	What I Was Thinking	Context for Actions Taken Demarcus is near the front of the room sitting at his desk. He is African American and tall for his age, especially tall for a third grade class; he was retained at the end of his first grade year. He has eyes that burrow into you, by turns serious, sad, angry, interested, thoughtful. Strength emanates from him. He has made strong academic gains, particularly in reading, during the year and a half we have been working together. Demarcus does not like to write, does not see himself as a good writer. His mother and I spent a good deal of time last year, when Demarcus was in the second grade, helping him figure out ways in which he could complete writing tasks that he didn't himself seem to believe he could complete. At the beginning of his second grade year, Demarcus rarely completed a writing task and often, during writing times, behaved in ways certain to cause him to be excluded from the class. Now, as a third grade student, Demarcus regularly completes all writing assignments.	Reflection on Changes in Practice	Relation to Research and Writings
2.3.04 "I hate you," Demarcus yells, "I hate you." I am giving directions for a writing task; we are readying for the Reading Retelling test given to all third grade students in Marin County in late March. "I hate you!" he says again loudly. "I'm not doing it!" To keep myself calm, to keep myself from over-reacting and becoming engaged in an argument with him, I pick up my journal, sit down and begin writing (as everyone in the class has been instructed to do). I write down what Demarcus is saying. Most of the rest of the class settles to the task. Demarcus keeps talking, but he is no onger yelling, not even speaking particularly loudly.	While I am fairly sure at this point in the incident, given previous experiences, that something about this writing task has caused deep frustration for Demarcus, I can think of nothing in particular that would have brought about such a strong reaction. The fact that, after I sit down, Demarcus lowers his voice significantly tells me that he is on his way to working through his feelings, despite the words that he uses here.	I have learned that Demarcus will make comments such as these when he is unsure of what to do with an assignment, particularly if the assignment involves writing. I know that Demarcus has learned to work through these reactions and he almost always does so on his own now. Here, and in general, I work to ignore the comments, in this instance by sitting down to write during the beginning of this incident; given that the rest of the class was able to continue working, I choose not to respond as an attempt to de-escalate the situation, thereby offering Demarcus the opportunity to work through his feelings on his own.	When I first began teaching, and for many years after that, working through situations with angry, frustrated students was scary. I was scared that I wouldn't be able to stop the flow of anger, that I wouldn't be able to keep control of the situation. I lacked any sureness that I could withstand the anger. Thus, it was difficult to keep a sense of calm, and of clear expectations, while in the midst of a situation such as described here. As I reflect on this narrative, I see how much my ability to outwardly maintain a sense of calm and of steadfastness in such situations has increased. A good friend of mine once told me to envision myself as a tree with a <i>very</i> long tap root; such a tree will not be knocked over even during an intense storm. Envisioning myself in this way has been helpful. What has helped even more has been learning that the ways in which I've tended to respond in situations of conflict (the insecurities, anxieties and fears with which I've been filled), while not at all unusual in white females, have created a cultural dissonance for many of my students. Learning to remain calm, while firm in my	Thompson; Through Ebony Eyes: What Teachers Need to Know But Are Afraid to Ask About African American Students: "to have an effective classroom management system, teachers must be firm but not mean. As Delpit noted, African American students are unlikely to respect teachers who appear weak." (pg. 100) Thompson; Through Ebony Eyes: What Teachers Need to Know But Are Afraid to Ask About African American Students: "Many [middle-class white]women are socialized to speak softly and in a nondirect manner, and to adopt a nonassertive persona; they are more likely to be experienced in submitting to authority than in exercising it."" (ng. 73)
want to chop off your head with a chain saw" I look up from my writing and comment that I'm sorry he's feeling this way, but that he'll need to complete this writing before he goes home today. "I'll leave when I want to!" he says loudly, then over turns his desk. It hits the floor hard. Most of the class looks up, but then goes back to writing. I write "Boom!" for the sound of the desk hitting the floor, in my journal. Demarcus picks up the desk and rights it. The next time I look up, the desk is upside down on the floor again, although I have not heard it go over. He's sitting with his feet on the desk's bottom, holding two of its legs, as though driving away as fast as he can. He begins to talk again. "I should just write `blah, blah, blah on every page in this stupid book Sometimes, I really wish this was a person so I could rip its head off I would break everything,	I choose to look up at Demarcus at this point and speak to him. I'm hoping that, if I calmly remind him that the work he is not doing will need to be finished before he can leave for the day, it will help him get started. While I speak in a calm voice and use words that Demarcus has often heard me speak before, I wonder what would have happened if I had simply continued my own writing, rather than speak to him at this point.	