explaining how negative attitudes affect students. The "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Merton, 1948; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) argues that children respond to teacher's expectations of them. Ogbu (1987), Fordham (1988), and others have interpreted low achievement of Black students as a form of resistance and withdrawal by the students themselves. Spencer (1995) has argued that student resistance must be viewed in terms of normal responses of youth at different developmental periods, and Steele's (1997) research has demonstrated that perceived "stereotype threat" can depress Black students' academic functioning and test scores. A study by Jussim, Eccles, and Madon (1996) goes further, suggesting that Black students' academic performance is actually more vulnerable to negative teacher perceptions than is the performance of their White peers. In a well-controlled study of 1,664 sixth graders, these researchers found that teacher perceptions had a negative impact three times greater on the test scores and grades of Black students than that on those of White students.

Beyond personal interactions and perceptions, a large body of literature has focused on culture and cultural hegemony as the mediators of discriminatory practices. Thus, Gay (2000) makes a subtle distinction between attitudes to race and to culture, arguing that "while most teachers are not blatant racists, many probably are cultural hegemonists. They expect all students to behave according to the school's cultural standards of normality" (p. 46). Gay proposes that the goal should be "culturally responsive caring" by teachers who are at the same time "academic task-masters" (p. 75).

As we searched for examples and counterexamples of biased practice, we treated issues of cultural hegemony in curriculum content as beyond our scope. We focused instead on the cultural contexts of schools, interpersonal communications, and referral practices.

Cultural Hegemony as a Contextual Bias

The concept of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1929–1935/1971) means that the cultural style, beliefs, and practices of the mainstream of a society infiltrate the values and behaviors of all sectors of the society and are valued and privileged above all others. Thus, public contexts explicitly and implicitly favor the dominant culture, which, in the case of the United States, is derived from what Spindler and Spindler (1990) have called the referent ethniclass—or White, middle-class Americans. This is certainly the case in

schools. We refer to these biases as contextual to distinguish them from the specific actions of individual faculty and staff.

The hegemony of this group means that a bias in its favor is built into most public situations, resulting in a sense of cultural consonance for some and dissonance for others. Let us consider the meaning of *cultural consonance* for a moment. We could define it as a comfort level that does not require one to change one's accent, one's language, one's tone of voice, or one's laughter, or as an environment where language preference, customs, and interaction style are shared and implicitly valued by all. It is natural for most of us to prefer such a setting, although members of many minority groups, through necessity, develop skills in becoming "border crossers" (Giroux & McLaren, 1994). As the notion of "White privilege" suggests (McIntosh, 1989), the opposite is not necessarily true, in that most White middle-class Americans can choose not to cross over into minority cultures.

Although we noted nuances of cultural difference in the public areas of schools in which Hispanic or African American students predominated, it was clear that middle-class Anglo American culture was the normal currency of classrooms. It was also clear that students most familiar with this culture were at an advantage affectively, if not cognitively. Arising from this fact is the question, Is cultural consonance between teachers and students a requirement for success in schools? Our answer is no, since we saw effective and ineffective teachers of all ethnicities. The counselor in one of the predominantly Black, inner-city schools was adamant on this point, exclaiming:

> The best-qualified teacher should be the teacher for the job. There's a teacher who's been called all kind of White names, but she was good. . . . If you care enough about the kids, you're gonna do the job. . . . But a workshop isn't really going to do it. It has to be your heart. It has to be strong.

We do believe, though, that cultural consonance was a plus, once the basic requirements of good teaching were met.

Understanding across cultures can be hard to accomplish in the face of the U.S. history of racial oppression. An African American community involvement specialist at the same school as the counselor cited above felt strongly that there needed to be more African American teachers at the school, because other teachers could not understand the community as well. She said:

> I think that basically it is because they are different. I mean if they were to just study Black culture, maybe they would understand. And there again, I came up during the time of Dr. Martin Luther King. I know what it is to be segregated. I know what it is to be looked

> down upon because of my race. I remember when I first started, when the Whites didn't want us there but they had to because of the law. . . . If they could truly, truly, truly know and get down with our culture and understand what poverty really is, what kind of fights there are for you. And we shouldn't have to fight, I was born here. They just get more things just given to them and we have to fight. And don't get me started there!

