Culture Clash: Interactions Between Afrocultural and Mainstream Cultural Styles in Classrooms Serving African American Students

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This study examined the relation between classroom cultural and achievement-related characteristics and their influence on social outcomes in a sample of 74 fifth grade African American youth (41 girls; 33 b oys) ages 10-13 years. Trained observers rated classrooms according to Boykin's (Boykin, Tyler, & M iller, 2005) definition of mainstream (competition, individualism, bureaucracy) and Afrocultural (verve, communalism, affect, movement, orality) cultural styles. Classrooms in low-income schools and with more African American students had lower levels of Afrocultural styles. S ignificant interactions between mainstream and Afrocultural variables suggested that youth in classrooms with high levels of both tend to perform better in reading and mathematics than those in other groups. A frocultural, but not mainstream, classroom cultural characteristics were positively related to teacher reports of social skills and negatively related to problem behaviors. Implications for instructional practice are discussed.

Keywords: African American students, culturally responsive instructional practices, cultural discontinuity, Urban Education, Afrocultural styles

In recent decades, attention has been drawn to the role of culture in cognition and cognitive development (cf. Boykin & Ellison, 1995; Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001; Okagaki, 2001). Culture is defined as the values, traditions, and beliefs that influence the behavior of social groups (Parsons, 2003). Culture shapes students' learning and problem-solving in several ways—through culture-specific knowledge and skills, values that mold motivation and beliefs, organization of information (i.e., cognitive architecture), and use of contextual cues to guide behavior (Serpell & Boykin, 1994). Culture and cognition are entwined because learning, thinking, and problem solving are socially situated and mediated by culture (Gordon & Armour-Thomas, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978).

Although a great deal of research has contrasted the cultural characteristics of American classrooms with those of other countries, particularly East Asian countries, less research has examined the impact that variation in the home cultures of American students has on achievement outcomes (Tyler et al., 2008). A growing body of empirical literature suggests that the cultural styles found in many African American homes are at odds with the culture of typical American classrooms (e.g., Boykin, 1983; Pai, Alder, & Shadiow, 2006). Therefore, it is not surprising that a cultural discontinuity exists between home and school that has implications for the school experiences and performance of African American children (Boykin & Bailey, 2000).

African American homes tend to be characterized by high levels of movement, multiple and simultaneous sources of sensory stimulation (e.g., music, conversation), and a communalistic orientation that values group over individual effort (Bailey & Boykin, 2001; Boykin, 1983; Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005; Tyler, Boykin, Boelter, & Dillihunt, 2005; Tyler, Boykin, Miller, & Hurley, 2006). American classrooms, on the other hand, tend to focus on limited movement, individualism, bureaucracy, and competition (Boykin & Bailey, 2000; Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, & Kizzie, 2006; Pai et al., 2006; Parsons, 2003). Recent studies have shown that African American youth perform significantly better in school when they are able to learn in a style that reflects their home culture rather than in the style associated with traditional classrooms (Boykin & Bailey, 2000). Further, studies have shown that when elementary students perceive discontinuity between home and school cultures, they have lower motivation and poorer academic outcomes (Arunkumar, Midgely, & Urdan, 1999; Warzon & Ginsburg-Block, 2008).

Although the body of research on cultural discontinuity in African American youth is growing, several issues still remain. First, most of the extant research was conducted with low-income African American samples (Tyler et al., 2006). Second, previous research has focused on learning and other cognitive outcomes and has not included academic and behavioral outcomes to the same degree (Wong & Rowley, 2001). The same cultural processes that inform learning and cognition probably also shape behavioral norms. Third, previous research tends to pit mainstream characteristics against Afrocultural characteristics without considering that most classrooms probably reflect a mix of the two (Boykin et al., 2006).

African American Children and Cultural Discontinuity

Okagaki's (2001) Triarchic model of minority achievement suggests that youth adapt more easily to the schooling process when classrooms reflect students' cultural norms. Although some children find similarity between the cultural characteristics of their homes and those they find at school, other children are faced with discontinuity—large differences between the cultural characteristics of home and school (Okagaki, 2001).

