

Differences in Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes about Classroom Management: Elementary and Secondary Perspectives

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Abstract: Classroom management as the most sought after skills in educators, and classroom management skills are viewed as markers of teacher effectiveness. In the face of larger and more diverse types of teacher-training formats, the development of classroom management skills and resources is often accomplished in courses that include diverse types of students seeking wide varieties of certifications. This study explored whether a difference in pre-service teacher perceptions and beliefs about classroom management existed based on the type of certification being pursued. Data were collected from 85 pre-service teachers enrolled in undergraduate educational psychology using the Attitudes and Beliefs on Classroom Control Inventory (ABCC). Findings indicate differences in the perspectives of pre-service teachers seeking early childhood, elementary and secondary certification regarding classroom management, and further exploration may help teacher educators effectively target and teach classroom management skills.

Keywords: teacher education, classroom management, teacher attitude, classroom management beliefs, behavioral management

1. Introduction

1.1 The Development of Pre-Service Teacher Classroom Management Skills

Classroom management and student behavior are sources of stress for pre-service and practicing teachers, as well as a major source of teacher attrition (Charles, 2008; Hong, 2012; Lewis *et al.*, 2005; McNally *et al.*, 2005; O'Neil & Stephenson, 2011; Rudolf, 2008; Stoughton, 2007). Hong (2012) highlighted classroom management as one of the greatest long-term issues, evidenced in part by school administrators evaluation of classroom management skills as an indicator of teacher effectiveness. Disconnections between what is taught in teacher education courses, what future teachers believe about teaching, and what is observed during fieldwork have been discussed in the literature (Gibbs & Powell, 2012; Hammond Stoughton, 2007).

1.2 Exploring Classroom Management and Teacher Beliefs

Although some work is ongoing regarding effective techniques for the teaching of classroom management skills to pre-service teachers such as case study and role-play (Rudolph, 2008), there has been little work exploring the attitudes and beliefs of pre-service teachers in different specialties regarding behavioral management. To further understand, it may be valuable to consider differences in the perceptions of pre-service teachers in relation to the level of certification they are pursuing. Many beginning teacher education classes are made up of students seeking both elementary and secondary certificates, and by exploring differences in the preconceptions, beliefs, and concerns of these two groups, teacher educators may more effectively prepare students to be successful in managing their classrooms in the future (Kasten & Buckley-Van Hoek, 2008; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2011). By exploring the differences in attitudes and perceptions about classroom

management, pre-service teachers may be better prepared for future positions (Hammond Stoughton, 2007).

1.3 Classroom Management Scholarship

The literature highlights the importance of the ability to effectively manage a classroom in both teacher effectiveness and administrative evaluation (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992). Lewis *et al.* (2005) concluded administrative attention to classroom management makes it leading cause of teacher stress, burnout, and replacement. The importance of the skill and ability to manage a classroom is not limited to the United States, but is shared globally. A study surveying practicing teachers in Australia, Israel, and China (Lewis *et al.*, 2005) found classroom and behavioral management to be either a moderate or major concern of teachers and administrators of all levels, while Chan's 1998 study found behavioral management was rated as a significant cause of stress among 400 participating teachers in Hong Kong. The skills involved in managing a classroom successfully clearly impact teacher satisfaction, teacher performance, and administrative evaluation of teacher effectiveness.

The administrative and practical priorities placed on classroom management are clear; however, the ability to manage a classroom effectively is also critical to the professional development and growth of the teacher. The ability to manage a classroom in an effective manner has been found to impact teacher development of professional identity, teaching style, and perceived effectiveness (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Lewis *et al.*, 2005; McNally *et al.*, 2005). It becomes important, then to consider the ways in which pre-service and new teachers develop skills to manage classrooms. Pre-service teacher beliefs concerning identification of behavior as appropriate or inappropriate and how behavior can be managed impact the development of teacher habits, identity, and planning patterns (McNally *et al.*, 2005). Pre-service and novice teachers appreciate effective classroom and behavioral management skills as necessary to their performance, effectiveness and professional development (Anderson, 2004), yet report these skills as difficult to acquire or develop (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000).

1.2 Research Questions and Design

The aim of this research is to explore possible differences in beliefs of pre-service teachers at 3 levels of certification to uncover possible differences in underlying beliefs and schemas that impact the development of classroom management skills and ultimately teacher effectiveness. Accordingly, the study explores the following questions:

- 1) Is there a significant relationship between the reported beliefs regarding classroom management and the level of certification?
- 2) Do the beliefs about classroom management differ significantly according to gender?

The research design of this study facilitates the exploration of these questions through the use of a convenience sample of pre-service teachers. Although the convenience sampling and small sample create limitations, it will allow for an initial exploration of the questions in order to indicate possible future focus and design.