The last sentence underscores the fact that racial tensions in this study ran in many directions. A notion of "people of color" as a generalized group, distinct from Anglo American Whites, does not work in this community, since many Hispanics in the region generally do not see themselves, and are not seen as, "people of color." This teacher's reference to a privileged "they" (who, implicitly, were not "born here") represented a theme of resentment common among African Americans in this city—a belief that immigrants, particularly from Hispanic countries, tend to get preferential treatment and allowances that are not available to African Americans. Also, because many Hispanics in the area have a combination of Caucasian features, relative wealth and status, or both, they tend to be accorded a higher place in the community's ethnic ranking. This was explicitly stated by a Black faculty member in a predominantly Hispanic school, who spoke of the difficulties experienced by students who were not Hispanic, such as an African American girl who was suffering from low self-esteem because she "does not look like" the rest of her classmates. This teacher spoke also of racial bias among her colleagues. She said:

> Here they make sure that you understand the distinction, you're Black. And this is a White person, a Hispanic, and I feel we need to get away from that. And when I came in one day in that class, one adult told me, "I'm having a problem, this Black kid has been disrespectful," and I was very upset. And, I cannot hide my feelings when I'm upset and I said, "I'm sorry but, this Black kid has a name." Let's call him by his first name. So, already you can see, if the person is talking to me as an adult and using that, what happens when I'm not around in that room?

Although we saw many Hispanic and other teachers who related very well to African American children, information from several schools indicated that many teachers had a preference for the "ESOL" group. The comparison between African American and Hispanic children was not only offered by non-Black personnel, however. An African American faculty member who had been moved to a predominantly Hispanic school described her fifth graders

as being "super innocent . . . like babies . . . with their Barbies and their . . . Pokémon cards." By contrast, she said, second graders in the African American neighborhood "knew about drugs . . . about sex . . . about guns."

Teaching the Culture of Power

While the negative aspects of inner-city communities are clearly detrimental to many children, our observations of strong teachers in the inner-city schools showed that children being "street smart" or "too grown" did not mean they could not be taught the behavioral and academic skills needed for school success. In the face of much discussion over the extent to which success in school requires that students meet the expectations of the dominant culture (e.g., Fordham, 1988; O'Connor, 1997; Ogbu, 1987), we concur with Delpit (1988), who argued that explicit inculcation of the "culture of power" is needed, along with strong support of the children's home cultures and languages. Thus, the children are given the cultural capital that will contribute to their success in the mainstream. In the following chapter we will offer an exemplar of this process—a strong African American teacher in a predominantly African American school who argued that teaching the culture of power was exactly her purpose in explicitly teaching acceptable school behaviors to her kindergartners.

DOCUMENTING BEHAVIOR AND INTERPRETING RACISM

While there was ample evidence that race and culture were inextricably woven into the fabric of the school contexts we observed, personal racial bias in classroom practice was not easy to document. Perhaps it was the tightness of the weave that made it difficult for us to isolate racism from all the other "isms" that pervaded our interviews and observations. In our research we looked for bias in terms of negative or positive preconceptions or preferences expressed by teachers as well as in terms of negative or positive relationships with students. We sought examples of behaviors that appeared to reflect these essentially intangible aspects of classroom interactions.

We found that relationships were easy to document, whether positive or negative. Positive relationships could be seen in the physical affection between a child and teacher; smiles or laughter that produced a good feeling in the classroom; or a teacher who would take an angry or sad child aside and counsel her gently, out of earshot of the other children. Negative relationships were evident when a teacher insulted children and their families to their face or in front of the entire class, and in the angry or defiant expressions on children's faces when that teacher addressed them. In all schools,

both positive and negative relationships were evidenced between teachers and children of their own ethnicity, as well as across ethnicities. However, it was much harder to determine whether racial or social-class bias motivated these relationships. We will use one classroom as an example of how difficult it can be to determine the presence of bias, despite teachers' explicit statements and researchers' nagging intuitions. The story is also an example of the possibility of a teacher being able to practice professionalism despite the presence of personal biases.