Boykin (1983) discussed the cultural discontinuity that exists for many African American youth. He notes that African American homes tend to reflect Afrocultural styles, a melding of African and American cultural values and behaviors. American schools, on the other hand, tend to reflect mainstream values such as individualism and self-control (Boykin et al., 2006).

Empirical research underscores the value of learning for African American students within a context that is consistent with Afrocultural ethos. In a study of cultural values in the contexts of low-income African American fourth graders, Tyler et al. (2006) found that students had the greatest preference for learning and working styles that were communal and vervistic—both at

home and at school. While most students favor cooperative learning opportunities over individualistic experiences (Johnson, 2006), a number of studies showed that African American students prefer working in groups more than do students of other ethnic groups (Dunn et al., 2005).

It is not surprising that African American youth learn better in the contexts that they prefer – those embracing Afrocultural styles. One study found that allowing African American students to move during story readings and a subsequent recall task yielded better scores than when movement was restricted (Boykin & Cunningham, 2001). In addition, African American students performed better on mathematics and reading items when learning in a communal context (i.e., seated together, sharing materials) than when assigned to individual learning or peer tutoring (Dill & Boykin, 2000; Hurley, Boykin, & Allen, 2005). Highlighting the cultural underpinnings of these results are studies that suggest that although communalistic and cooperative learning contexts benefit both African American and European American students, African American students benefit to a greater degree than European Americans (Boykin & Bailey, 2000; Serpell, Boykin, Madhere, & Nasim, 2006). Furthermore, high levels of movement have been shown to have a positive effect on the cognitive performance of African American students, but a negative effect on European American students (Allen & Boykin, 1991; Boykin & Bailey, 2000).

Compared to studies on Afrocultural values and behaviors, less research has examined the influence of mainstream styles on student achievement. The research available has yielded mixed findings. Tyler et al. (2006) found that teachers rated hypothetical children adopting mainstream styles more positively than they rated students portrayed with an Afrocultural ethos. Additionally, Lam, Yim, Law, and Cheung (2004) found that students performed better in classrooms with high versus low levels of competition. Nevertheless in the same study, students in the competitive classroom had more negative self-evaluations, which could have long-term effects on motivation (Lam et al., 2004). Other work has also shown lower self-efficacy and motivation in classrooms that emphasize performance goals, competition, and individualism (Chan & Lam, 2008; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Moreover, mainstream practices may be especially problematic for African American youth (Boykin & Cunningham, 2001; Dill & Boykin, 2000; Hurley, Boykin, & Allen, 2005) since American classrooms tend to demonstrate mainstream styles. Yet, it is unclear how beneficial these styles are for achievement and adjustment, particularly for African American students.

Also, much of the literature using Boykin's (1986) Afrocultural framework has been conducted with schools serving low-income children. This literature suggests that such schools tend to be high in mainstream cultural styles and low in Afrocultural styles (Boykin et al., 2005). Research has not made clear how similar these classrooms are to those serving more middle-class or racially integrated classrooms. However, evidence suggests that schools serving high numbers of low-income African American and Latino students tend to be more focused on issues of accountability, and thus, more structured and less creative (Madaus & Clarke, 2001). We suspect that greater focus on testing and accountability would increase emphasis on individualism and decrease opportunities for movement, communalism, and affective engagement.

Study Context

The current study examined the relation between classroom culture (i.e., mainstream versus Afrocultural) and achievement-related characteristics and their influence on social outcomes in

an ethnically diverse sample of African American youth. Trained research assistants rated each classroom in terms of mainstream (bureaucracy, individualism, and competition) and Afrocultural (verve, affect, orality, and communalism) cultural styles. These observational ratings were related to children's achievement test scores and assessments of social skills made by parents and teachers. The following research questions were posed to deepen our understanding of the relation between classroom culture and achievement-related characteristics and their influence on social outcomes:

1. *What is the relation between cultural values and school composition? Are mainstream and Afrocultural values correlated with each other? Are the racial and socioeconomic composition of the school related to classroom culture?* It was hypothesized that the tendency for classrooms to have mainstream cultural characteristics would be unrelated to school racial or socioeconomic characteristics. However, classrooms with more African American youth and children from families of low socioeconomic status would be in classrooms with less Afrocultural characteristics. In addition, we expected that mainstream and Afrocultural values would be slightly related to each other.

