

***Dispositions and Applications for Classroom Management:
Pre-Service Teachers Build a Community of Learners***

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Abstract

This empirical study discerns whether candidates' dispositions and applications of classroom management strategies change after completing the university classroom management course and whether their views are aligned with current research on effective techniques. A voluntary, confidential, ongoing survey was offered to candidates completing the course over a period of two years at least one quarter after they completed the course. Beginning with the second year, candidates will given a short survey the first week of the course to more clearly ascertain dispositional changes from the beginning of the course to the end, as well as after they have teaching opportunities to practice their skills. The preliminary results from the first year confirm the benefits of creating effectual classroom management plans and identifying the basis for their future success as classroom teachers. This study substantiates the importance of a research-based course in teacher preparation programs with future implications for further study.

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Introduction

Classroom teachers have all witnessed or can visualize the following scenario. An enthusiastic beginning teacher has spent hours planning a wonderful, innovative lesson on state standards with engaging instructional strategies, and an aligned assessment. The teacher begins teaching the lesson, and it becomes rapidly apparent that many students in the class are disengaged, talking, or displaying inappropriate behavior. The teacher asks for attention several times and calls on students who are not paying attention without successfully regaining control of the class or the lesson. The teacher is feeling frustrated, anxious, and vulnerable. Finally, the teacher stops the lesson and invokes some type of consequence or punishment on the entire class. The students (and the teacher) are angry and resentful; what went wrong? The scenario doesn't have to end this way, but of greater significance: the teacher isn't teaching and the students aren't learning. How can we provide support for new teachers to be successful before they enter the classroom?

Theoretical Framework

Our K-12 colleagues and veteran teachers know that effective classroom management skills are an essential component for beginning teachers to become successful, yet they often lack the confidence or ability to implement them appropriately. The research shows that effective classroom management is "preventative rather than reactive"; it is important that educators model, identify, and effectively teach desired classroom behavior (Emmer & Stough, 2001). With the emphasis on improving student academic achievement linked with teacher evaluation, mastery of these strategies becomes a critical factor in teacher longevity. The significance of

supporting teachers' professional growth and practice in implementing research-based practices to improve academic and behavioral outcomes for all learners has been demonstrated (Algozzine, Wang, & Violette, 2011; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andrée, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Emmer & Stough, 2001; Greenwood & Abbot, 2001; Horner, R. H., Sugai, G., Smolkowski, K., Eber, L., Nakasato, J., Todd, A. W., & Esperanza, J., 2009, Wong & Wong, 2009). What can we do to better prepare our neophyte teachers to be effective classroom managers?

Having been classroom teachers and now teacher educators, many university professors understand how inextricably linked the salient components of classroom management are to effective instruction and student achievement. Many of us experienced the scenario described above as student teachers, convinced we were going to be dismal failures, all due to a lack of appropriate techniques. Until recently, many undergraduate programs did not offer a classroom management course; new teachers learned on their feet, by trial and error, which was a stressful and ineffective method.

University instructors can hopefully prevent our novice teachers from experiencing this agonizing situation by providing them with some “tools in their toolbox” to manage the students in their classroom without coercion and punishment, which is largely ineffective in changing student behavior. Attention and nurturing should be given to all students, and teacher praise can be a useful tool in achieving essential objectives ((Sprick, Garrison, & Howard, 1998; Marchant & Anderson, 2012). Teacher education programs should introduce classroom management strategies along with lesson planning to prospective teachers. Teacher candidates learn when creating a positive learning environment, they must construct a classroom in which learning consistently occurs (Young & West, 2008), and which is characterized by an apparent focus,

high expectations, a warm environment, and predictable routines and consequences (Latham, 1998; Sprick et al., 1998; Young & West, 2008).

Our university graduates approximately 400 teacher candidates a year. We have a quarter system requiring teacher candidates to take a senior undergraduate course on classroom management for 10 weeks. The most effective way to develop successful classroom management skills is to create one's own personalized plan using the most current and relevant information available (Charles, 2014), which our teacher candidates do. They work in groups to analyze and synthesize the development of modern discipline strategies based on major researchers in the field, view various classroom videos of teachers demonstrating techniques, and relate learning to observations of or interviews with real classroom teachers in prior field experiences.

