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Preservice Teacher Education Programs, Novice Teachers, and Classroom Management Preparation

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Abstract

Classroom management is one of the biggest challenges first-, second-, and third-year (referred to as *novice*) teachers face. Research has shown novice teachers feel unequipped to manage their classrooms due to inadequate preservice training. In this study, 96 novice elementary school teachers from school districts throughout South Carolina completed an online survey that addressed preservice classroom management experiences and teachers' beliefs about classroom management preparation. It was found that although 80% of participants did receive preservice classroom management training, some of these participants felt unprepared to manage their classrooms. Over 90% of participants agreed that a preservice classroom management course in college is beneficial for future teachers. The results indicate a need for strong preservice courses in classroom management that offer both strategies and classroom experiences, as well as inservice professional development opportunities, to provide educators with the tools necessary to successfully manage their classrooms.

Keywords

Classroom management, novice teachers, preservice teacher education programs

Peer Review

This work has undergone a double-blind review by a minimum of two faculty members from institutions of higher learning from around the world. The faculty reviewers have expertise in disciplines closely related to those represented by this work. If possible, the work was also reviewed by undergraduates in collaboration with the faculty reviewers.

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Classroom management refers to strategies that teachers implement to make their classrooms run smoothly, such as positive behavior interventions, organizational tools, methods for engaging students, and creation of a positive classroom environment (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). Although these skills are essential for all teachers, first-, second-, and third-year (referred to as *novice*) teachers are finding themselves unequipped to face the challenges of classroom management (Giallo & Little, 2003; Smart & Igo, 2010). Even a well-prepared lesson can fall flat when disruptive behavior is not immediately handled. With classroom management preparation, teachers are able to develop routines and expectations that minimize the chances of disruptive behavior occurring. In order to create and maintain a positive classroom environment, teachers must actively promote positive behaviors through praise and rewards, rather than focusing on negative behaviors. Use of effective classroom management techniques allows students to be more engaged in learning as interruptions are less frequent.

However, teachers are not receiving adequate training in classroom management during their preservice education (Giallo & Little, 2003; Greenberg, Putman, & Walsh, 2014; Smart & Igo, 2010), and this lack of preparation leads novice teachers to leave the profession, which has led to a teacher shortage across the United States. This is a serious problem, as research indicates that as teacher turnover increases, student achievement decreases (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013).

Although there is research on the classroom management problems that teachers experience, strategies they implement, and approaches they adopt, there is a shortage of research on novice teachers' classroom management preparation and skills. Not all colleges and universities provide formal instruction in classroom management, leaving

novice teachers emotionally exhausted (Dicke et al., 2014). By understanding more about where educators are learning classroom management, colleges and universities may see the need to create stand-alone classes in classroom management, rather than embedding strategies into other classes, and school district officials may see the need for professional development opportunities for teachers who did not receive formal training during their preservice experience. The questions then become, where are educators learning their classroom management skills? And do educators benefit from preservice instruction on classroom management practices?

The purpose of this research is to provide information on where teachers are learning classroom management in order to better serve preservice and novice teachers. By filling some of the gaps in previous research, colleges and universities may see the need to create an all-encompassing curriculum on classroom management. Schools and school districts will understand the needs of novice teachers better and see the need for professional development opportunities. Finally, teachers will be encouraged to advocate for their needs.

In this paper, I present findings from previous research on novice teachers' classroom management preparation and the benefits of learning effective classroom management strategies. I then describe a study I conducted with elementary school teachers to better understand where they learned classroom management. After presenting my results, I discuss the importance for teachers of obtaining classroom management skills during their preservice teacher preparation.

Review of Literature

The amount of effective preservice training teachers receive in classroom management directly affects how teachers manage their

classrooms to run smoothly. To determine the effectiveness of classroom management strategies used by teachers who did not receive preservice training, Smart and Igo (2010) interviewed 19 first-year elementary teachers. They found that the majority of teachers relied on what they had learned during student teaching to handle behavior problems. Overall, one-third of teachers felt their classroom strategies were ineffective, and, when the researchers contacted teachers the following year, they found that 4 of the 19 participants had left the teaching profession.