2. *Does classroom culture, both Afrocultural and mainstream, predict achievement and behavioral outcomes?* For this question, we expected that Afrocultural characteristics would be positively related to achievement and behavioral outcomes of African American students, but that mainstream classroom characteristics would be negatively related to those outcomes.

3. *Do Afrocultural and mainstream classroom culture interact to predict achievement and behavioral outcomes?* Although we examined the interaction of mainstream and Afrocultural classroom styles, we did not have specific hypotheses about these outcomes. In this analysis we considered the possibility that mainstream behaviors may be less detrimental in the context of high levels of verve (e.g., emphasizing competition may be less problematic in the context of other communalistic activity).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine how classrooms reflected mainstream or Afrocultural values in an economically diverse sample of African American fifth-graders and whether classroom characteristics were correlated with racial and socioeconomic composition. The study also sought to determine whether classroom culture was associated with achievement and behavioral outcomes for African American students.

Additionally, the study attempted to fill the gaps in the literature examining classroom cultural characteristics and their relation to achievement and behavioral outcomes in economically diverse African American youth by focusing on five of nine dimensions of Boykin's (1986) Afrocultural ethos that are believed to be most relevant to classroom practice – (1) *movement*: an emphasis on the interconnectedness of movement, dance, rhythm, and percussiveness; (2) *verve*: an ability to focus with high levels of sensory stimulation; (3) *affect*: an emphasis on emotion and the ability to be emotionally expressive; (4) *communalism*: a commitment to social connectedness, including an awareness that social bonds transcend the individual; and (5)

orality: emphasizing oral and aural modes of communication. In contrast, the three dimensions of Boykin's mainstream ethos were also examined and include: (1) "*Individualism:* emphasizing individual accomplishments and autonomous work; (2) *Competition:* a focus on showing the best performance in a domain; and (3) *Bureaucracy:* an emphasis on rules, form and procedure" (Boykin & Ellison, 1995, pp. 99-100).

Method

Participants and Setting

Seventy-four African American fifth grade students (41 girls; 33 boys) ages 10-13 years (*M*=11.4 years) participated in this study. These students were attending one of 40 elementary schools (52 classrooms) located within and around a small city in the southeast. The students were initially recruited when they were infants and part of a longitudinal study of health and development. The parents of these children were lower middle class with an average of 13 years of education (ranging from 3 to 19 years). The majority (68%) had greater than a high school education, including some college. About half of the sample was considered poor according to federal poverty standards. A higher percentage of the schools in the sample had students that were African American while a lower percentage of the schools had a majority European American student body. Few students of other ethnicities were enrolled.

Instruments

1. *Cultural Themes in the Classroom Checklist* (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005) was used to assess 'classroom culture'. This observation checklist assesses the extent to which five Afrocultural (i.e., verve, orality, affect, communalism, and movement) and three mainstream cultural patterns (i.e., individualism, competition, bureaucracy) are present in the classroom. A trained observer visited each classroom for 2-3 hours to observe the child's affect and engagement, the developmental appropriateness of the classroom and the classroom cultural characteristics. At the end of the observation period, the observer recorded levels of cultural characteristics based on strict definitions of each using a scale from 1 (*not at all characteristic*) to 5 (*very characteristic*). Reliability was calculated by having a second observer in about 10% (n=8) of the classrooms. Kappas calculated from those observations suggested good reliability (.82 - .88). Two composite scores were created by computing the average score of the five Afrocultural (Cronbach's alpha = .70) and three mainstream (Cronbach's alpha = .68) items. Cultural themes tended to be positively correlated within subscales, and negatively correlated between the two (see Table 1).

2. *Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement (WJ-R) Broad Reading and Broad Math Cluster* (Woodcock & Johnson, 1989) was used to assess mathematics and reading ability. The Broad Reading cluster includes Letter-Word Identification, which assesses the ability to identify isolated letters and words, and Passage Comprehension, where children read a passage silently and identify a key word that is missing in the context of the passage. The Broad Math cluster includes Calculations, a combination of basic (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) and advanced (geometric,

trigonometric, and calculus) mathematical skills. The Broad Math cluster also includes Applied Problems, which assesses skills in analyzing and solving verbal math problems.