Demarcus' mother and I agreed to an arrangement last year (when she and I both believed that Demarcus was choosing to behave in ways that would cause him to be suspended, thereby not having to complete assigned tasks); we agreed that Demarcus would not leave school until all assigned tasks were complete. I would bring him home after he'd finished all of the tasks he'd not yet completed during the school day. The first three days after his mother and I agreed to try this approach, Demarcus didn't finish assigned work until approximately 5:30, at which point I drove him home. After these three days, Demarcus began to complete all assigned tasks during the school day. Demarcus' family and I have worked hard to help him begin to shift from the coping strategies he has used previously, such as tipping over furniture when he is frustrated or upset, to strategies which allow him to deal with his frustration while not disrupting the rest of the class. While this incident shows a return	 expectations, has been an important shift in becoming a more culturally-relevant teacher. An insistence that he complete the writing tasks assigned him has been one of several important pieces in bringing about the shift that Demarcus has made over the course of the last year. Underlying this insistence is a belief that Demarcus can and will succeed at the task presented him. It has taken me much longer than I wish that it had to understand this point. I now recognize that early in my teaching career I was a much less demanding teacher than I am currently. I often stopped attending to whether a student had completed assigned tasks when he or she was behaving in ways I deemed inappropriate. My attention shifted to working through the behavioral situation at hand; I was not "pushy," as I call myself now, regarding the completing of academic tasks. I am certain that this lack of insistence did my students a disservice in that it communicated that I could be distracted from the task at hand; more importantly, I was also indirectly communicating that these were 	(pg. 73) Ladson-Billings; <i>The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children:</i> "Teachers with culturally relevant practices believe that all students can succeed." (pg 44)
including the teacher's" He trails off, sits quietly for a moment, drives the desk. Damion, who sits at the same table, is now becoming engaged in what Demarcus is doing; he's beginning to say that he's not going to do the work either. I stand up, walk over to Demarcus and, without saying anything, carefully pull the desk out from under his feet (he holds on to the desk legs for a moment but then lets go). I slide it away from him a few feet, then leave it sitting upside down. He gets up, walks toward the door, throws himself at it (Boom!), and is gone. A student gasps, "Ms. Franz, he just threw the blue chair!" I look out the window. Sure enough, the chair we keep just outside the door is sitting upside down on the muddy hillside adjacent to our classroom.	When I see that another student is beginning to be influenced by Demarcus' behavior, I decide to intervene. I choose not to respond to Damion's words and, as well, choose not to say anything to Demarcus as I move toward him and put my hands on the desk; to say anything to either of them at this point, I am sure, will not help to de-escalate what is going on. I move slowly and pay attention to my breathing, wanting to be careful to move the desk without seeming to yank it. I am not sure if Demarcus will try to prevent my moving the desk away from him. I notice how quickly he lets go of the desk and think, again, that there is a good chance that he will still work his way through this situation with only a small amount of support/intervention from me.	to behaviors he has not used in several months, he lets go of the desk easily and allows me to move it away from him, something which would not have happened when we began working together last year.	tasks they may not be fully capable of completing successfully. While insistence has been a useful tool in communicating to Demarcus that he can and will be successful in completing a task, its usefulness exists only in proportion to the strength of my relationship with his family and with him. Demarcus' mother knows that my insistence is in the service of pushing Demarcus to be a strong, academically successful student. She has evidence that he has made, and is continuing to make, academic gains. She supports, and actively participates in, the insistence that Demarcus complete assigned tasks. This has been integral to Demarcus' acceptance of insistence as a tool in supporting his learning.	Ladson-Billings; The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children: "Culturally relevant teaching involves cultivation of the relationship beyond the boundaries of the classroom." (pg 62)
