

Bringing Reality to Classroom Management in Teacher Education

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Abstract

Learning how to manage a classroom effectively is a difficult task for preservice teachers. This is compounded by the lack of attention that classroom management receives in many teacher preparation programs and in the field of education in general. This article offers a rationale for the lack of attention to classroom management in teacher education, a lens through which we can discuss classroom management, and five activities and assessments we can use in teacher education courses to prepare teacher candidates in the area of classroom management. This goal is to focus the attention of preservice teachers on classroom management as a means to enhance student learning as opposed to improving student behavior.

Introduction

The most common concern of beginning teachers is classroom management (Ganser, 1999; Jacques, 2000; Ladd, 2000; McCormacke, 2001). Beginning teachers report that weak classroom management skills and disruptive students are the most significant barriers to being a good teacher (Fideler & Haskelhorn, 1999), and often teachers in their first few years of teaching blame their teacher preparation programs for failing to adequately prepare them for classroom management (Ladd, 2000; Monroe, Blackwell, & Pepper 2010). Merrett and Wheldall (1993) found that a vast majority of teachers felt that classroom management is very important, while 72% were unsatisfied with the preparation they received from their teacher education program in classroom management. This article offers a rationale for the lack of attention to classroom management in teacher education, a lens through which we can discuss classroom management, and five activities and assessments we can use in teacher education courses to prepare teacher candidates in the area of classroom management.

Lack of Focus on Classroom Management

Learning how to manage a classroom effectively is a difficult task for preservice teachers. The reasons for the difficulty lie in the lack of attention to the field by the profession, lack of formal preparation in the field by most teachers, and the lack of reality-based pedagogy in many teacher education classrooms. Beginning teachers face a reality shock in the classroom when their teacher education programs focus on the theoretical side of classroom management (Roache, & Lewis, 2011). Preservice teachers believe it would be more helpful if teacher preparation programs provided more real-life experiences on how to resolve classroom management issues (Stewart-Wells, 2000).

The teaching profession has many ways of demonstrating the relative importance of topics within education. Individual aspects of the profession have well-developed theories; a substantial body of research; common definitions, goals, and evaluations; graduate programs focused on the topic; as well as professional organizations, journals, and conferences all dedicated to the improvement of the

specific topic. As an example, the teaching profession has demonstrated and embraced the importance of early elementary teachers' ability and skills in teaching students to read. Every teacher education preservice program has multiple courses dedicated to the topic; there are multiple professional organizations at the state, regional, national, and international level to promote the advancement of reading education, such as the International Reading Association with its corresponding professional conferences and journals. There are hundreds of graduate programs in reading education, thousands of professionals dedicated to researching the best content and pedagogy in reading, and millions of dollars spent each year to improve reading instruction in schools.

In contrast, classroom management receives little attention, professional development, research, or professional discussion. Most teacher preparation programs dedicate less than one course to classroom management (Blum, 1994; Hammerness, 2011; Landau, 2001). In most programs, there is one module in one class on the topic. There is comparatively little scholarship dedicated to classroom management issues, no graduate programs, professional organizations, national conferences, or journals focused on classroom management. This lack of focus has put classroom management at the low end of priorities and pedagogical innovation.

Focus on Student Learning

To generate more professional attention on classroom management, the focus needs to change. Most teachers view classroom management strategies as tools to control student behavior. This paper asserts, however, that the teaching profession should look to classroom management as a resource to improve student learning as opposed to controlling behavior. When classroom management centers on student misbehavior, the field naturally falls behind topics and pedagogy that we perceive as directly affecting learning. We need to direct the field of classroom management and evaluate the strategies based on student learning outcomes. In other words, we must view the theories, research, strategies, rules, and procedures of classroom management in light of their effect on learning. We can best serve the students our future teachers will be teaching by learning how to teach self-directed learners to manage their own behavior and learning. This will indeed prepare our future students to lead lives of "living and learning across a lifetime."