3. *Social Skills Rating System* (SSRS), Grades K-6 (Gresham & Elliot, 1990) was used annually by teachers and parents to assess social skills. This instrument (questionnaire) requires teachers and parents to assess whether a child has displayed certain social skills in the past month (*never, occasionally,* or *frequently*). A social skills standard score and percentile ranking (based on norming sample) are computed. The percentile scores were used in this investigation. In addition, the Grades K-6 version includes a Problem Behaviors Scale, which measures negative behaviors such as aggression displayed in the past month. This measure is widely used, with adequate internal consistency and construct validity for African American children in other studies (Huston et al., 2001) and in our sample for both social competence (a = .93) and behavior problems (a = .91). Teacher and parent scores are examined separately, though they were moderately positively correlated.

Procedure

The children were originally recruited between 6 and 12 months, when they were in a childcare center and part of a study of children's health and development. Assessments of classroom culture were made when the children advanced to fifth grade. The 52 classrooms of participating children were observed and assessments of cognitive and social skill outcomes were obtained for each child individually during the summer upon completion of fifth grade by an African American research assistant.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

The mean scores on the Afrocultural and mainstream composite variables (see Table 1) revealed that the classrooms under study were, on average, more Afrocultural in nature, with scores just under the scale midpoint of 3 (*M* = 2.76, *SD* = .52). Mainstream scores were slightly lower in comparison (*M* = 2.13, *SD* = .62). There was significant variability in both scores, as evidenced by large standard deviations and significant ranges. Examination of individual components of each subscale showed that the high levels of Afrocultural characteristics were driven by high levels of orality, affect, and movement. Individualism was the highest rated mainstream orientation, with levels similar to orality, affect, and movement. Relatively low levels of verve, competition, and bureaucracy were observed.

TABLE 1
Correlations Among Afrocultural and Mainstream Classroom Culture Variables

	Verve	Orality	Affect	Communalism	Movement	Individualism	Competition	Bureaucracy
Verve	1.00							
Orality	0.30*	1.00						
Affect	0.03	0.61**	1.00					
Communalism	0.16	0.52**	0.48**	1.00				
Movement	0.35**	0.38**	0.29*	0.41**	1.00			
Individualism	-0.02	-0.05	-0.31*	-0.36*	-0.10	1.00		
Competition	0.05	-0.17	-0.15	-0.17	0.05	0.27*	1.00	
Bureaucracy	-0.03	-0.25*	-0.33**	-0.30*	-0.11	0.39**	0.56**	1.00
Mean	2.88	3.38	3.00	3.13	3.25	2.88	1.13	1.88
SD	1.36	0.92	0.76	1.36	1.39	1.13	0.35	0.84
Range	1-4	2-4	2-4	2-5	1-5	1-4	1-2	1-3

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Moreover, correlations among cultural theme ratings showed that most Afrocultural themes were moderately positively correlated with each other (verve was not significantly related to affect or communalism) and either unrelated or negatively related to mainstream ratings. Mainstream themes were moderately, positively associated with each other. In addition, schools with greater numbers of poor students (i.e., those receiving free or reduced priced lunch) and those with more African American students had lower levels of Afrocultural behaviors in the classroom. The percentage of White students was positively correlated with Afrocultural behaviors and mainstream behaviors were unrelated to school demographic characteristics (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
Correlations Between Classroom Culture and Demographic Variables

	Free/Reduced Lunch	% Black	% White	Poverty Status	Parent Education
Verve	-0.27*	-0.38**	0.37**	-0.32**	-0.18
Orality	-0.18	-0.13	0.15	-0.14	-0.10
Affect	-0.07	-0.07	-0.05	-0.06	0.07
Communalism	-0.19*	-0.22	0.22	-0.22	-0.01
Movement	-0.31*	-0.30*	0.29*	-0.26*	0.04
Individualism	-0.12	-0.08	0.07	-0.07	0.05
Competition	-0.02	0.05	-0.05	-0.06	-0.03
Bureaucracy Orientation	-0.08	-0.06	0.05	-0.11	0.13
Afrocultural Composite	-0.31*	-0.30*	0.31*	-0.31*	-0.09
Mainstream Composite	-0.09	-0.04	0.03	-0.10	0.07