Therefore, not having strategies to address misbehavior has consequences beyond a disruptive classroom. Giallo and Little (2003) found from their study with 54 novice elementary teachers and 25 preservice teachers that teachers who encountered “severe and unmanageable” behaviors in the classroom had a lower sense of self-efficacy than teachers who did not encounter such behaviors. Participants reported that their education and training were not sufficient, and 66 participants expressed a desire for formal training in classroom management and hands-on experience in handling behavior problems. Not knowing the strategies needed to address behavior problems can leave teachers feeling emotionally exhausted. Dicke et al. (2014) administered an emotional exhaustion, teacher self-efficacy, and educational knowledge scale to 1,740 German students at the beginning of their student teaching. The researchers found that more knowledgeable student teachers experienced less emotional exhaustion. Also, 21% of student teachers experienced an increase in self-efficacy as their teaching experience increased.

Teachers’ knowledge about classroom management greatly influences their effective use of classroom management strategies. Moore et al. (2017) surveyed 160 elementary school teachers on the training they had received in classroom management during preservice and inservice teaching. The

teachers reported receiving the most training in prevention practices, such as rules and routines. Because they were less knowledgeable about individualized behavioral interventions, such as teaching replacement behaviors, they less frequently implemented these important classroom management strategies. Teaching replacement behaviors means modeling to students how to act appropriately, such as raising their hands versus yelling out.

In order to determine the specific strategies preservice teachers learned, Begney and Martens (2006) administered a survey to graduate education students (N=110) about their preparation in instruction, error correction, punishment, reinforcement, and student engagement. The participants reported receiving training in less than half of the questionnaire items and felt that they would have benefitted from formal coursework on behavioral instruction during their undergraduate coursework. From a review of the content of 213 education courses that addressed classroom management, it was found that 38% of courses did not address misbehavior (Greenberg et al., 2014).

When preservice teacher education programs do not provide adequate classroom management preparation, the responsibility falls on school districts to provide professional development and training opportunities for teachers. Hirsch, Lloyd, and Kennedy (2019) conducted classroom observations of six elementary teachers in their first 3 years of teaching to determine the effects of practice-based professional development (PD). It was found that not only did teachers use more preventative strategies for misbehavior after receiving the PD, but they also had greater control of their classrooms and students were more engaged in class.

In a meta-analysis of 54 intervention studies, Korpershoek et al. (2016) found that interventions that contained a social-emotional component were more effective for promoting students' social-emotional development than interventions that did not have a social-emotional component. Other interventions focused on improving teachers' behaviors such as their use of classroom rules and procedures, but these programs were not effective for changing all outcomes (academic, behavior, social-emotional, and motivation) for students.

Research indicates a clear need for teachers to have knowledge and training in classroom management strategies. Studies have found that teachers have higher self-efficacy and are less emotionally exhausted when they have effective classroom management skills. Students are also more engaged in learning, which helps to minimize behavioral disruptions. And teachers who receive training in classroom management are more confident and successful in implementing effective classroom management strategies. It is therefore important to understand where teachers learn their classroom management strategies and whether there are benefits to preservice classroom management courses.

Methods

Procedures. After receiving approval from the Presbyterian College Institutional Review Board (IRB), I randomly selected one elementary school from each of the 79 school districts in the state of South Carolina using an online random name generator. I contacted each principal (N=76) through an email describing my study and asking them to respond with their agreement to participate and forward my survey to teachers in their first-, second-, and third-year of teaching. No contact information was available for schools in three of the districts. The response rate from principals was 8% when schools closed across the state due to the COVID-19

outbreak. I then sent a follow-up email to principals, which increased the response rate to 14%. This was still too low to yield meaningful results so I contacted five additional schools from the five largest districts in each region of the state. The following week, I sent a follow-up email to every principal that had been contacted (N=91), except for 10 who had already declined to participate. Nineteen schools agreed to participate in the study.

Survey. I created a five-question survey using Qualtrics. The survey contained one closed-ended question asking respondents if they had taken a stand-alone course in classroom management during their preservice education program. If the respondents answered *no*, they were directed to an open-ended question regarding the effectiveness of where they received their classroom management preparation. If the respondents answered *yes*, they were asked if they thought the course was sufficient in preparing them to manage their classroom. All respondents were asked if they thought it was beneficial for preservice teachers to take a classroom management course in college and if they believed classroom management is learned through experience or through a college class. These questions were chosen based on my personal experiences in my preservice education program. I had received no formal training in classroom management and relied solely on my personal experiences from working in the summer. This led me to wonder if other teachers had similar experiences and how they learned to manage their classrooms. If teachers had received training in classroom management, I wanted to know whether preservice training or experience was more effective.