The primary reason few teachers focus on learning in classroom management may stem from the fact that in higher education we consider classroom management "neither content knowledge, nor psychological foundations, nor pedagogy, nor pedagogical content knowledge" (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006, p. 4). None of these individual fields of teacher education acknowledge classroom management as belonging to its domain. Those in higher education that focus on content knowledge, psychological foundations, pedagogy, and pedagogical content knowledge see their field as working to improve student learning. While we view classroom management as an important topic, its focus on student behavior instead of learning leaves it relegated to a second class status that practitioners deal with but is not part of their field of study. Until we begin to evaluate classroom management based on its effect on learning, the profession will not take it seriously.

When we begin to evaluate classroom management's impact on student learning we find abundant examples of both successful and unsuccessful strategies. For example, under traditional models of management, an effective management strategy is for a teacher to stop teaching to call out a student playing with an object, causing that "misbehavior" to end. Evaluating this method in the light of student learning gives a different perspective. The student was interrupting his or her own learning by

playing with the object, but the teacher interrupted the learning of all students by stopping the lesson to deal with the situation. A more effective management strategy would be for the teacher to continue to teach, walk over to the student, without anyone else noticing, take the object, and place it in the student's desk. The goal for this strategy is to redirect the student back to the lesson in a manner that doesn't interrupt all students' learning. Using this type of lens for management brings into question many of the practices teachers currently use in education.

Classroom Management Assessments and Activities

One place to start the focus on learning for classroom management is in teacher preparation. In addition to evaluating the theory and research based on its possible effect on learning, preservice teachers also need to evaluate real-world management practices and their effect on learning (Tal, 2010). To a large extent, teacher educators are still giving teacher candidates theories and practices separated from practical experiences in classrooms. There is little to no chance to plan for, put into practice, and reflect on classroom management. We expect students to construct for themselves a personal model of classroom management with no active experiences to draw on. This is the basis of the research behind this paper. To bring the real world to the higher education classroom, we implement a philosophy of teaching and evaluating classroom management based on its effect on learning into our classroom management courses for teacher candidates. We will share five activities that we use in our education courses to assist future teachers in developing their own classroom management skills while viewing the purpose of classroom management as enhancing student learning. The five activities we will share are a movie study, microteaching, an animated video, an observation protocol, and the development of a personal management system.

Movie Study

Teacher candidates watch one of the following movies: *Freedom Writers* (Paramount Pictures, 2007) or *The Ron Clark Story* (Alberta Film Entertainment, 2006). While viewing the movie, we ask candidates to observe the classroom management and notice the impact of the teacher on student learning. After watching the movie, the teacher candidates write a reflective paper on the classroom management practices in the film. We explain that this reflection should be thoughtful, moving beyond simple statements of like or dislike for the movie. The paper should demonstrate a careful analysis and presentation of classroom management demonstrated throughout the movie and how the management impacted student learning. The scoring guide to evaluate this assessment is represented in Table 1.

Teacher candidates benefit from completing this assessment because it requires them to thoughtfully analyze intervention techniques in terms of fostering student learning and it requires them to make connections between the movie and classroom management theory. It also requires them to apply what they observe in the movie to their own future classrooms.

Table 1
Movie Study Scoring Guide

Criteria	Points Possible	Points Earned
<p>Classroom Management Philosophy</p> <p>The teacher candidate thoroughly and accurately describes the classroom management approach/philosophy of the teacher in the movie, articulating thoughtful connections between plot events and classroom management theory. The candidate references specific examples from the movie to support the connections.</p>	30	
<p>Intervention Techniques</p> <p>The candidate identifies and reflects upon intervention techniques that the teacher uses in relation to their effectiveness or ineffectiveness in fostering student learning.</p>	30	
<p>Personal Application</p> <p>The candidate discusses two or three main points that resonated with him or her as a prospective teacher, including specific reasons why and how he or she would or would not incorporate similar techniques in his or her own classroom.</p>	30	
<p>Writing</p> <p>There are no errors in grammar, spelling, syntax, or punctuation. The candidate uses professional language throughout. The paper is well-organized with subheadings and is easy to follow.</p>	10	
Total	100	