Wong and Wong (2009) state effective teachers are good classroom managers and have positive expectations their students will be successful. Teacher candidates develop several papers based upon various interrelated topics, including their philosophy of student behavior, their personal management style, and expectations. Identification of classroom management style is important to promote more democratic, humanistic, and positive styles for interventionists (Chambers and Hardy, 2005). Teacher candidates determine their seating chart, procedures, rules, rewards, consequences, and how they will communicate with stakeholders. Training in specific key strategies can provide teachers with the resources to prevent problem behavior and manage disruptions without the use of reactive consequences. Teachers can devote more time to instructional activities rather than on reactions to problem responses that rarely contribute to positive long-term outcomes (Ducharme & Shecter, 2011). The teacher candidates also analyze how to integrate specific classroom management in developing each Task in *The Teacher*

Performance Assessment (edTPA, 2013), which is Washington's required performance-based assessment for pre-service teachers that is completed during student teaching.

The final "Classroom Management Plan" is a compilation of their personal research, theory, and practice; it is a professional document in APA format, "published" for future use during student teaching, employment interviews, and in their first teaching position. Many students comment they how extremely proud they are of their enormous effort in creating and publishing their plan.

Method

Participants

We received university Institutional Review Board approval to conduct educational research. An anonymous, online, ongoing survey was created and consisted of 27 questions to collect data over a period of two years. It was disseminated in stages to 170 senior level teacher candidates who enrolled in this course during four university quarters (one year) following restructuring the course using their university email addresses through the web-based tool Qualtrics. Data collection and analysis are ongoing and still in process. Teacher candidates' verbal and written feedback indicates their perceptions changed and the content learned was very valuable after taking the course. The anecdotal comments are wonderful, but insufficient; we were still curious specifically how their perceptions changed from before taking the course to after creating their Classroom Management Plan. Beginning with the second year, candidates will be asked during the first week of class to answer five questions in one or two sentences about the meaning and purpose of classroom management. These narrative responses will be compared to the results from the survey at the end of the second year.

Procedure

The first six questions identified the participants' demographic information: gender, age, year graduated, teaching level (EL, MS, HS), current position, and number of teaching opportunities. The remaining 21 questions were based on understanding and applying the research-based strategies learned in the course in teaching situations as well as how their disposition towards management changed as a result of the course. The responses were recorded on a Likert-like scale from 1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 10 = "Strongly Agree" (see Appendix). Responses were downloaded, quantified, and aggregated by question. The survey will remain open until June 2015 to allow all participants an opportunity to complete their coursework and student teaching before completing the survey.

In our professional education program sequence, some candidates complete their student teaching the quarter after completing this course, and some still have coursework to complete. We prefer that participants complete their student teaching before they participate in the survey; therefore, we decided to wait one or two quarters after the participants completed the course to distribute the survey instrument. Most candidates also participate in practica experiences or work as substitute teachers giving them other opportunities to work with K-12 students as well as a basis for responding to the survey questions if they choose to take it prior to student teaching.

Results

At the beginning of the course, most candidates equate classroom management with rules and punishment or disciplinary methods and have no concept of how to structure their classroom, based on verbal comments in class. Ashley stated that her students will be high school age and should know how to behave, so she shouldn't have to tell them what to do. They have not considered that management largely involves teaching students daily routines and procedures to achieve an orderly, structured learning environment. Joette stated that she participated in a mock

interview before taking this course and, when asked a question about classroom management, she had no idea how to answer it. After she completed the course, she felt comfortable describing her management plan and strategies. Pre-service teachers rank classroom and behavior management highly in what makes an effective teacher (Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James, 2002; Lee, Tice, Collins, Brown, Smith, & Fox, 2012). These “ah-ha” reflections are incredibly rewarding for course instructors.

Steven went directly from taking the course to student teaching in high school history and shared his method for knowing students:

Having to think about what we would do in these situations has definitely helped.

Obviously, I have not memorized everything I wrote (in my plan), but taking the time to think about it has been valuable. The first few days I implemented "I-messages" and proximity with a high level of success. I pass back papers in class each day, so I wanted to make it a priority to learn their names quickly. When I pass back papers, I ask students questions and associate their names with the story. Whenever I had the chance I would look at the seating chart and learn one row at a time, rhyming their name to help learn faster. It looks like I'm talking to myself as I go through the roster, but it's how I learned them. Once I feel comfortable with the name I make sure to use it as often as possible with the student.