AN EXEMPLAR: "VERY GOOD, MAH MAN!"

Ms. Q, a White, Hispanic teacher in an inner-city school, was potentially a strong teacher. However, a tendency to be unduly harsh undermined this impression. She described the African American children and their community in extremely derogatory terms, stating, for example, that her first graders did not know "how to walk, how to sit in a chair." Concluding her list of deficiencies, she exclaimed: "It's cultural!"

We observed Ms. Q's classroom twice toward the end of our first (academic) year of research. Seeing her getting inches away from a child's face and reprimanding her in an extremely loud and harsh voice for some minor infraction, we had to assume that her negative attitude to this child and others had been building throughout the year. On the second occasion a few weeks later, a visitor joined our observation and expressed shock at Ms. Q's harsh manner with the children, noting that she seemed either to not like teaching or not like the students. Ms. Q seemed unhappy and angry.

In the fall of the following year, Ms. Q was a changed person. She greeted us with smiles, exclaiming delightedly that she was happy that she had been assigned "the ESOL [infusion] class." The class included approximately one third Hispanic students, whom she described as "generally calmer and better behaved." Certainly, in our eight observations of this classroom, we saw that Ms. Q's relationships with the group as a whole were much better than with the previous year's class, and we noted her strong instructional skills. Indeed, both the children and the teacher were "calmer and better behaved."

Despite Ms. Q's characterization of the superior behavior of the Hispanic children, our observations showed that the troublesome children were as often Hispanic as African American. Two Hispanic boys, Juan and Francisco, though reasonably compliant under Ms. Q's firm hand, would literally run wild in the less structured setting of the music class, tormenting the teacher and instigating others to do the same. One or two other children stood out, such as Jimmy, an African American boy whose family problems were severe and who would act out occasionally, and Tomás, a Hispanic boy who tended to be a bit hyperactive when he was bored. Andre was an African

American boy about whom the teacher complained consistently. This was a puzzle to us, since in four out of five observations where he was a target focus (unknown to him), we found him very attentive and eager, shooting his hand up to answer, but seldom being called on by the teacher.

Ms. Q's greater empathy for the Hispanic children was evident in the way she interpreted their difficulties. For example, after describing Juan as "a very angry child" and Francisco as having behavior problems but "very manageable," she said she "feels bad" for these two, because they may have a learning problem and the bad behavior may be a result of frustration. She did not express such feelings of sympathy for any of the African American children with behavior and academic problems, although they were all lower academically than Juan and Francisco, yet generally better behaved. In fact, Juan's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores were above those of the group generally—at the 62nd percentile in math and 25th in reading; Francisco's scores were at the 21st percentile in math and 17th in reading. Andre and Jimmy, whom Ms. Q described as having behavior problems, had much lower scores—both around the 2nd percentile in reading and the 10th in math, indicating that their learning needs were greater than those of both the Hispanic boys.

Despite this evident ethnic preference, Ms. Q's feelings did not seem to affect her referrals. This teacher was one of the three-highest-referring teachers across the 12 schools; the other two were Anglo American teachers, also in predominantly Black schools. However, we noted that Ms. Q used the CST process as a supportive as well as an evaluative mechanism. That year, she referred 18 students of varying ethnicities, about half of whom were found eligible for special education services. At the CST conferences, with the exception of negative interactions with Andre's mother, Ms. Q treated the parents with respect and seemed to use the committee for the benefit of the children, often by seeking parents' cooperation through daily or weekly home-school contracts. One such case was Jimmy, about whom Ms. Q was concerned because of his mother's alcoholism, but whom she did not feel needed special education placement. We concluded that, while we did note ethnic bias in Ms. Q's interactions with the children, she did engage in an equitable and helpful referral process.

