

RUNNING HEAD: Perceived Classroom Management Needs

Perceived Classroom Management Needs of Pre-Service Teachers

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Purpose

Classroom management is a crucial issue in teacher education; however, many misconceptions about it exist among pre-service teachers (Stoughton, 2006). The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) defines *classroom management* as a ...gestalt combining several teacher traits, including reflection, skill in problem-solving, skill in managing student behavior, and the ability to provide engaging instruction (ASCD, n.d.)

However, many pre-service teachers' concerns regarding classroom management are limited to classroom discipline or dealing with student behavior (McNally et al, 2005). A disconnect exists between pre-service teachers' expectations concerning classroom management course content and the reality of teaching in an elementary school. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceived needs of pre-service teachers in a classroom management course for elementary education majors at a Midwestern university.

Research Questions

Research questions guiding the inquiry were:

1. What do pre-service teachers perceive as their needs regarding classroom management?
2. In what manner and to what extent are these needs related to published textbooks and research on classroom management?

These questions stem from the apparent disconnect between the class framework, textbook selection, and students' questions posed during two different semesters this class was taught.

Theoretical Framework

The transition from the college classroom to the real-life classroom presents a challenge for novice teachers (Mueller, 2006; Thibodeau & Hillman, 2003; Stoughton, 2006). A dissonance between theory and practice often exists. This seems to be especially evident in the area of classroom management (Stoughton). Silvestri (2001) noted that when classroom management courses were taught earlier in teacher education programs there was a better connection between theory and practice. This also alleviated much of the anxiety that pre-service teachers felt going into field experiences. Mueller (2006) agreed and suggested that field experiences become less intimidating when social foundations in education were incorporated into theoretical classes allowing students to connect the theory to their own contexts.

Pre-service teachers often view the term 'classroom management' as synonymous with student behavior management, in part because administrators frequently perceive good teachers as those who can control unruly students (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992). This is especially true for pre-service teachers who have not completed a classroom management course (Stoughton, 2006). Stoughton examined pre-service teachers' perceptions of what they learn in college and what they see in classrooms during their field experiences and found that many made changes to existing practices based on their observations. Brouwer and Korthagen (2005) suggested that novice teachers tend to see their cooperating teachers as more realistic role models than their instructors in college, crediting them as having real knowledge about teaching.

This dissonance between theory and practice and the limited view of classroom management is an area of recent interest to educational researchers (Thibodeau & Hillman, 2003; Silvestri, 2001; Stoughton, 2006). Pre-service teachers need to be taught theory that is pertinent to the real-world and not be left to follow the routines of their mentor teachers without reflecting on research-based, effective practices (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005). In the context of these

issues, this study sought to determine the perceived needs of pre-service teachers concerning classroom management and to compare these needs with what is actually taught, written about in textbooks, and used in college classrooms.

Methods

Participants

All students enrolled in a classroom management course at a Midwestern university during the fall 2007 ($n=92$) and spring 2008 ($n=88$) semesters comprised our sample. In fall 2007, 81 students were female and 11 were male. In spring 2008, 74 students were female and 14 were male. The majority of students in the fall semester were seniors who would be student-teaching in the spring of the following year. Students in the spring semester were a combination of juniors and seniors who would either student-teach in the fall of that year or the following spring. IRB review determined that informed consent was not required to gather these data, as the assignment collected was an extant requirement of the course and not solely for the purpose of this research.

Data Sources

Student questions. During each semester, students responded to an assignment in which they were asked to pose questions to a guest lecturer. Specifically, they were asked to write three questions for the upcoming lecturer to answer, and these questions were collected via WebCT/BlackBoard. In all students posed 659 questions in fall 2007 and 1,013 in spring 2008 thus providing a total of 1,672 questions from 180 students. The questions were shared so prospective lecturers could best meet the needs of the students. The questions were not graded, and therefore they should accurately reflect students' concerns about classroom management. The topics of lectures for both semesters addressed issues of concern for beginning teachers related to classroom management and are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 *Lecture topics for each semester:*