Participants. Overall, 96 elementary school teachers completed the survey. Of the participants, 34% (n=30) were first-year teachers, 38% (n=33) were second-year teachers, and 28% (n=25) were third-year

teachers (not all teachers responded to this question, as it was optional). In regards to preservice experiences with classroom management, 64% of participants had taken a stand-alone preservice course in classroom management, while 36% of participants had not taken a stand-alone course. A stand-alone course means that the course was solely on classroom management, rather than information on classroom management being integrated into other courses.

Results

Overall, the survey results indicated that teachers felt classroom management courses in preservice preparation programs are necessary but not sufficient. Teachers believed that a combination of experience and preservice instruction provided the most opportunity to be successful in managing the classroom. The following section provides both quantitative and qualitative data related to teachers' experiences and beliefs about classroom management preparation.

Learned Classroom Management Through Experience. Over one-third of the teachers (n=34) in this study had not taken a stand-alone preservice course in classroom management. When asked where they learned classroom management, the most popular responses were "in the classroom" and through "teaching experience" (n=12). Student teaching and field placements were other frequent responses (n=11). Other responses included the influence of cooperating and mentor teachers (n=4) and observing veteran teachers (n=2). In response to whether these teachers thought the method they learned classroom management through was sufficient, 42% (n=11) stated they did not think it was. When asked whether they thought it was beneficial for preservice teachers to take a course in classroom management in college, 6 of the respondents stated that they did not think a class was necessary because the best way to learn

classroom management was through experiences in the classroom.

Took a Classroom Management Course.

Participants who took a stand-alone preservice course in classroom management (n=59) were asked to indicate whether the course helped prepare them for managing students' behavior in the classroom. Of the 52 participants that responded to this question, 40 (77%) stated that the course did help them, with 28 specifying that it taught them classroom management strategies.

Additionally, respondents found the course beneficial because it provided the foundation needed for managing a classroom (n=2) and helped them learn about: classroom procedures (n=2), creating a positive classroom environment (n=2), and building relationships with students (n=2). They also found the following opportunities beneficial: observing strategies implemented by different teachers (n=2), creating a classroom management plan that they later implemented in a practicum classroom (n=2), and learning from scenarios they had to create responses for (n=2).

Of the participants who had taken a course in classroom management, 12 (23%) did not believe the course was sufficient. Five participants were not given enough classroom experience or real-life examples. Four participants did not feel prepared on how to implement the strategies they learned, and three participants did not feel the course covered all aspects of classroom management. Participants also volunteered information about what was *not* covered, including how to implement strategies (n=4) and how to deal with extremely disruptive behaviors (n=3).

Do Preservice Teachers Need a Classroom Management Course? Seventy-eight participants responded to the question of whether they thought it was beneficial for preservice teachers to take a classroom

management course in college, and 92% of participants (n=72) said “yes.” Sixty-six of these respondents explained why, with the most popular reason being that classroom management courses address strategies that are beneficial for teachers to know (n=41). Eleven teachers mentioned that each class and school year is different, so having a variety of strategies from which to draw can make managing a classroom easier. Additionally, 25 participants felt that teachers must be prepared for managing a classroom, with one participant explaining that preservice classroom management courses “can make a transition into their first year of teaching easier.” Seven additional teachers made similar remarks, stating “the hardest thing as a new teacher is learning how to manage 20+ children in one setting,” and “if you cannot effectively manage your class, it is a struggle to do everything else.”

Where is Classroom Management Learned?

Seventy-four participants responded to the question of whether classroom management could be learned through a course or if it can only be learned through experience, and 38 teachers stated that it is learned through experience. One teacher stated, “Your classroom is never the same, so textbook information can't prepare you for what you may have to deal with in the classroom.” However, 24 of the 38 respondents who felt classroom management was learned through experience did feel that courses in classroom management can provide preservice teachers with useful classroom management strategies. One teacher stated “it is hard to be successful in the real experience if there is no prior knowledge,” and went on to reflect on their teaching experience saying, “Even having some classroom management experience in college, it would have been beneficial to me to have had more experience going into my first year of teaching.” Additionally, one teacher stated, “strategies to help teachers and scenario situations that are provided by a professor in a college classroom can be

incredibly beneficial [but] nothing can fully prepare you for managing your class as a first-year teacher.”