Despite this teacher's strengths, however, in our classroom observations we noted a steady undertone of cultural bias. Our final illustration of this is of a particularly subtle form, whereby the teacher's attitude seemed to be condescending toward the child's ethnicity. In the example we give here, this might not be evident to anyone who has not experienced such condescension, but we believe it would be understood by people who have. Ms. Q, who normally spoke in Standard English to her class, became effusive when an African American boy who seldom participated gave a surprisingly good answer. She exclaimed: "Good! Very good, mah man!" The switch to an approximation of African American vernacular was out of place and made the two researchers present feel distinctly uncomfortable. Both researchers were Black

and their immediate exchange of glances confirmed that their gut reactions had been identical.

To be clear on this example, the impression of condescension did not come merely from the fact of a Hispanic teacher's using a Black vernacular phrase. It was that this was so unusual for Ms. Q, so out of character, that it came across as contrived. By contrast, in a classroom in another similar school, we noted an excellent Hispanic kindergarten teacher whose regular repertoire of interaction included terms of endearment commonly used by African American teachers, such as *baby* and *honey*. These expressions seemed natural to the teacher in the context of affectionate and caring relationships with her students. We believe that these two groups of children would know the difference.

PERCEIVED RACIAL BIAS IN CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENTS AND REFERRALS

Our sense of "easy to spot but hard to prove" bias was frequently triggered in schools in which African American students were in the minority, whether among Anglo American or Hispanic peers. In such classrooms, it was common to see an African American, usually male, student seated separately in the classroom, often at the teacher's desk or at the back of the room. This child might be the only, or one of a couple of, African American children in the room, so this seating arrangement was very noticeable. We were not always aware of what behaviors had earned the children this distinction, but we did see some classrooms where the children so seated did, indeed, display behaviors that the teacher found troubling. Occasionally, though not usually, the teachers in these rooms were African Americans.

The best exemplar of this pattern was Sunnybrook, the school that Matthew attended. African American students from a relatively low-income neighborhood were bused into this affluent, predominantly Anglo American neighborhood and constituted approximately 17% of the student population. The distinction between the two groups was marked by common references to students being from either "east or west of the highway." As we will detail later in the book, the high achievement of the majority of students made that of the African American students seem lower than it would have seemed at low-income schools. The same was true of their behaviors, which were perceived by school personnel as less compliant and more troublesome. The principal of this school commented on the fact that such judgments are relative to local norms and expectations.

The teachers whom we observed intensively in this school were both very strong, one an African American and one an Anglo American. In observing their classrooms, we detected no differential behavior toward the children

based on ethnicity. However, all of the six referrals from the latter teacher's class were for African American children. Three of these were found eligible for special education—one as EMR and two as LD. Unfortunately, we were not able to gain permission to examine the level of these students' work. The other three did not go to testing—one because the parents did not sign consent, another because it was agreed to get the child into tutoring and monitor her progress, and for the third we do not know the outcome. The African American teacher referred two children, Austin and Matthew, both also African American, who were found eligible for LD and EH respectively. We will report on these cases in detail in our later discussion of the construction of these disabilities.

Despite an initial welcome from this school's administration, as our research progressed we had considerable difficulty obtaining access to detailed records of placement rates. All indications were that this was a school where much more intensive research was needed to ascertain the reasons for the disproportionately high rate of placement of Black students. Indeed, we noted an approximately equal distribution of White students and Black students in the school's LD classrooms. This balance led one of the special education teachers to say that the numbers were not disproportionate, since they were equal. Clearly this teacher had not reflected on the meaning of the term, for Black students represented 17% of the school's population, but approximately 50% of her class. In reflecting on our findings, we felt frustrated at our inability to adequately probe the processes in this school. Not only was the pattern similar to the findings of Oswald, Coutinho, Best, and Singh (1999) that Black overrepresentation was evident in high-income districts that were predominantly White, but, we believe, the presence of court-ordered school desegregation was also salient. Eitle (2002), in an analysis of survey data on 1,203 school districts nationwide, found that Black overrepresentation in special education programs increased in districts that were operating under court-ordered desegregation. Eitle concluded that the pattern reflected "alternative forms of segregation" (p. 599) being practiced by school or school district administrators. Whether or not the discriminatory effect was intentional in this school, we believe that the context of a forced racial mixture had many disadvantages for Black students, one of which could have been increased likelihood of special education placement.