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Classroom Cultural Themes and Student Outcomes

Ordinary Least Squares Multiple Regressions (see Table 3) were used to evaluate the study hypotheses. Independent variables were composite scores for Afrocultural and mainstream classroom themes as well as a product score of the two. In addition, parent education level, child sex, school socioeconomic status (percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch), and school racial composition (percentage of school population that was African American) were entered simultaneously as covariates. Dependent variables were the Woodcock-Johnson broad reading cluster, Woodcock-Johnson broad mathematics cluster, social skills, and behavior problems.

TABLE 3

Ordinary Least Squares Multiple Regressions

	Woodcock-Johnson (Reading)	Woodcock-Johnson (Math)	Problem Behaviors (Teacher Report)	Social Skills (Teacher Report)	Problem Behaviors (Parent Report)	Social Skills (Parent Report)
Parent Education	2.67 (.70)**	1.18 (.69)	-2.68 (2.11)	2.30 (1.79)	-4.348 (1.95)*	6.39 (2.00)**
Child Sex	-1.55 (2.51)	0.99 (2.65)	-7.52 (8.41)	15.55 (7.30)	-2.47 (7.75)	6.37 (7.95)
Poor School	-0.13 (.09)	-0.15 (.10)	-0.55 (.66)	-0.15 (.56)	-0.38 (.60)	-0.29 (.62)
% Black	0.00 (.10)	0.07 (.10)	0.18 (.33)	-0.03 (.29)	0.25 (.29)	-0.16 (.30)
Afrocultural	4.99 (2.66)	3.32 (2.85)	-28.38 (9.85)**	19.04 (.03)*	-5.39 (8.53)	7.39 (8.75)
Mainstream	1.32 (2.18)	2.56 (2.30)	-2.34 (6.88)	0.28 (6.00)	6.67 (6.53)	-2.29 (6.70)
Afrocultural*Mainstream	11.87 (3.96)**	8.97 (4.22)*	-24.21 (15.56)	15.92 (13.23)	-23.11 (12.45)	18/19 (12.77)

Note: *$p<.05$; **$p<.01$
B(se) for each variable is listed

Overall, the results of this study showed that a b alance of Afrocultural and mainstream classroom cultural styles is associated with better reading and math scores. More specifically, the interaction of Afrocultural and mainstream orientations was a significant predictor of reading scores ($b = 11.87$, $p < .001$) and mathematics scores ($b = 8.97$, $p < .05$). We used the method suggested by Aiken and West (1991) to evaluate the interactions. Figures 1 and 2 show a plot of the interactions.
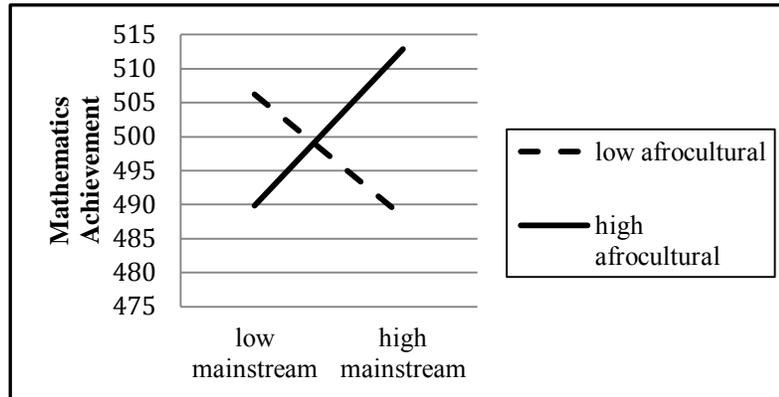