Mary shared how her strategies were tested the second day of student teaching in middle school physical education:

I became the emergency sub on my second day of student teaching when my teacher got sick, and they couldn't find a sub. I learned A LOT being on my own so fast! In the fifth period class (the most difficult one), I had a girl "de-pants" another girl right in front of

me. The whole class stopped and looked at me to see what I would do. The "popular girl" who did the "de-pantsing" asked if I was going to tell the teacher (the day before, all the classes got the speech that I am no different than any other teacher and that I have earned that right. Any problem with me, and it will be an immediate referral, no lunch suspension). When asked if I was going to speak to the teacher when she returned, all I said was, "Of course, that is totally unacceptable." I just continued the class like nothing happened. At the end of class, the popular girl had her swarm of friends around her protecting her and glaring at me. I sent them all in to get dressed and asked her to come to my office when she was finished changing. The air was thick. I sat in the office wondering what the heck I was going to say or do about this awful incident. AHHHH, WONG CAME TO MY MIND! HA! I couldn't believe it! I had just a few minutes to reflect on his "My Action Plan" before the student arrived. When she sat down, we totally went through the scenario of what went wrong and why it was wrong and what other places her hands should be. We both agreed that her choice to keep her hands to herself would be a great choice. We opted to leave this conversation and agreement between us and start over fresh with a new agreement...MOORISH! She was relieved, and I got to be the cool teacher and write her an excused tardy slip for her next class. She and I have been cool ever since. It was soooo great to experience that! It really does work! Anyway, it made me smile, and so relieved that I took your class and had all those theorists drilled in my head. It is so important to have a game plan because students are going to test you from day one (or two, in my case!).

The teacher candidates' responses from the first group are shown in the Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 shows the first six questions, which identify the participants' demographic information:

gender, age, year graduated, teaching level (EL, MS, HS), current position (student, student teacher, teacher, not teaching), and number of teaching opportunities. The characteristics indicate a traditional university of undergraduate students majoring in education. Table 2 shows the percentage of respondents who selected a response of five or higher (on a scale of 1-10), with 10 being “Strongly Agree.”

Teacher candidates indicated the course concepts learned were useful in their overall success as a teacher, as shown in Table 2. The preliminary survey results suggest a strong positive connection between the Classroom Management course content learned and application of the strategies to classroom teaching with 90% of respondents reporting the course was an integral component of the professional education program. Ninety percent of the survey participants also reported the Wong (2009) textbook was valuable (question 16), the skills learned for the first day of class helped them set the tone for the classroom environment (question 22), and they learned how to encourage positive behaviors (question 24). More than 80% of the respondents stated they applied the philosophical foundations developed and honed as well as techniques and strategies learned throughout the course in managing classroom behavior (questions 10 & 17). About 75% of respondents stated they gained confidence (question 12), and about 66% to 75% communicate effectively as a result of the completing the classroom management course (questions 18-21).

The responses showed candidates felt some areas of the course were not as important as others in preparing them to successfully teach. Only about half of the respondents stated their perceptions about student teaching changed significantly (question 11), which wasn’t surprising because they already know the expectations. Only 60% of the respondents stated the course content gave them insight for successfully completing the *Teacher Performance Assessment*

(*edTPA*, 2013), which is completed during student teaching (question 27). The candidates completed an assignment during the course in which specific classroom management strategies learned were effectively implemented in each of the *edTPA* (2013) Tasks. As previously stated, not all respondents have completed their student teaching; therefore, not all have completed the *edTPA* (2013). We expect the positive responses to increase as candidates who completed the course in the second year show the benefits of instructors' experience teaching the course, more emphasis on field experiences, and making course modifications based on candidate feedback.

Discussion and Implications

The trend that teacher candidates are reporting shows they are effectively implementing the strategies learned in the classroom management course as they begin teaching in the classroom. Their disposition changed and their confidence increased as a result the curricular content covered, contributing to their overall success as a teacher. Teacher candidates discovered that classroom management involves building a community of learners in their classroom by bonding with and supporting their students, rather than using discipline, coercion, and punishment to achieve optimal behavior. Ongoing survey dissemination and analysis will further generalize these results. Offering candidates the pre-course survey will provide valuable insight into how their perceptions changed as a result of the aptitude they gained. The research discusses the importance of classroom management skills for beginning teachers, and many university teacher preparation programs require their teacher candidates to learn and implement management strategies as part of their foundational coursework. Classroom management expertise necessitates effective teaching and learning in K-12 classrooms, thereby increasing teacher success and personal satisfaction, which concomitantly has a significant positive impact on their students' well-being and academic achievement.

The findings are summarized in the following list:

1. Candidates use the strategies learned in the classroom management course effectively when teaching students.
2. Candidates find the resources provided useful and practical in the classroom.
3. Candidates' perceptions about how to effectively manage a classroom changed as a result of the course.
4. Candidates gained confidence in their ability to plan and implement instruction based on the context of their classroom.
5. Candidates learned skills to manage undesirable behaviors and promote positive behavior in their classroom.