office after this. He talks with the principal; he works on some mathematics papers I bring for him. At lunch time Damion and I walk down to check on him. Damion has worked with me to do the retelling task, and he is now very cheery. He smiles broadly when I suggest that he and I go check in on Demarcus, and he practically skips down the ramp toward the office. Once we get there, Damion plops down in the chair next to Demarcus, while I stand just in front of him. Damion speaks first, asking how he's doing, asking if he's ready to come back yet. I notice Demarcus' face soften noticeably as Damion speaks to him. I'm glad that I didn't speak first, that I stood quietly while this interchange takes place. While he's done very little of the work I gave him to do, I note that Demarcus is calm and collected. He says that he's ready to come back now. I remind him that he'll need to complete both the writing and the mathematics before he	I ask Damion to come with me because he is Demarcus' best friend; as well, Damion has, with support from me, completed the writing task. My hope is that Damion's presence with me will help Demarcus's mood, his willingness to return with us to class, and his eventual finishing up of the writing task.			Ladson-Billings; The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children: "Culturally relevant teaching encourages students to learn collaboratively and expects them to teach each other and take responsibility for each other." (pg 70)
goes home today, and he nods his head. The three of us walk back up to class together, Demarcus pausing outside the door just long enough to go and pick up the blue chair still lying on the hillside. The end of the day is approaching. "Do I really have to do that writing?" he asks me, maybe ten minutes before the bell is going to ring. "Yes, Demarcus, you know that you do." He grumbles some, but I see him about five minutes later sitting at his desk, journal out, writing. I tell the class it's time to get their backpacks and jackets and we line up to walk down to the bus. I tell Demarcus that he'll get the bus on its second run.	I note that Demarcus picks up the chair without my telling him to do so.		Again, I see the role insistence has played in Demarcus' completion of assigned tasks. He knows that he must do this piece of writing to be able to go home; I am not surprised to see him at his desk writing steadily, shortly after asking me if he really has to do it. A few years ago, I likely would have told Demarcus that he didn't have to complete the task, since he'd been able to calm himself down, get back to class and work through the rest of the day. I would have been so relieved that the conflict was eased, smoothed, finished, and I know I would have wanted to be seen as "nice." Learning to recognize this pattern of wanting to be seen as "a nice teacher" has been a hugely important piece in helping me to shift my teaching practices; understanding this pattern's impact on my instructional/managerial decision-making and the negative impact of those decisions on my students' work habits and, ultimately, learning, has helped me attend carefully to those situations in which my inclination is to "be nice," and to then question myself	
"No!" he cries, "I'm finished! I'm finished!" He slams his pencil down, lifts up his journal so that I can see it. "It's okay, Demarcus. You know I have to look over the writing, and I can't do that now. Come on, walk down with us, and then we'll look at it together." "No!" he yells, throwing the journal, knocking over a book box on another students' desk, the contents of which spill over the floor. I head out the door to walk the class down to the bus. Demarcus trails after us. I see him standing behind a tree on the embankment above the bus loading area. I get on the bus, help get everyone seated and settled, get off the bus and talk with a teacher who wants to tell me something. When I call Demarcus	Since the bus makes its second run within about twenty minutes of its first run, it didn't dawn on me that Demarcus might react strongly to staying for this extra time. Things have worked well between the two of us all afternoon. Part of me wishes I'd just checked to make sure he'd finished the writing task and not said anything about going over it together. I realize he wasn't expecting to go over it; he thought that what he needed to do was complete the writing task, and I have just surprised him with what for him seems to be an additional requirement. I say nothing after he throws the book box. I know that anything I say will not help to de-escalate the situation; I hope that by walking the rest of the students down to the bus it will allow him time to calm down, and that then we can talk it through after the bus has left.	I have never had a student actually leave	Another shift in my teaching practice revolves around learning how and when to attempt talking things through with students. Previously, I would have tried right then to persuade Demarcus of my point of view, that catching the second bus was not a punishment, that it offered us a few minutes to go over his work together. I would have tried to "smooth the waters" as quickly as possible. I've learned to try not to respond so quickly, as is shown here when I say nothing after Demarcus has knocked down the book box (all the other students were on the way out the door at this point) and, earlier, when I chose to sit down and write in my journal rather than respond to Demarcus' loud proclomations that he was not going to do the writing. Almost inevitably, I've learned, when I try to immediately talk things through with a student who is frustrated and/or angry I end up engaging in arguing; the student has his or her point of view and I have mine and the tension and negativity within the situation is only escalated by engaging in talking	