Figure 1. Interaction Between Mainstream and Afrocultural Orientations on Mathematics Achievement Scores.
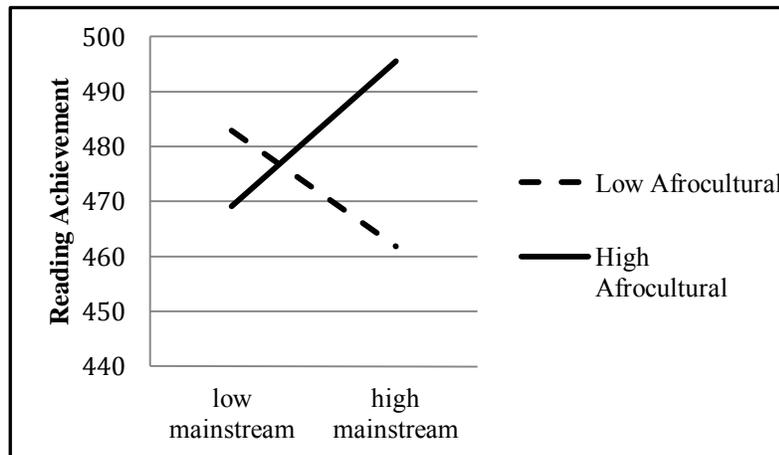

Figure 2. Interaction Between Mainstream and Afrocultural Orientations on Reading Achievement Scores.

In both cases the plots show that students in classrooms high in both mainstream and Afrocultural characteristics tended to have the best reading and mathematics scores. Students in high mainstream classrooms with low scores on Afrocultural characteristics and those in classrooms low in both styles tended to fare least well.

For behavioral outcomes, the results were somewhat different. Classroom cultural styles were unrelated to parent reports of social skills and behavior problems. Afrocultural classroom culture, however, was positively related to teacher-reported social skills ($b = 19.04$, $p < .05$) and

negatively associated with teacher-reported behavior problems ($b = -28.38$, $p < .05$). Mainstream styles and the interaction of the two styles were unrelated to behavioral outcomes. Moreover, parent reports of problem behaviors and social skills were unrelated to Afrocultural classroom culture or mainstream classroom culture.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine how classrooms reflected mainstream or Afrocultural values in an economically diverse sample of African American fifth-graders and whether classroom characteristics were correlated with racial and socioeconomic composition. The study also examined whether classroom culture was associated with achievement and behavioral outcomes for African American students. To this end, classroom culture scores were compared to scores on reading and math assessments, as well as teacher and parent ratings of behavior and social skills.

In general, the classrooms in this study were more Afrocultural than mainstream. Though there was substantial variation, this differs from other studies (i.e., Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, & Kizzie, 2006), which suggest that typical classrooms reflect more mainstream than Afrocultural styles. These findings may be due to the socioeconomic diversity of our sample. Also, these results highlight the relevance of socioeconomic classroom composition and suggest that classrooms with more middle-income students may be higher in Afrocultural styles than those that serve primarily low-income students.

The first research question, which was related to variability in cultural styles found in classrooms serving our sample of African American children, revealed considerable variability. Nearly all of the classroom cultural ratings ranged from 1 to 4 with standard deviations about three-quarters of a point. In addition, mean levels of each subscale were quite different within the major categories of Afrocultural and mainstream styles. Moderate levels of orality, affect, communalism, and movement; and low levels of verve characterized the Afrocultural scale. High levels of individualism were coupled with low levels of competition and bureaucracy on the mainstream scale. These results mirror, to some degree, the results of Tyler, Boykin, Miller, and Hurley (2006). They found that teachers of low-income African American youth preferred communalistic student behaviors over those involving verve. Unlike the current study, however, Tyler and colleagues also found that teachers highly endorsed competition among their students.

The second research question examined the relationship between school demographics and classroom cultural styles. We predicted that Afrocultural, but not mainstream, styles would be associated with the racial and economic composition of the schools. Indeed, mainstream styles were unrelated to school demographics, but Afrocultural styles were more likely to be exhibited in classrooms with lower percentages of low-income and African American students. These are the children that the literature suggests would prefer Afrocultural styles the most, yet these styles are less present in their classrooms.