2. Method

In order to explore possible differences in beliefs about classroom management by level of certification pursued and gender, 85 students enrolled in an educational psychology course completed the Revised Attitudes and Beliefs on Classroom Management Control Inventory (ABCC-R). Because educational psychology is taken by all pre-service teachers, course content is uniform across all levels certification sought by students. Students participating in this study were pursuing

certification in early childhood, elementary and secondary education. By exploring differences in perceptions by certification level and gender, it may be possible to more effectively address and develop classroom management skills and abilities in pre-service teacher education coursework.

2.1 Participants Characteristics

The study group consisted of 85 students enrolled in a 300 level educational psychology course at the regional campus of a large state university in the United States. Of the 85 students, 11 were male and 74 were female; this is not an uncommon ratio in teacher preparation programs in the United States. Students ranged in age from 20 to 42, and self-identified as African-American, Latina, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian.

2.2 Sampling Procedure

This study seeks to explore if pre-service teachers seeking different levels of certification report different attitudes regarding classroom management through the convenience sampling of 3 educational psychology classes. Participants received no payment or academic credit for participation, and the study was ruled as exempt by campus IRB. Students completed paper copies of the surveys in 15 minutes immediately preceding the start of chapter materials focused on behavioral management and teaching, and signed informed consent documents. No student responses were excluded or removed from the convenience sample. Students were informed of their right to decline to participate or to remove submitted responses at a later date. Student responses were confidential and coded using university identification numbers.

2.3 Measures and Instrumentation

The 20 item ABCC-R presents statements regarding beliefs about classroom and behavioral management using two constructs: instructional management and people management (Cronbach's $\alpha > .70$) (Martin *et al.*, 2006). The inventory uses a four point Likert scale confirmed by the work of Martin, Yin and Mayall in which "describes me very well" scores 4, "describes me usually" = 3, "describes me somewhat" = 2, "describes me not at all" = 1. Scoring for 10 of the 20 items was reversed resulting in a high subscale scores indicating a more controlling, interventionist attitude and a lower score indicating less controlling beliefs regarding classroom management (Martin *et al.*, 2006). Items targeting instructional management include belief statements regarding instructional oversight, routine, rules and adherence to behavioral standards. Items focused on people management include statements about students, attitudes regarding relationships, the importance of student initiative and the importance of independence in the classroom. Interventionalist management styles are consistent with high emphasis on instructional management and inversely with behavioral management (Martin *et al.*, 2006). The level of teacher support for student freedom and control of learning is inversely associated with the interventionist approach.

3. Results

This study explored the beliefs of 85 pre-service teachers enrolled in educational psychology in order to investigate differences in the classroom management beliefs of early childhood, elementary and secondary education majors.

3.1 Recruitment

Because this exploration used a convenience sample of student enrolled in educational psychology courses, all participants enrolled in the course and attending the day of administration completed the ABCC-R. Those students absent did not complete the survey. No experimental interventions were

used in this exploratory study, and the ABCC-R was administered before chapter materials on behavioral management were presented.

3.2 Statistical and Data Analysis

Data collected from the completed inventory was transferred to SPSS. SPSS was used for all analysis including descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, Pearson product correlation, and ANOVA.

A *t* test was run on the scale scores of each of the subscales of the ABCC-R to determine if the responses indicate a difference in the classroom management styles of pre-service teacher by certification area or gender. Results of a univariate F test found that there was a not a significant difference between males and females in scores relating to the two constructs ($F(1, 85) = 1.402$, $p > .240$) and ($F(1, 85) = .1357$, $p > .247$) respectively). The difference, however, may be impacted by the distribution of males within the certification areas: no males were early childhood majors, 6 were elementary education majors, and 5 were secondary education majors.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for subscales

	Factor 1 Instructional Management (Interventionist)		Factor 2 Behavioral Management (Interactionist)		N
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Total	2.80	.45	2.25	.55	85
Certification Level					
Early Childhood	2.54	.46	2.58	.62	14
Elementary	2.82	.43	2.25	.54	46
Secondary	2.89	.45	2.08	.47	25
Gender					
Male	2.95	.44	2.07	.32	11
Female	2.77	.45	2.28	.57	74

Table 1 displays the means and standard deviations of the ABCC-R subscales for the total sample, gender and certification area. Male responses were more heavily interventionist than females in instructional management, and their means were higher than females for interventionist items and lower for interactionist factors, although not statistically significant. There was a positive correlation between both instructional and behavioral management scales and certification area [$r=0.236$, $n=85$, $p=0.236$] and [$r=-.284$, $n=85$, $p=0.009$] respectively. Negative correlation in the behavioral management scale indicates that the “higher” the grade level certified, the less likely responses were to be interventionist or behavioral. Pre-service teachers with early childhood majors tended to be more interactionists and less interventionist in responses, and have higher behavioral management scores. It is interesting to note that on the instructional management scale, elementary majors tended to be more similar to secondary peers, while in behavioral issues, they tended in responses to be more similar to early childhood majors.