ETHNICITY IN TEAM MEMBERSHIP, REFERRALS, AND TEACHING STYLES

In most schools, faculty membership on CST teams was ethnically diverse, revealing an attempt to reflect the mixture of the student population. However,

since district policy required that membership include an administrator and a counselor, ethnicity could not be a criterion for these two key positions. Additional members were usually a general education teacher, the referring teacher, and other ad hoc members according to the case being considered. Some schools included the psychologist as a regular team member.

In one inner-city school serving a student population that was 99% African American, three issues related to teacher ethnicity came to our attention. One was the complaint of an irate parent that the CST team comprised only White members. The administration explained that this was coincidental, since the requirement is that the AP, counselor, and psychologist serve on the CST. All three happened to be White. The fourth team member had to be a teacher, and the teacher thought most appropriate by the administration was a reading specialist who also happened to be White. After the parent's challenge, however, the administration changed the CST composition to include an African American teacher who was much respected in the school as an excellent teacher.

The second issue related to ethnicity at this school was the fact that most special education referrals came from White teachers. Some personnel believed that this reflected Black teachers' lack of confidence in the special education system, while others argued that it might be related to a third issue—differential behavior management styles.

The question of behavior management was particularly interesting because it reflected the notion of cultural fit with African American students' behavioral styles (Gay, 2000). An African American professional associated with this school believed that the expressive verbal and physical interaction style displayed by many African American children tended to intimidate some Anglo American teachers and that the children, perceiving this, acted out as a result. She was speaking in general, not just regarding this school. However, our observations of 11 of the 16 general-education classrooms in this small school did reveal differential classroom-management styles that, to some extent, seemed to relate to teacher ethnicity. Specifically, what we refer to as the "passive" style was displayed only by Anglo American teachers.

Authoritarian Style

There were three teachers, one African American, one Hispanic, and one White, whose management styles were characterized by a stern authoritarianism. The White teacher ran a calm, very structured classroom in which students typically scored well, although we noted a great deal of negative ignoring of a child who was working well but whose grooming left much to be desired. The Hispanic teacher's class was generally chaotic. She made sporadic efforts to use positive reinforcers such as stickers, but mostly resorted

to yelling and threats. The African American teacher used an overly rigid structure and constant yelling. The researcher commented in her notes that, while in this room, she felt as though she was in "boot camp."

Authoritative, but Friendly

Five teachers (four African American and one Hispanic) displayed this approach, four very effectively and one moderately so. While none were effusive in their manner, all used a lot of verbal praise and enforced clear standards for behavior. Their instructional approaches varied, but all included explicit instruction, consistent monitoring of seat work, and relevance to children's lives and interests. Overall, these teachers were effortless in their reinforcement of behavior and their quietly authoritative handling of their students. The children had no doubt about who was in charge. Two African American teachers in this group had the reputation of being excellent teachers and both demonstrated what Ladson-Billings (1994) has referred to as a key feature of effective teachers of inner-city children—an explicit affiliation with the community, even the neighborhood of their students. One of these teachers told us that she works in this school to "give something back to the community," while the other spoke of her willingness to go directly to students' homes to talk with parents when issues arose, a strategy which, she said, "the White teachers won't do!"

Passive Style

Teachers exhibiting this style made little effort to impose authority on the class. All three teachers who fitted this pattern were Anglo American. At the most extreme end was a music teacher, whose total neglect of classroom management resulted in chaos, which will be described in the following chapter. The behavior in the classrooms of the other two "passive"-style teachers was not as extreme, but the teachers' management styles were characterized by minimal or no intervention related to troubling behavior. One of these began her lesson with a creative approach—using a puppet that initially gained the children's attention and enthusiasm—but her ignoring of two disruptive individuals gradually led to total inattention and finally a chaotic environment. At the end of the lesson, the teacher, who had started with a friendly and relaxed style, was visibly angry. The other "passive"-style teacher was Ms. E, whom we observed twice, once in a first-grade class in the spring and then in the subsequent fall when she was assigned to a second-grade class. In both classrooms, this teacher showed a low-key, friendly manner toward the children but made no effort whatever to curtail the early signs of disruptive behavior. Rather, she ignored these signs, allowed

the behavior to escalate and spread to other members of the class, and then demonstrated an expression of resignation and frustration that she had been assigned a class with all the troublesome children. A brief excerpt from the second-grade observation will illustrate:

> The children work quietly for about 10 minutes, moving from one worksheet to the next, while the teacher circulates looking at work. Larry enters the room. He never really settles down. Within minutes he starts playing with his chair, rocking and balancing it. Next, he goes over to a girl who is standing next to her chair, and he whisks her chair away, grinning. The girl responds with a show of annoyance but is smiling. The teacher is standing quite close to them but with her back to them as she looks at a child's work. She does not turn around or show any awareness of Larry's behavior. A boy in a green shirt gets up and starts to walk around. He goes and sits on the high stool at the blackboard in the front of the room and looks around the room with a grin. Soon he gets down from the stool and starts a slow chase after Larry. They make it through a couple of rows of desks and then the teacher looks up and says the boy's name softly. He sits down for a few minutes. Larry is still walking around . . . the noise level is gradually rising. . . . The boy in the green shirt gets up and starts to chase after Larry until he gets to the row where the teacher is standing and she reaches out and stops him by putting an arm gently on his shoulder. She tells him to go and copy his homework from the board. He goes to his desk and, standing, copies the work neatly into his notebook. . . . By now all the children in the room are talking to each other, moving around, and the general sense of disorder is escalating steadily. . . . When the children leave for their Spanish class, the teacher turns to us with a resigned expression and says, "You see what I mean?"

Ms. E's tone of resignation indicated a pervasive sense of low expectation for her students. As one of the highest-referring teachers in the school, she had, in the previous year, referred almost half her class. She told our team that she did not believe in the "cooperative consultation" (pre-referral) process, because she believed in handling the children's problems by herself until she was sure they really needed to be evaluated. She believed that the children in the school were becoming steadily "worse" because of their detrimental home and community settings. Thus, she felt that the team should "trust" her judgment and that her referrals should go forward to evaluation.

From these observations, we cannot come to any conclusions about typologies of behavior management according to teacher ethnicity. However,

this limited, but in-depth, view offers examples of concerns frequently expressed in the field about low expectations and about cultural mismatch in behavioral management, particularly in reference to the difficulties of some Anglo American teachers in handling behavior issues with African American children. We are not suggesting that teachers' ethnicity needs to be matched to that of their students. Rather, we concur with scholars such as Gay (2000), Cartledge and Milburn (1996), and Ballenger (1992), who argue that caring, responsive teachers can become aware of different cultural patterns in children's behavior and can learn strategies and approaches that may work better with either individuals or groups.

Most important to this discussion is the role of poorly managed classrooms in referrals to special education. As we will note at length in our chapter on decision making at the conference table, Ms. E's total lack of behavior management was never mentioned when her referrals were brought to the CST conference. One of her students was Kanita, a child found to "qualify" for emotional disturbance, whose case we will describe in detail in later chapters.

CROSSING THE BIAS BARRIERS

To what extent did the various kinds of bias we have noted show up in most classroom interactions? We cannot generalize across classrooms or schools. We saw examples of them all. However, we also saw examples of many teachers who successfully crossed the barriers of bias. There was no single route to this success, since these teachers represented a range of teaching and personality styles. Perhaps the only common thread we could feel sure of was that these teachers expected the children to work and to succeed, yet they were capable also of a light touch that reached out to the children as people worthy of respect. They seemed to illustrate Gay's (2000) model of "culturally responsive, academic task-masters." The following examples will illustrate.