The third research question investigated the relation between Afrocultural and mainstream classroom cultural styles, and academic and behavioral outcomes. The findings revealed partial support for the hypothesis that Afrocultural styles would be positively associated with

achievement and social skills, but negatively associated with behavior problems; and that mainstream styles would show the inverse. Interactions between cultural styles were significant for both reading and mathematics outcomes. Classrooms high in both Afrocultural and mainstream values had children with higher reading and math achievement scores. However, classrooms high in mainstream values without corresponding high Afrocultural values, or classrooms low in both tended to have lower scores. Mainstream styles were not related to social skills or behavior problems, but Afrocultural styles were positively related to teacher-reported social skills and negatively related to teacher-reported behavior problems. In other words, high mainstream values were associated with more negative outcomes, but only when accompanied by a low emphasis on Afrocultural values. When both were emphasized, achievement was actually higher. As expected, Afrocultural styles were negatively related to teacher reports of behavior problems. It is interesting, though not totally unexpected, that these same styles were unrelated to parent-reported social skills. Other research confirms modest concordance between parent and teacher ratings on the SSRS, suggesting that there may be variation in behavior across contexts (Ruffalo & Elliot, 1999) and that classroom processes may not transfer to behavior outside of school.

The achievement results highlight the unique contribution of this study to the research literature. The findings indicate the importance of a balance/interaction, implying that both are needed for African American youth to be academically successful. One interpretation of the results is that by engaging in both types of cultural styles, the youth in this study were able to build a bicultural competence (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993) that would allow them to successfully navigate between worlds, regardless of their preferences. This study only assessed academic success and behavior, but future research may consider other outcomes such as well-being and school belonging.

A second possibility is that teachers using both styles may be serving as cultural brokers (Serpell & Boykin, 1994) who are preparing children to navigate between mainstream and Afrocultural spheres. By incorporating both styles into the classroom, teachers allow children to learn the skills they need, while at the same time, not alienate them from the values they are exposed to at home. Also, rather than denigrating the culture of African American students, the teachers may be consciously drawing on the students' culture to help them learn.

The results for behavioral outcomes were somewhat different in that only Afrocultural styles were significant predictors. As the classroom culture affords great expression of affect, movement, and communalism, students were found to have better social skills and fewer behavior problems. This fits with broad theories of home-school discontinuity, which suggest that when the classroom cultural style is more in sync with the home cultural style, children have better developmental outcomes (e.g., Boykin, 1986; Okagaki, 2001). If one assumes that the homes from which these children come are higher in Afrocultural styles, an implication is that some of the behavior problems of African American youth may be the result of the lack of opportunity to work collectively or an expectation to learn in a p assive manner. Teachers of African American children may assume that the best way to deal with the behavior problems of young African American students is to further restrict their behavior; in essence, to help them learn to behave properly by increasing bureaucracy (forcing them to raise their hands be moving) and decreasing movement. These results suggest that the opposite is true. Allowing African

American students to express an Afrocultural ethos may improve behavior. I n addition, increasing Afrocultural classroom styles might have an indirect effect on African American student achievement and engagement, given their relationship to behavior problems and social skills (Jagers, 1996; Jagers, Smith, Mock, & Dill, 1997).

This research, however, was not without limitations. First, the study only used achievement test scores as a measure of academic achievement, where some research has shown grades and daily classroom performance to be important and complementary in triangulating actual student achievement (Duckworth & Seligman, 2006). Still, achievement test scores may be preferable over grades because of the potential for teacher bias. Teachers who create the classroom culture also assign grades and would likely be biased in favor of children who have similar behavior styles. Second, the sample was small and non-random. The sample size precluded more sophisticated analyses, such as analyses where gender or family socio-economic status could have been considered as moderators of these relationships. The small sample size also underscores the strength of the interactions between cultural styles in predicting achievement scores, as interactions require significantly more power to detect than main effects.

In summary, this study supports previous research that Afrocultural styles are advantageous for African American children (Okagaki, 2001). At the same time, the study contradicts previous research, in that our findings indicate that reducing the discontinuity between home and school is important for children's success, but mainly in a context that also requires children to adjust mainstream values and behaviors as well. Teachers who present students with aspects of both orientations may be giving their students the best of both worlds.

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Acknowledgement

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