3.3 Ancillary Analyses

No ancillary analyses were performed.

3.4 Participant Flow

Because this study was a convenience sample, all participants moved through the study in the same two-day period during the semester on the day their class began the chapter on behavioral management.

3.5 Intervention or Manipulation Fidelity

This study did not use interventions or experimental manipulations.

3.6 Baseline Data

This study did not use interventions or experimental manipulations, and did not record baseline data. The characteristic required for participation was enrollment in 1 of 3 sections of an educational psychology course. No additional clinical or demographic characteristics other than gender, age, race/ethnicity and certification level were obtained or used.

3.6.1 Adverse Events

No adverse events occurred during the course of the study or survey administration.

4. Discussion

Understanding the attitudes and beliefs held by pre-service teachers could assist in the better design and presentation of classroom management principles and skills, and facilitate the construction of targeted scenarios and simulations (Engle & Faux, 2006; Rudolph, 2008). The results of study indicate that the certification level of pre-service teachers is indicative of specific tendencies and beliefs regarding classroom and behavioral management. The findings of this study support and expand the findings of Martin *et al.* (2006) documenting a relationship between years of experience and attitude toward classroom management, and highlighting that within pre-service teachers there are also differences in attitudes regarding classroom management. The findings of this study have implications regarding the way in which classroom management is taught, how pre-conceptions and attitudes regarding behavioral management might be best presented in classrooms with diverse participation.

Responses to the behavioral management items (interactionist) indicate pre-service teacher beliefs about students as people and the important characteristics of the teacher–student relationship (Martin *et al.*, 2006). Study results indicate that early childhood majors place a higher value on the teacher–student relationship and a greater belief in the importance of open discussions. In addition, these findings pose questions that build on Rosas and West’s (2009) work documenting the need determine differences in beliefs before concluding what skills might be taught to improve outcome and ability in teachers. In their responses, pre-service teachers seeking secondary certification indicated a preference for a more distant relationship between teachers and students and for more direct and authoritative communication. It is interesting to note that on the instructional management scale, elementary majors tended to be more similar to secondary peers and the “experienced” teachers of Martin *et al.* (2006), while in behavioral issues, they tended in responses to be more similar to early childhood majors. This may indicate that the secondary and early childhood groups have more polarized beliefs, and that perhaps elementary education majors develop dual perspectives and adopt techniques and attitudes that allow for classroom management “code-switching” between the two approaches.

Elementary and secondary education majors showed similar attitudes toward the instructional management subscale of classroom management, indicating pre-service teachers in these two certification areas do not have significantly different reported beliefs and attitudes in relation to these constructs. Interestingly, though, secondary education majors were found to be more interventionist in their responses, while elementary education majors were interactionist in the subscale of people management. The behavioral management scores yielded a significant negative correlation with instructional management, indicating that elementary education majors may view the classroom as controlled with the help of students, while the responses of secondary education majors indicate they expect full control in the classroom.

The responses of early childhood majors did show statistically significant differences from those of the elementary and secondary education majors in both instructional and behavioral constructs. Early childhood education majors responded with an interactionist perspective in the construct of people management, and showed greater flexibility in the management of instruction. Responses indicate that the early childhood education majors emphasized greater acceptance of the role of the student in learning, and in the need for flexibility and adaptation in the presentation and routine of the classroom.

4.1 Limitations and Recommendations

This study's findings are limited by the small number of participants, focused geographical setting, as well as by the distribution of students' certification areas. Future research should attempt to develop a stratified sample that represents certification area and gender. The study's results are also difficult to generalize, as the university setting is that of a four-year metropolitan public university. Future studies might consider sampling pre-service teachers at a variety of institutions and geographic settings. In addition, it is important to note that the ABCC-R is a self-report instrument that attempts to measure teachers' attitudes and beliefs. The validity of the instrument would be greatly enhanced by including observational data in a practicum setting, or responses to case-study scenarios.

Classroom and behavioral management skills are critical to teacher effectiveness, yet often prove to be a stumbling block for student teachers as well as teachers early in their careers (Charles, 2008; Hong, 2012). This study hopes to begin a dialogue regarding the differences in the assumptions of students regarding classroom management in light of their certification area in order to improve the way in which teacher educators approach discreetly teaching classroom and behavioral management. Appreciating differences in the assumptions and beliefs of these two groups may allow the presentation of materials, activities and theory to address pre-conceived notions, and to create prompts and class discussion questions that assist students in developing tools with which to approach and manage classrooms and behaviors.

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