Lecture Topic	Speaker	Lecture Topic	Speaker
Differentiation	Course Instructor	Differentiation	Course Instructor
Student-Based Strategies	Content Expert	Student-Based Strategies	Content Expert
Praise Effort	Course Instructor	Praise Effort and Love & Logic	Course Instructor
Motivation	Content Expert	Motivation	Content Expert
Positive Discipline	Veteran, practicing teacher	Problem Behaviors and Discipline	Veteran, practicing teacher
A Superintendent's Perspective	Retired Superintendent	A Superintendent's Perspective	Retired Superintendent
Getting a Job	Elementary school principal	Getting a job	Elementary school principal
Student Teaching	Student teachers	Student Teaching	Student teachers
Parent Communications	Parent of a school-aged child	Teacher Panel (from the inside)	Practicing teachers
Classroom Management	Course instructor	The Essence of Math	Course instructor
First Year Teacher Concerns	First-year teacher	First Year Teacher Concerns	First-year teacher
Special Education	Special education case manager	Student Panel	Elementary school students

Textbooks. The content of two textbooks, (Burden, 2006; Henley, 2006) was evaluated and compared with the topics addressed in the course and questions posed by students during the course. The table of contents was analyzed for general topics contained in the text and the index was consulted for inclusion of any specific topics posed by students that were not found in the table of contents.

Analytical Framework

Questions. This study used a reality-testing framework (Patton, 2002) to investigate what occurs in classroom management courses for pre-service teachers. Analyses of questions were performed using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998). The constant comparative method stems from grounded theory. Data that are collected are coded as the researcher reads through the transcripts or data sources (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These codes are extracted from the text and are not determined beforehand. Initial codes are then compared for similarity and collapsed into concepts to make them more workable. Themes are then formed from these concepts to form the basis for creating a theory (Glaser & Strauss; Merriam, 1988).

Textbooks. Content Analysis was used to investigate the presence of concepts related to the course outline and questions posed by students. In content analysis, researchers investigate the content and attempt to quantify and analyze the meaning associated with text content. These analyses provide the framework for researchers to deduce information regarding the intent of the author and the anticipated audience (Patton, 2002). To conduct the analysis, content was broken down into themes and then examined using conceptual analysis. This was done by coding for the existence of themes relevant to this inquiry. A thesaurus was used to ensure that all possible

synonyms were investigated for the specific themes coded. Analysis was then completed based on these themes (Busch et al., 2005).

Data Analysis

Questions posed by students for lecturers were analyzed using the constant comparative method of qualitative data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998). We first examined the questions posed for each lecture looking for important themes and compared those with themes found in questions posed about other lectures. Based on review of these data, we generated four themes. All the researchers have been either teaching assistants or the instructor in the course, so strategies were used to minimize biases in the analyses. The main strategy used to deal with bias involved asking external reviewers in a graduate level qualitative research seminar to assist in the analysis as well as examining our own perceptivity to the data. One of the authors was in the qualitative research seminar and data from six different lectures were analyzed by that author and three classmates. The author and the three classmates found on the four themes in the lectures they analyzed. Additionally, the authors analyzed all the questions (12 lectures from the fall of 2007 semester and 11 lectures from the spring of 2008 semester) again to look for other themes, but no other themes were found.

Validity of Data Analysis

This study used several different methods to ensure credibility and transferability of results. Four different researchers individually coded the student questions and then compared their results as a group. The questions used for this first analysis had as guest lecturers a first year teacher, two students (one 3rd and one 4th grade student), and a panel of four student teachers. Main themes found were then collapsed into larger themes for parsimony and to reduce overlap among themes. The second round of analysis was done by two researchers following the same format. Since the initial analysis was done in an inductive manner in order to define themes the second phase was conducted initially using these themes in an inductive manner. Subsequent passes through the data were inductive again in order to assess whether additional themes were present in the data that were not identified in the initial analysis.

Textbook analysis was completed by the first two authors using content analysis. Discrepancies and issues were discussed and resolved together and then themes re-stated in order to gain consensus.