Microteaching

Teacher candidates plan a full lesson for an age appropriate K–12 classroom. Candidates come to class prepared to teach a lesson they have prepared in advance. When it is one’s turn to teach, the teacher candidate briefly explains the lesson he or she will teach, draws a management problem out of a hat (without looking at it), and leaves the room. These problems are real world situations teachers find themselves facing in the course of everyday teaching. Problems range from small interruptions such as a student asleep in class, students talking to one another during the lesson, and students having to use the restroom during class, to large interruptions such as student defiance, a fire drill, or students fighting. When the microteacher is out of hearing range, the class reads the problem and discusses who will participate in the situation. The microteacher returns and proceeds to teach the planned lesson. At some point during the lesson, the management problem occurs, causing an interruption to learning. The microteacher must handle the situation while not losing sight of the content learning. After the microteacher ends the lesson, the class discusses what happened, what management techniques the teacher candidate used, and what else he or she could have done to solve the problem. The class reviews the management demonstrated and reflects on how they think the situation and solution would affect student learning. The microteacher must reflect on the situation outside of class and report his or her findings in writing.

This activity allows teacher candidates the opportunity to engage in classroom management practices within a real-world application. These case studies in action can enable preservice teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and problems that they will need to address in their future classrooms (Tal, 2010). Planning for management, management in action, and reflection all come together in a constructivist activity that puts into practice ideas and methods that we normally only talk about.

Animated Video or Comic Strip

Teacher candidates use a web 2.0 application, such as xtranormal.com or goanimate.com, to create two animated videos. Both videos deal with the same behavior issue that impacts learning in a negative manner. The first video depicts a teacher and student interaction where the teacher employs an inappropriate classroom management approach and the interaction leads to student compliance but not learning. The second video depicts the same teacher and student interaction, but this time the teacher employs an appropriate classroom management approach and the interaction leads to student learning.

For example, a teacher candidate created two videos that focused on the issue of a student who was tardy for class. In video one, the teacher makes the common mistake of dealing with multiple behaviors simultaneously. The teacher reprimands the student for being tardy, for chewing gum, for being inattentive in class yesterday, and for violating the school dress code. This leads to an argument between the student and the teacher, but the student eventually complies, sits in her assigned seat, rolls her eyes, and displays a negative attitude throughout the learning activity. In contrast, in the second video, the teacher utilizes a more effective classroom management approach of dealing with one behavior at a time. The teacher engages the student in a conversation focused on the importance of arriving to class on time. The teacher explains how it benefits the student to be in class for the entire period, and the student admits that the reason for her tardiness was taking her little brother to school. The teacher and student work together to find a solution to the student's habitual tardiness, and the student then sits in her assigned seat and gets engaged in the learning activity at hand.

More examples of strategies that teacher candidates could depict in their videos are included in Table 2. As an alternative to creating an animated video, teacher candidates can create a comic strip using a web 2.0 application such as pixton.com. Table 3 represents the scoring guide for the animated video assessment, which one can easily adapt if assigning a comic strip.

Table 2
Animated Video Examples

Behavior Issue	Video One	Video Two
Students are inattentive during a class discussion.	The teacher requires students to raise their hands and only calls on students with raised hands.	The teacher uses a random generator to determine which students to call upon, thereby expecting all students to be ready to participate.
Students are off-task during small-group work.	The teacher constantly reminds students to get on task	The teacher gives the students one reminder and focuses them on a specific step in the task. He explains that if they continue to be off task, he will separate them and require them to continue the task independently.
Students take too long to put away materials and transition from one activity to the next.	The teacher repeatedly yells at the students to hurry up, put away their materials, and get to their seats.	The teacher sets a timer and displays it on the board, giving the students an appropriate amount of time to put their materials away and get to their assigned seats to be ready for the next learning activity.

Table 3
Animated Video Scoring Guide

Criteria	Points Possible	Points Earned
Behavior Issue The teacher candidate has selected a common classroom behavior issue for students of this age, and the focused behavior is one that will prevent student learning. Both videos focus on the same behavior issue.	30	
Classroom Management Approach The two videos offer a good contrast between an effective classroom management approach and an ineffective classroom approach. The second video demonstrates an appropriate classroom management strategy that is likely to effectively address the behavior issue and lead to student learning.	50	
Use of Technology The videos are creative and engaging. The teacher candidate makes good use of the medium to display his or her understanding of the classroom management strategy. The characters in the movie use movements, facial expressions, and body language appropriate to the story line.	20	
Total	100	