after I've finished talking, there is no answer, no tell-tale movement from behind the trees. He's gone. Since Demarcus has never left school before, I walk around the grounds looking for him. He's nowhere to be found. I get in my car and drive over to the apartments where he lives. At first, no one is home, but when I return about twenty minutes later, Demarcus, shoes off, opens the door. His mouth drops open when he sees me. "Get your shoes on," I say. "You need to come back to school, clean up the mess that you made, and go over the writing with me." His mom looks out the door. I'd thought she was still in Washington, where she's been the last several days. I learn that she has just walked in the door from the airport not five minutes ago. "What did you <i>do</i> ?" she asks him. He doesn't respond. I say, quietly, "Demarcus left school without permission. He walked home on his own, and he left quite a mess	I'm not that surprised that Demarcus won't respond to my call; I expect to see him behind one of the trees on the embankment next to the stairs I walk up on the way back from the bus. I expect he'll drag up the ramp to the classroom behind me, as he did on those occasions last year when I kept him after school to finish his work. I am very surprised when I realize that he seems to have left, but know immediately that I'll need to drive over to his home, both to ensure he's gotten home safely and to help him know that if he leaves school without permission I will simply come to his door. I wonder if he chose to leave knowing that his mom is still away in Washington, not expected home until late today.	campus before. It is clear to me that I'll need to go and get him from home and bring him back to school. While I recognize how much time this will take out of the late afternoon, time I was planning to spend on getting ready for school the next day, I am spurred on by the roles that I know insistence and clear expectations have played in Demarcus' work habits and academic success.	(arguing) in those moments. Waiting, and breathing, always helps.	Ladson-Billings; <i>The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children</i> : "Culturally relevant teaching involves cultivation of the relationship beyond the boundaries of the classroom." (pg 62)
behind him. I'd like to take him back to school to clean up." His mother's mouth drops open. "You told me you <i>missed</i> the bus! You get your shoes on <i>right now</i> !" Demarcus says nothing but turns to get his shoes. We all walk out to the parking lot together. I tell his mom that I'm sorry this is happening the moment she's gotten back, but that it seems important for Demarcus to know that if he leaves, I'll simply come and get him. She smiles, nods her head. We agree that I'll bring him back in about an hour, which gives her time to run an errand she was just leaving to do. Demarcus and I are quiet in the car. As we arrive back at school, I tell him he'll need to first clean up the things on the floor in the classroom and that after that we'll talk about the writing and about what happened today. He nods, and begins to pick up the books and papers lying on the floor as soon as we enter the room.				
We talk for about fifteen minutes. I do much more talking than he does. It dawns on me while talking with him that perhaps part of the reason for his anger this morning was simply that he didn't expect there to be two writing assignments. I realize that I hadn't written both tasks—the quotation mark work and the retelling—on the schedule. The retelling work was a surprise to him, an unwelcome surprise given how much he dislikes writing. I ask him about this. He agrees that it was, along with the fact that he was tired and hungry. After we finish talking, he goes out to clean off the muddy blue chair, and then we start work on a new engineering project—constructing a marble track run—until it's time to take him home.	I am very surprised that it didn't dawn on me earlier that I'd changed our routine without even noting it on our schedule. "Oohhhhh," I think to myself when it hits me. No wonder Demarcus responded so strongly. How could I not have realized this? How could I have missed the shift I was making in our routine when I planned the two writing activities, especially knowing how much Demarcus depends on routine?	In my original planning for the week, our writing lesson was devoted to work on dialogue and the use of quotation marks. The night before the events of this day, I'd decided to add in a task that would provide practice toward the upcoming third grade county-wide Reading Retelling assessment. The next morning I didn't remember to add this new writing task to the schedule that's up on the chalkboard.		
As we're getting ready to go, Demarcus says, "Ms. Franz, can I stay after school on Tuesday" he pauses for a moment, "and Thursday?" 2.04.04 It is Wednesday, the day after Demarcus' and my conversation after school. I have added the word "retelling" to the schedule, and I see Demarcus look at it when he first comes into the room. When it is time for the retelling work, he has his journal out and his pencil in hand; he participates fully in the exercise, even reading aloud his effort to the class when he doesn't particularly want to. At the end of the day I call his mom to let her know how hard Demarcus worked and what a good day he had.	Internally, I feel the equivalent of my mouth dropping open.	Demarcus and I spent one afternoon a week together last year, sometimes just the two of us, sometimes with another student with whom Demarcus is good friends. We worked on Engineering projects during this time. I did this to build a stronger relationship with Demarcus, so I intentionally chose to work on projects in which Demarcus sees himself as strong and in which he would be interested. These times served us well in that I believe, our relationship did indeed strengthen; we talked often, especially while I was driving him home after our sessions, about how things had gone during the day and how things might go tomorrow. We have only occasionally been spending this kind of time after school this year, for a variety of reasons, so it comes as quite a surprise when Demarcus asks me about it here, especially given the tenor of our day together.		