Results and Discussion

Textbook Frameworks

Themes

Data analysis yielded four themes that describe the primary needs perceived by the pre-service teachers in this sample:

1. learning to deal with discipline
2. meeting students' needs
3. dealing with a feeling of uncertainty towards 'real' teaching experiences (transition from pre-service to student-teacher and then to first-year of teaching)
4. positive relationships (with parents, teachers, students, staff, and administration)

Main Themes

Learning to deal with discipline emerged as one of the major concerns of pre-service teachers enrolled in this course. Discipline appeared as a theme in lectures dealing with other topics. Some of the terms related to discipline we looked for in the students' questions were: discipline, behavior, misbehavior, trouble-students, rules, and disruption. Students in our sample

believed classroom management refers to discipline as evidenced by the questions students raised in different lectures.

Is there a certain strategy that you've found to be helpful when dealing with problem-causing students? (First-year teacher concerns, spring 2008)

When using a proactive strategy, how do you respond to repeat repeat discipline issues? (Classroom Management lecture, fall 2007)

How do you personally balance praising effort with regular discipline? (Praise Effort lecture, fall 2007)

How can you use motivation in the classroom in regards to classroom discipline? (Motivation lecture, fall 2007)

What is one suggestion you have for someone in regards to discipline in the classroom? (First-year Teacher lecture, spring 2008)

Which theory of discipline works well for teaching mathematics? (The Essence of Math lecture, spring 2008)

Discipline was a frequent topic, which indicates that participants were concerned about this issue. Two lectures dealt directly with the topic of discipline and elicited a total of 129 questions (50 and 79 respectively). *Words* related to discipline appeared in different lectures on other topics such as: classroom management ($n = 15$); parent communication ($n = 4$); student teachers ($n = 1$); mathematics ($n = 5$); motivation ($n = 2$); praising effort ($n = 5$); teacher panel ($n = 8$); superintendent ($n = 1$); student panel ($n = 1$); and principal ($n = 4$). This resulted in a total of 175 question relating to discipline. Another important topic was the need for strategies that work for other teachers. This revealed an important need of pre-service teachers: the preference for being given answers and strategies that are ready-to-use. However, teachers must learn to personalize strategies for their own classrooms.

Meeting students' needs emerged as important to the students as evidenced by their questions, however, while it was briefly mentioned, it was not a prominent theme across all lectures. Students raised questions for lectures concerning differentiation, which is one of the ways teachers can meet different students' academic needs. Some examples are:

What three things can I as a teacher do to make learning easier for you in this class? (Student Panel, spring 2008)

What are some ways that you differentiate instructions for your students? (Teacher Panel, spring 2008)

What kind of professional development do you have for teachers with respect to differentiation? (A Superintendent's perspective, spring 2008)

How hard is it to differentiate a lesson for each an every student? (Differentiation, fall 2007)

Differentiation appeared as a theme throughout all sets of questions sent by participants. This may be due to the fact that the state department of education recently passed legislation mandating gifted education programming and differentiation has become somewhat of a buzz-

word. At least two lectures each semester dealt with differentiation and one major assignment involved writing a differentiated lesson plan. This might have influenced students' questions.

It is important that pre-service teachers have access to information about meeting the needs of different students before entering the classroom. Classroom management textbooks should cover such topics, but this was not the case in those we analyzed. Inconsistencies such as this could generate more uncertainties than answers (Mueller, 2006). Our third theme is related to uncertainty.

Dealing with a feeling of uncertainty towards 'real' teaching experiences was a recurrent theme in the questions and it included both feelings towards student-teaching and about the first year of teaching. Students' questions dealt mostly with things they need to do to have a smooth transition from pre-service to student-teacher and then to first-year of teaching. We report on these two different steps to real teaching experiences separately.