The survey results suggest a strong positive connection between the Classroom Management course content learned and application of the strategies to classroom teaching (questions 7-10, 13-17, and 22-24, 26). We presented these findings at the NWATE Conference in June, 2014. Most participants were university or college instructors, some of whom offer a classroom management course, and some who don't. There was keen interest in developing and implementing cogent, research-based coursework for pre-service teachers as an integral component of teacher preparation programs. We would like to continue this research study through 2014-15 to ascertain cogent trends and strategies that can be extrapolated to undergird the basis of university classroom management courses.

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Appendices

Table 1

Classroom Management Candidates' Demographics

Question	% of Highest Response
1. Gender	71% = Female
2. Age	88% = 18-27
3. Year of Graduation	59% = 2014
4. Current or anticipated teaching grade level	59% = MS/HS
5. Current position (student, student teacher, teacher, not teaching)	56% = ST/T
6. Number of teaching opportunities	56% = 1-5

Table 2

Classroom Management Candidates' Selected Responses of Five or Higher

Question	% Agree
7. Course provided useful techniques to use.....	83
8. Strategies learned in the course are applied when instructing students.....	83
9. Course changed perception about effectively managing a classroom.....	73
10. Philosophical foundations of classroom management are applied when instructing students.....	80
11. Course helped in gaining confidence as a teacher.....	70
12. Perceptions about student teaching changed significantly.....	53
13. Course positively affected personal classroom management skills.....	80
14. Course created confidence in ability to plan/implement instruction based on learner characteristics & context of school and community.....	83
15. Charles textbook used in course was valuable.....	70
16. Wong textbook used in course was valuable.....	90
17. Philosophy of classroom management developed in course is applied.....	87
18. Course prepared how to communicate effectively with students.....	77
19. Course prepared how to communicate effectively with parents.....	67
20. Course prepared how to communicate effectively with colleagues.....	67
21. Course prepared how to communicate effectively with administrators.....	67
22. Skills learned for the "first day of class" are applied to set the tone and the classroom environment.....	90
23. Plan developed is applied for how to manage undesirable classroom behaviors.....	83
24. Plan developed is applied for how to encourage positive classroom behaviors.....	90
25. Video examples for implementing strategies helped develop personal behavior management plan.....	70

26. Course was extremely important component of overall professional education program.....90
 27. Course provided valuable insight for completing a successful edTPA.....60

Classroom Management Survey

Please check the appropriate category for each of the questions below:

1. Gender: Male, Female
2. Age: 18-22, 23-27, 28-32, 33-37, 38-45, over 45
3. Year of Anticipated Graduation: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017
4. Current Status: CWU student, Student Teacher, Certified Teacher Teaching, or Certified Teacher Not Teaching, None of These Options Apply to Me
5. Teaching Level: Pre-K, Elementary, Middle School, High School
6. Number of Teaching Opportunities or Positions: 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, more than 15, Not Applicable

For each of the following questions, please select the location on the spectrum that best represents your response. (Scale was provided under each question).

Strongly Disagree										Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

7. The classroom management course provided useful techniques for me to use.
8. I apply the strategies learned in the course when instructing students.
9. This classroom management course changed my perception about effectively managing a classroom.
10. I apply the philosophical foundations of classroom management that were learned when instructing students.
11. This classroom management course helped me gain confidence as a teacher.
12. By completing this course, my perceptions about student teaching changed significantly.
13. This course positively affected my own classroom management skills.

14. Because of the content of this course I am confident in my ability to plan and implement instruction based on learner characteristics and the context of the school and community.
15. The research-based textbook used in this course, authored by Charles, was valuable to me.
16. The research-based textbook used in this course, authored by Wong, was valuable to me.
17. I apply the philosophy of classroom management that I developed in this course.
18. Because of this course, I am better prepared to communicate effectively with students.
19. Because of this course, I am better prepared to communicate effectively with parents.
20. Because of this course, I am better prepared to communicate effectively with colleagues.
21. Because of this course, I am better prepared to communicate effectively with administrators.
22. I apply the skills learned in this course for the “first day of class” to set the tone and classroom environment.
23. I apply the plan I developed in this course for how to manage undesirable classroom behaviors.
24. I apply the plan I developed in this course for how to encourage positive classroom behaviors.
25. The video examples for implementing classroom management strategies helped me develop my own classroom behavior management plan.
26. This course was an extremely important component of the overall professional education program.
27. This course provided valuable insight for completing a successful edTPA.