Article Critique

Monroe, C.R., & Obidah, J.E. (2004). The influence of cultural synchronization on a

teacher's perceptions of disruption. A case study of an African American middle-

school classroom. *Journal of Teacher Education, 55,* 256-268.

I. Statement of the Problem

a. Ressearch Topic

The topic is how to discipline students. The authors state, "student responses to

teachers' disciplinary techniques can be unpredictable and require quick reactions on the

part of the teacher." This sets the context for the more specific research problem.

b. Research Problem

As the title of the article suggests, cultural synchronization between the teacher

and the students can be influential in discipline. This is illustrated in the authors'

transcription of an interaction among students and the teacher along with commentary.

More specifically, the authors note that Ms. Simpson (the teacher) has shifted her

language to include dialect that is non-standard English but is closer to the students' own

language. The authors state "Ms. Simpson's comments, undoubtedly, have altered her

professional image from one of "effective educator" to "unprofessional teacher" in the

eyes of many teacher educators." They go on to note "conventional wisdom fails to

account for the importance of cultural context when analyzing teacher behaviors."

c. Research Questions/Hypotheses

No specific research question or hypothesis is noted, but the authors do address

the overall context for their qualitative study. They state that "we argue that researchers

and teacher educators must carefully consider the salience of culture as related to effective classroom management techniques for low-income African American students who attend urban schools." More specifically, after reviewing the literature, the authors state that the "purpose of the current study was to investigate an African American middle-school teacher's disciplinary classroom actions." In the final paragraph of the literature review they also state "our goal is to emphasize the importance of cultural factors as related to classroom discipline" and how "building cultural bridges between teachers and studens is critical to reversing negative disciplinary trends that exist among African American students who attend urban schools."

II. Review of the Literature

The authors begin with a brief review of literature that supports the ideas that African American students in general, and males in particular, may exhibit behavioral and linguistic patterns that differ from the institutional norms and may contribute to more frequent disciplinary actions. The impact of more frequent disciplinary actions (e.g., missed academic information, involvement in increasingly antisocial activities) are also mentioned.

Next, the authors review literature that supports the "value of culturally responsive pedagogy for African American students." However, they suggest that little of this research addresses disciplinary responsiveness.

The authors clearly point out the gaps in the existing literature. They suggest "few scholars have studied how the presence of cultural synchronization may nurture effective, albeit, nontraditional classroom management techniques. Central to our analysis is an understanding of how the teacher and students' shared cultural orientation

influenced the teacher's responses to behaviors traditionally defined as disruptive in research literature" and the "impact her actions had on the quality of her students' schooling experiences."

The researchers also review literature explaining what is meant by culturally responsive education and how such models can have positive impacts on African American students. They also review literature on cultural synchronization in the classroom and how effective teachers of these students "align professional practice with their students' culture." The authors conclude their study provides an important step in furthering understanding of culturally responsive and synchronized disciplinary practices rather than focusing on curricular pedagogy.

III. Methods

The authors state they used a qualitative case study approach. The teacher participant was selected based on being an effective teacher (self-report and principal recommendation) and the class/students were selected by the teacher based on the likelihood of behavior problems being evident.

The student participants are described in terms of ethnicity/race, gender, age and socioeconomic backgrounds. The teacher is also described as being 31 years old, African American, and having 10 years experience. Her degree and socioeconomic background are also given. The authors include examples of actions of Ms. Simpson that illustrate her culturally responsive nature (e.g., student council advisor, sensitivity to students' home lives, providing advice and guidance to students and families).

The Classroom Code of Conduct and Expectations is described in sufficient detail with examples of how Ms. Simpson's disciplinary style may differ from more traditional

approaches. The School setting is described in terms of number of students, ethnic/racial makeup, and percentage eligible for reduced or free lunch, along with geographical data that inform the reader the school is a metropolitan, diverse, largely low income populated school.

Data collection methods are described in considerable detail as one would expect with a qualitative study. The number of field visits were extensive (36) and both formal and informal interviews conducted. Come documents were reviewed (teacher handouts concerning expectations). The first author also maintained a research journal. Themes from the field notes , documents, and interviews were coded and examined for themes. These are also described in considerable detail. Reliability and validity issues were addressed by the authors who noted how they ensured reliability of data obtained and the triangulation of sources of data.   Field visits and interviews were autiotaped for example. Ms. Simpson also reviewed with field notes and interview transcripts for errors or disagreements she noted. Authors' colleagues also reviewed and critiqued the study.

IV. Results and Conclusions

The authors begin by relating their findings back to the overall purpose of the study, to develop "a framework for understanding how cultural synchronization between teachers and students influences classroom disciplinary actions." To that end, they identify several thems.

Patterns of cultural humor is the first theme and is illustrated with several transcriptions of interactions along with commentary explaining how they enabled the teacher to "build cultural bridges between students' home and school lives." They also explain how the use of dialect allows the teacher to emphasize expectations in

meaningful ways. Her responses also "promoted and reaffirmed solidarity with her students." They note that humor may allow the teacher to be more authentic in the students' perceptions. The teacher also demonstrated how to use humor in place of overreacting to statements or actions that could be considered offensive or result in harsher disciplinary actions.

Demonstrations of affect and emotion was another major theme noted, also referred to in the literature as "warm demands." Again, a number of excerpts are provided to illustrate the presence of this theme in the teacher's actions. Of importance is the teacher's reprimands were generally met with solemnity and quiet when they were intended to get a serious reaction from students. The authors note such blunt and direct types of discipline are more common among urban African American students' homes.

In conclusion, the authors state that there is considerable divergence in this teacher's reactions to disciplinary situations than might be in less culturally responsive teachers.   They assert their case study does help to establish that cultural synchronicity is important in effective classroom management. However, they also recognize their conclusions require caution in interpretation due to such variables as the teacher's experience and status, and her relationships within the community and with families. Finally, the authors make suggestions for future research including empirical studies with larger sample sizes, use of both male and female teachers, across grade levels and with teachers from various cultural communities.