Uncertainty towards student-teaching was a prevalent theme in questions posed. Students were apprehensive about facing their first real-world teaching experience during student-teaching. That may be partly due to how students in previous cohorts have described their experiences, but also reflects a disconnect between teacher education curricula and practice. The idea that people who have had this experience can give good advice was a recurrent theme, but it also showed that students do not know what to expect from student-teaching. Although students in this teacher preparation program are required to have field experiences from the beginning of their college career, they perceive student teaching as the first time in which they will need to be completely in charge of a classroom (and most of the times that is the case). For the students in this study, student-teaching seems to be an intimidating experience that they will all have to endure before becoming teachers. There seems to be very little middle ground in their perceptions of the experience. Some examples of those feelings of uncertainty are found in the questions below:

Overall, would you consider your student teaching experience to be a positive or negative one? (Student-teaching, spring 2008)

What is the best way to prepare for student teaching?(First-year teacher concerns, spring 2008)

First-year teaching was another concern for the students. These uncertainties are related to avoiding or preventing major problems and how to improve once they have their own class.

Have you been able to see any improvement in your weaknesses since you've started teaching? (First-year teacher concerns, spring 2008)

How can I prevent becoming overstressed during the school year? (First-year teacher concerns, spring 2008)

Is it normal to make lesson plans for the first year and then reuse them for the following years? (Differentiation, spring 2008)

The 'first-year teacher' lectures have been given by competent, successful teachers who offer hope that, while time-consuming, teaching is a rewarding endeavor. We tried to include issues related to those two experiences in our discussions and lectures, as these topics seem to be conspicuously missing from formal textbooks. Pre-service teachers should understand that education goes beyond teaching students and that social context is also important. Mueller

(2006) contended that this social aspect of education, when incorporated into the college classroom offers students the opportunity to reflect on how their learning fits into the context of the education milieu (students, parents, and colleagues) thus giving students a more realistic picture of the profession.

Once again, questions about student-teaching and the first-year in the profession were included in different lectures and that signals that these pre-service teachers are concerned about these two experiences and want to learn about all aspects to have a smoother transition from college to teaching. One way that transition can become smoother is by learning about the different people teachers have to work with on a day-to-day basis.

Learning to establish positive relationships with school staff, students, and parents was another recurrent theme across most lectures. However, *positive relationships with parents, students, and school staff* are not addressed in the texts analyzed. Only student-teacher relationships were covered. Our students were concerned with developing positive relationships with more experienced teachers, administrators, other staff members, and parents.

Did you find it easy to talk to your cooperating teacher when you were struggling? (Student teaching, spring 2008)

What is the biggest challenge you have encountered concerning parents and their confidence in you as a teacher? (First-year teacher concerns, spring 2008)

What do you think is the most important thing the teacher should know about you and other students? (Student Panel, spring 2008)

These questions show that participants understood the importance of developing and maintaining positive relationships with people related to their career. One of the most frequent themes in the questions was the relationship teachers have with their students' parents as well as being accepted by students, teachers, and school staff.

Table 2. *Presence of questions relating to the four themes found*

Lecture Topics	Theme 1 Discipline	Theme 2 Students' needs	Theme 3 Transition	Theme 4 Relationships
Differentiation		X	X	X
Student-Based Strategies		X	X	X
Praise Effort	X	X	X	X
Motivation	X	X		X
Positive Discipline	X	X		X
A Superintendent's Perspective	X	X	X	X
Getting a Job	X		X	X
Student Teaching	X		X	X
Parent Communications	X		X	X
Classroom Management	X	X	X	X
Special Education	X	X	X	X
Praise Effort and Love & Logic	X	X		X
Problem Behaviors and Discipline	X	X	X	X
Teacher Panel (from the inside)	X	X	X	X
The Essence of Math	X	X	X	
First Year Teacher Concerns	X	X	X	X
Student Panel	X	X		X

We also analyzed the content of two textbooks (Burden, 2006; Henley, 2006) using these four themes as guidelines. We tried to see how the two textbooks related to the main themes found in the students' questions.