In one classroom in a predominantly Haitian American school, a veteran Anglo American teacher was simply a very good teacher, despite the fact that she was a very high referrer. She was strict, but she tried to be fair. Laughing at herself as an old dinosaur who couldn't understand the children's complicated schedules, she would give the children the responsibility of telling her when they had to go to some special program. She was humorous and entertaining while also being very serious about the children's learning. She cared if the children did well and they knew it. Despite the complaints of many teachers that the SFA materials were boring and repetitive, this teacher made wonderful use of them, and she adapted some of the SFA strategies to the skill levels and interests of her students (for more detail on this, see Klingner, Cramer, & Harry, in press). For example, she explained that

the SFA "jump in reading" is supposed to have children "jump in" spontaneously to read aloud. Her children, she felt, were not ready for that, so she modified the activity by moving quickly around the room touching children on their shoulders to indicate their turn to read. As she chose the children, she would put on a comical facial expression and wiggle her legs to indicate her own excitement at deciding which child to call on. The children giggled and became very excited waiting for their turns. Every child was called on.

A Cuban American teacher in a predominantly African American school used humor and her own natural spontaneity to build wonderful relationships with her students. For example:

> She encourages them to think of a special day in their life. She breaks out singing the song "Unforgettable." Then she goes around the classroom brainstorming with the class. The students give examples of special days in their life. She encourages everyone to volunteer an answer, reminding them that it won't be wrong—she just wants them to think.

In a school that served a very low income community of African American and Hispanic students, negative comments from faculty often suggested biases against the former group. In the class of one of our selected teachers, a lively Anglo American New Yorker, we saw no sign of negative interactions with any children. Her natural humor and strong relationships with the children made behavior management seem easy, as in the following example:

> While they worked on their assignment, the students spoke freely, but quietly. (They seemed to know the limitations for acceptable activity). A few students who had questions about their assignments or who sought approval for their work went to the teacher while she helped an African American girl whose hair was braided and beaded. . . . Other students followed suit and, after a few minutes, seven students surrounded her. She said to the class in a direct but soft voice, "Now listen. How many teachers and how many students are there here?" "One and thirty-two," called out most of the students in unison. Then, she asked the class, "Can I talk with each of you at the same time?" All, almost all, said, "No." One boy, Osvaldo, however, said, "Yes." The teacher heard him and responded, "Well, Osvaldo, it may seem like that to you, since I'm always talking to you." The whole class roared with laughter, especially the teacher and Osvaldo.

In a predominantly African American inner-city school, where negative stereotypes of children's families were openly expressed by faculty of all ethnicities, the researcher sometimes sought refuge in the class of an outstanding African American teacher who addressed her boys and girls with the titles *Mr.* and *Ms.* Halfway through an excellent math lesson, we could feel the sense of solidarity occasioned by the teacher's spontaneous shift from Standard English into an African American tone and accent as she exhorted her class to keep their attention focused: "Y'all wit me?" she challenged, to which the students chorused a rousing, "Yeah!"

CONCLUSIONS

Our classroom observations do not give us clear-cut answers to the question of whether racial bias against particular groups contributed to ethnic disproportionality in special education. The subtleties of racism are difficult to document, and though we could detect it in various "moments of exclusion" (Lareau & Horvat, 1999) that we observed in schools, we had no direct evidence of its contribution to disproportionality, since there was no clear pattern, across schools, of referrals by teacher ethnicity.

Yet we could see clearly that racial bias was present in the nuances of teachers' tone and manner toward children. It was present in the built-in hegemony that creates a "goodness of fit" (Keogh, 2000) between a school and some of its students, but not others. It was present in some teachers' discomfort with, even fear of, the behavioral styles of their students and in the low expectations that accompanied this discomfort. We suspect that the more vulnerable children were affected by these biases in ways that our research was not able to substantiate. In contrast, bias was countered by professionals whose authenticity allowed them to develop the skills of a border-crosser (Giroux & McLaren, 1994).

While teacher bias can most often only be inferred, teachers' behaviors are readily evident. In the following chapter we will paint a broad picture of the types of instruction and behavior management we observed across the 12 schools. We argue that the institutional bias against schools serving the poorest, Black populations resulted in an imbalance of teacher quality that limited these students' opportunity to learn. This placed the most vulnerable students at increased risk of school failure and special education placement.