PowerPoint, is the student learning or merely engaged in compliant, nondisruptive behavior? We use the classroom management observation protocol as a starting point to engage teacher candidates in critical thinking about their assumptions regarding classroom management. Another common observation is that the identified student behaves differently in different situations for a variety of reasons. He might behave more appropriately in PE because he enjoys sports, or because he likes the PE teacher, or because the PE teacher uses more effective classroom management strategies. It is often hard to determine and often for a combination of reasons. These are important ideas for teacher candidates to consider and discuss. In general, we use this activity to engage teacher candidates in critical reflection of their own assumptions of using classroom management strategies to require students to be compliant versus attempting to focus on whether the strategies actually lead to student learning, which should be the ultimate goal of classroom management.

Personal Management System

Prepackaged systems of discipline rarely match up as well as one would like with school guidelines, student traits, teaching philosophies, personalities, and preferred styles of teaching. Therefore, to promote the most effective learning environment, teacher candidates are required to create personal systems of discipline tailored to their teaching philosophy. After evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the various management models presented throughout the semester, the teacher candidate designs a personal management system that fits his or her teaching beliefs and style and that shows promise for establishing an environment conducive to student learning. The system includes the grade level; parent newsletter; teaching philosophy; class rules; and preventive, supportive, and corrective management strategies. The scoring guide for this assessment is in Table 5.

Table 5
Scoring Guide for Personal Management System

Criteria	Points Possible	Points Earned
Grade Level The teacher candidate clearly states the intended grade level, and the management plan is appropriate for students at this level—in other words, there is an appropriate level of guidance versus independence for typical students of this age.	10	
Parent Letter The parent letter clearly communicates the important aspects of the management system. The letter has a professional appearance. There are no errors in grammar, spelling, syntax, or punctuation. The candidate uses professional language that is appropriate for the intended audience.	10	
Teaching Philosophy The teacher candidate clearly articulates his or her teaching philosophy and includes well-defined implications for the classroom management plan. The rest of the plan is aligned with this philosophy statement.	30	

Table 5 (continued)

Criteria	Points Possible	Points Earned
<p>Class Rules The candidate has clearly stated the class rules in language that is appropriate for students at this grade level. It is clear whether the rules were or will be teacher-created or student-created, and the candidate has provided an appropriate rationale for the rules.</p>	10	
<p>Management Plan The management plan effectively and clearly conveys the following and includes rationale for each type of management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventative management • Supportive management • Corrective management <p>If teachers will use rewards, consequences, and positive reinforcement methods, the menu of options are specifically stated.</p>	40	
Total	100	

We have found that implementing this assessment is most beneficial after teacher candidates have had one or two field experiences in the classroom. At this point, teacher candidates are more likely to be able to identify their beliefs and teaching style. They often have begun to experience difficulties in classroom management and realize the importance of having a well-developed approach that aligns with their beliefs. Candidates complete this assessment during a field experience that lasts for five weeks, when the teacher candidate is in the classroom for approximately 15–20 hours a week.

The teacher candidates benefit from engaging in this assessment in two significant ways. First, it requires them to examine different classroom management approaches and consider which approach most closely aligns with their teaching philosophies. Second, it serves as a starting point for a classroom management system that they can implement in their future classrooms after graduation. Teacher candidates understand that they will continue to refine their management systems as they gain experience using it and as they observe and collaborate with other more experienced teachers.

Conclusion

Asking teacher candidates to evaluate their management methods in terms of impact on student learning is an important mindshift that needs to happen. When classroom management focuses on learning, we can no longer relegate it to an add-on topic in teacher education. When we acknowledge that classroom management techniques have an impact on learning it becomes a variable that we must address in teacher preparation, educational theory, and research. Through this lens, teacher educators can no longer discuss pedagogical strategies for teaching specific lesson content without including the impact of the classroom management on student learning.

Incorporating real-world assessments in classroom management courses for preservice teachers that focus on student learning is a worthwhile endeavor for teacher educators. We have attempted to change our teacher candidates' focus on classroom management from controlling student behavior to

enhancing student learning, and the five activities we shared in this paper are examples of assessments that teacher education professors can use in their courses to encourage this shift in thinking about and assessing classroom management strategies.

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