Burden (2006). The Burden text has a specific emphasis on discipline, but it doesn't necessarily include *learning to deal with discipline* as his focus is more on different theories of discipline. This book devotes its opening chapter to *Understanding management and discipline in the classroom* with the second chapter defining fourteen different theories of discipline for use in the classroom. This discussion takes a total of 36 pages in the text with a two page discussion of *your management philosophy and your management plan* as a summary. There is very little in terms of information about how to build a behavior plan and what procedures should be followed. However, this book is full of examples of the difficulties students in regular classrooms may face and disorders they may have that might influence their behavior and school work. As a reference manual in this area, Burden offers a good resource. However, the questions asked by the pre-service teachers were mostly related to practical applications:

I'm at a school where teachers are not allowed to raise their voices to students.
How can I discipline my students without yelling at them? (Positive Discipline, fall 2007)

What do you do with the child that flat out defies you? (Positive Discipline, fall 2007)

How should we deal with kids who always cause trouble when you feel like you are saying their name every other word? (Classroom Management, fall 2007)

If there is a student with bad behavior problems and they do something against school policies, is it appropriate to always inform the parent and principle right after the incidence? Or is it just appropriate to tell the parents that their child had recess taken away because he was not following the rules and leave out the details? (First-year Teacher Concerns, spring 2008)

Burden includes information about *meeting students' needs*, but that information is among other topics included in the 26 pages of information on planning and conducting instruction. He offers advice on making decisions that will influence student behavior, managing seatwork, the degree of structure in lessons, and managing student work. However, he provides only 2 pages that mention differentiation and meeting the need of students. There is no discussion about how to differentiate a lesson or about the various types of differentiation, which is an area of concern and source of difficulty for the pre-service teachers in the course. We found that students in this class have completed one differentiated lesson in their four years of classes and when given the opportunity to revise this lesson as part of the differentiation assignment in this class they often re-wrote the entire lesson. There were questions about how to handle differentiation in the classroom in different lectures, including The Essence of Math, Student-based Strategies, and A Superintendent's Perspective, and Motivation, which shows how important that topic is to our participants, . However, Burden does not offer information about handling grouping in the diverse classroom he describes. Some of the students' questions about differentiation included:

How hard is it to differentiate a lesson for each and every student? (Differentiation, fall 2007)

How can we develop modifications to assignments and curricula without making the student feel dumb or his/her classmates think it is unfair? (Differentiation, fall 2007)

What are some other major examples of differentiation that are used in a classroom? (Differentiation, spring 2008)

Have you ever had a parent ask you NOT to differentiate their student's work to a lower level than the other students in the classroom? (Student-based Strategies, spring 2008)

Burden (2006) provides no information regarding the transition from pre-service teachers to real teaching experiences or the student-teaching process. There is also no discussion about how to find a teaching job or what potential employers are seeking in a new teacher. While many of these issues are peculiar to the institution a student attends there are several themes that can be covered in general that may prepare a student for these transitions.

Finally, Burden (2006) does offer some advice to teachers about *building positive relationships with parents*. However, the discussion regarding relationships with students is more geared towards controlling behavior, not on the proactive, positive relationship. There is no discussion about how to build relationships with colleagues and administrators; a theme that was present in different lectures as evidenced by the following questions:

What is the one thing that first year teachers do that might bother their fellow teachers or their cooperating teachers? (Getting a Job, spring 2008)

What if I don't get along with my cooperating teacher? (Student-teaching, fall 2007)

When is it appropriate to bring a discipline problem to the principal? (Positive Discipline, fall 2007)

Henley (2006). This text was adopted for the class under investigation after the use of the Burden text. This book comes closer to the themes described here, but there are still gaps that are not covered in the text. The main theme of Henley's text is one of building a classroom climate in which to situate the process of management, learning, and discipline and divides the text into three parts: community, prevention, and positive behavioral supports. This is a departure from the discipline-focus of Burden (2006). Henley devotes 92 pages to *community*. This section defines proactive classroom management, building the classroom community to empower students, and developing positive teacher-student relationships through the use of proactive strategies such as connecting with students' lives outside of school, ensuring gender equity, and understanding cultural diversity.

Dealing with student discipline is covered in part three of the book where several strategies for understanding the etiology of behaviors are discussed such as functional behavior assessment. However, there is no direct discussion anywhere in the book of how to build your own philosophy of discipline or what to include in a discipline policy or behavior plan.