The remaining respondents (n=36) stated that both a preservice course and experience is the best way to learn classroom management. Without a course and experience in classroom management, one teacher felt “there’s a risk you will pick up habits that you don’t realize are unhealthy and harmful to the children in the long run.” One participant felt, “if higher education institutions do not help build this foundation, they are setting their future teachers up to become overwhelmed and feel discouraged and inadequate.” Of the 36 respondents, 16 discussed how courses in classroom management lay the foundation for effectively managing a classroom, and when paired with experiences, teachers are more successful.

Discussion

This study confirms previous research on the content covered in preservice courses in classroom management. As with Moore et al.'s (2017) study, my findings indicated that educators received the most training in prevention practices and few teachers were prepared in how to manage disruptive behaviors. Twenty-one participants in my study mentioned learning about strategies to prevent negative behaviors, like establishing rules and routines, setting up a positive classroom environment, and creating a classroom management plan. Teachers struggled with motivating students, applying effective discipline strategies, and managing large groups of students in one setting.

Previous research indicates that a more comprehensive approach that addresses universal classroom management strategies focusing on both teacher and student behaviors is needed. Classroom management preparation courses currently lack training in interventions that effectively promote

students' social-emotional development. Programs tend to take a one-size-fits-all approach to classroom management. As the composition of classrooms changes from year to year, it is important to consider student characteristics such as learning styles, personality styles, and socioeconomic status in the implementation of effective classroom management strategies.

These findings indicate the need for preservice classroom management courses to cover additional material to develop well-rounded and competent educators. My findings were similar to the results of Begney and Martens' (2006) study, in that teachers believed they would have benefitted from more formal instruction in college. One teacher reflected, "When I got my own class, it was evident that I did not have the tools I needed." It is important that college courses are comprehensive in all aspects of classroom management. Three teachers provided suggestions on what should be incorporated, including how to communicate and build relationships with students, and using real-life scenarios on different behaviors that students may exhibit.

Of the 25 teachers who had not received formal instruction in classroom management through a college course, 10 described the role their student teaching experiences and mentor teachers provided in helping them learn classroom management strategies. From their research, Smart and Igo (2010) concluded that student teaching and practicum experiences lay the foundation for teachers' ability to effectively manage a classroom. Colleges and universities should be aware of the importance of these experiences when providing preservice teachers with classroom opportunities.

Regardless of how classroom management was learned, 29% of respondents (n=23) did not feel the method by which they learned classroom management was sufficient. Many

of these teachers explained that the strategies needed for classroom management change from year to year depending on the composition of students. If teachers are not adequately prepared to manage their classrooms prior to getting hired, responsibility then falls on the school district to provide further mentoring and professional development. Many teachers in this study felt they needed more opportunities to learn classroom management both in college and once working in their classrooms. One participant felt that classroom management "can really make or break a teacher's success within the classroom," and another stated, "You need some basic skills and knowledge, and lots of support from your administration with space to learn and grow in that area." With the support of their school, teachers will be more successful and provide students the best environment in which to learn.

Based on the feedback of respondents in this study, it is evident that more preparation is needed for preservice teachers. Respondents who had received preservice preparation did not feel this was enough preparation for what they needed going into their first year of teaching. The same situation applied for respondents who received training outside of preservice preparation. No course or professional development opportunity can teach every aspect of classroom management that teachers need. Future research should explore the effective components of classroom management courses with a focus on the way programs prepare students to work in different types of schools with students from a variety of backgrounds. Taken together, findings from previous research and my research indicate that components of effective classroom management preparation include the social-emotional development of students and teacher behaviors such as how to effectively manage large groups of students and how to properly implement positive behavior interventions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this study confirm the need for comprehensive preservice classroom management courses for future educators. In response, colleges and universities could adjust their curricula to include more classroom experiences for future educators. In addition to preservice preparation, participants felt that additional inservice training is needed to learn strategies that will increase their success in the classroom. Based on these findings, colleges, universities, and school districts are called upon to make improvements in their classroom management opportunities to help better the field of education and develop competent and confident teachers who remain in the teaching profession.

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