Henley (2006) devotes the final chapter to being a reflective teacher. He suggests that teachers take the time to assess their own perceptivity to behaviors and to the teaching that occurs in their classrooms. He provides some practical strategies about how to externalize students' negative behaviors in order to separate the behavior from self. This is an important concept for pre-service teachers to understand, but still falls short of offering practical advice on how to deal with these issues on a day-to-day basis.

Although Henley includes suggestions that could be related to meeting the students' academic needs, this textbook does not include a discussion about how to differentiate instruction in classrooms and its purpose seems to keep the discussion at a more philosophical level that could be more appropriate for teachers who have experience and should be able to change their practice based on his suggestions. Based on the rather basic and practice-oriented nature of the questions most of the students posed, we can see that Henley does not provide most of the answers students would like to have before they have real teaching experiences.

Henley (2006) limits discussion about interactions with parents, staff, and administrators to one page. Furthermore, he does not offer advice about how to find a job or the transition to professional life. These two issues were prevalent in the questions asked by students throughout both semesters of data gathering.

Discussion

Our analysis showed how complex classroom management can be and that the textbooks analyzed do not deal with all the issues about which students perceive they need to know. One of our goals in this course is to address most of the issues related to establishing effective learning environments and guide students through the development of their own classroom-management style and philosophy. The questions show that most students do not have the necessary knowledge to face real teaching experiences based on the amount of fairly general questions they asked. For example, an often question was "What is...", which indicates that students were not familiar with some of the most basic concepts in teaching, such as differentiation or the adequate use of praise in classrooms. Another issue is their need for right answers when learning about teaching is usually a never-ending process and most questions could have different answers for different teachers in different classrooms. This understanding is crucial in the development of reflective practitioners. If pre-service teachers understand that although they have uncertainties

about their future jobs, the only way they will improve is by experiencing, making mistakes, and not giving up then they have learned a valuable lesson.

We concluded that the textbooks used in this class did not address all the topics students perceived they needed to know. This is a problem and further supports this notion of the disconnect between the content of textbooks and students perceived knowledge-needs (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005). Based on these data, instructors supplemented required textbooks with current literature directly related to what students perceived they needed to learn in the course and was more pertinent to students' contexts.

We acknowledge that there is no complete and/or perfect classroom management textbook. However, given the disconnect we found in just two semesters' worth of student questions and two classroom management texts there is definitely cause for concern. In fact, a recent study of teacher preparation programs published in February 2009 provides pertinent information about problems in teacher education, but does not make recommendations related to how teachers should be prepared (Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., 2009). This research study provides information that should be used to inform the content contained in textbooks used to prepare teachers to compete in an ever-increasingly competitive world.

One of our main goals with this study was to improve the course and make it more pertinent to pre-service teachers who are about to enter the classroom. The findings might also interest publishing companies and other teacher educators in charge of classroom management courses. These data can help improve the quality of classroom management courses by considering what needs pre-service teachers perceive they have and what the literature shows is important to teach those about to enter the teaching profession.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study is not without limitations, and some of them are related to the use of a qualitative design. A convenience sample of students in a classroom management course taught by the authors was used and that may be a source of bias. The class in which the questions were collected is taught by teaching assistants and professors in the gifted education department and, thus, too much emphasis may be placed on issues related to gifted students. Except for some of the more general lectures, such as the ones about classroom management, most of the lecture topics are chosen by the instructors and that gives students little say on the questions they want to ask. The fact that not all students could see the value of sending questions to the forthcoming lecturers could be another limitation. Some students did not appear to take the assignment of sending questions for the lecturers seriously and sent any questions they had in mind. One of the most common question was "What is...?" and that can be a sign that students did not really know what things such as differentiation or student-based strategies were or that they didn't want to think of legitimate questions to ask the lecturers. It might have been more beneficial to have asked each student to write at least one quality question about each lecture topic instead of three questions that were not always informative.

Future studies could use different sampling strategies or surveys that could be distributed to all education students at different programs or institutions. That could give participants more freedom to ask whatever questions they felt are pertinent to classroom management instead of simply asking questions to one lecturer about a specific topic. If a study similar to this one were to be repeated, questions could be a part of the students' grades and that could encourage them to write legitimate and more elaborate questions.

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