



A Commentary on the Misalignment of Teacher Education and the Need for Classroom Behavior Management Skills

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Accepted: 22 September 2020 / Published online: 18 November 2020
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Abstract Teachers' skill in fostering students' engagement and limiting disruptive behavior is important for maintaining a safe, productive, and effective learning environment. Yet, teachers lacking specific training in classroom and behavior management continue to report high levels of stress and are more likely to leave the profession (Ingersoll, Merrill, et al., *Seven trends: The transformation of the teaching force*, 2018; Zabel & Zabel, *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 15(2), 67–73, 2002). Despite wide agreement from experts about the importance of developing classroom and behavior management skills, many teacher training programs do not require specified coursework or experiences to develop this skill set for teacher licensure or degree completion. In this article, we describe what we observe to be a disconnect between current requirements of teacher preparation programs, and the nature of adequate teacher training to appropriately manage and support student behavior. We argue that this disconnect currently contributes to a host of problematic outcomes observable in schools, including teacher attrition, racial disproportionality in discipline actions, and an overreliance on punitive and ineffective behavior support practices. We end our discussion with additional recommendations for improving teacher training and ensuring systems alignment.

Keywords Behavior · Classroom management · Teacher training · Systems

As the adage goes, *the system is always perfectly aligned to the results*. This phrase is intended to invoke reflection and accountability by a system — any system — that is responsible for and evaluated according to expected results. In the United States, public education system responsibilities are diverse, and educators are accountable for the safety and security, achievement, and even the social-emotional and physical well-being of students. The evaluation of school performance is similarly multifaceted; the accountability era has constrained schools and teachers to prioritize some results to the detriment of others (U. S. Department of Education, 2019). In such a climate, the public education and evaluation systems are aligned to produce some unfortunate yet predictable outcomes, including high dropout rates, low levels of reading proficiency, high incidence of behavior problems, and high rates of teacher attrition. It is our position that creating meaningful change related to these outcomes will require an intentional realignment of multiple educational systems (e.g., public schooling, teacher preparation programs, state and local education departments of education, and licensure boards) working in collaboration.

Sustainable and cohesive systems alignment between primary and secondary (K-12) schools and higher education has proven difficult to achieve (Perna & Armijo, 2014). K-12 and higher education institutions typically

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develop and maintain independent curricula, assessments, governance, instructional standards, and funding systems (Conley, 2013; Kirst & Usdan, 2009; Kirst & Venezia, 2005; Venezia et al., 2005). Each has a deeply rooted infrastructure (e.g., course offerings, personnel, decision-making processes) that may not be easily altered without confronting existing norms, policies, and traditions. Complete alignment between teacher training institutions and K-12 schools is an ideal, and it is naïve to expect that it could be accomplished in short order. Altering existing systems requires long-term change efforts that are likely to meet considerable resistance along the way. Simply adding a course to the university teacher training curricula, for example, requires the revision or elimination of one or more existing courses to make room for new content. Curricular change is typically a lengthy process in higher education, as it involves navigating university committees and processes. Furthermore, any change impacting a program leading to teacher licensure may also need approval from the state department of education.

Even if substantive changes were able to occur quickly, it is important to ensure such changes are part of a system in which conditions are sustainable *over time*. For complex educational systems, the most productive course of action is to target specific areas within which to focus collaborative efforts and solutions (Perna & Armijo, 2014). We submit that one area in urgent need of realignment is the under-preparation of teachers in evidence-based classroom management skills.

The inability to manage challenging classroom behavior contributes to a host of adverse effects including increased teacher stress and decreased job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Landers et al., 2008; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wang, et al., 2015), as well as negative effects on student learning (Flower et al., 2017). Conversely, teachers who are able to effectively manage their classrooms report higher levels of job satisfaction and are less likely to experience burnout (Canrinus et al., 2012; Caprara et al., 2006). Their students, moreover, are more likely to make academic progress (Evertson & Emmer, 1982; Sutherland & Wehby, 2001). Inadequate skill in classroom management, by contrast, is linked to increased rates of teacher attrition (Haynes, 2014; Ingersoll, 2001; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Landers et al., 2008; Zabel & Zabel, 2002). Among general education teachers, nearly 40% leave teaching within the first 7 years of their career. For special education teachers, the rate jumps to 40% of teachers leaving teaching within their first 3 years

(Hill & Flores, 2014), a trend exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Kini, 2020).

Evidence also reflects that insufficient classroom management training disproportionately impacts the retention of teachers in high-need areas such as science and math (Ingersoll & May, 2012). Across general and special education, and regardless of content area, the research is remarkably consistent in showing classroom management to be a major contributor to teacher attrition (Freeman et al., 2014; Oliver & Reschly, 2007, 2010; Stough et al., 2015). As has been noted elsewhere (cf. Buchanan et al., 2013; Oliver & Reschly, 2007; Stough et al., 2015), researchers have attested that classroom management competencies are highly influential to the success of new teachers (Dinkes et al., 2009). For example, teachers' inability to appropriately respond to and redirect disruptive behaviors is a major reason why teachers report leaving the profession (Ingersoll, Merrill, et al., 2018).

The preparation and professional development of new teachers is a major contributor to these trends. While the quality of teacher preparation impacts our capacity to sustain a viable teacher workforce, it also contributes to inequity within our educational system. Current teacher distribution patterns indicate less-qualified teachers are more prevalent in economically and socially disadvantaged classrooms (Sutcher et al., 2016). Students from marginalized populations, consequently, are more susceptible to negative outcomes associated with ill-prepared teachers such as lower rates of achievement, school participation, and completion (Flower et al., 2017).

In the remainder of this paper, we describe the impact of effective classroom management on students and teachers in contemporary society, and the many ways in which a lack of training in critical classroom and behavior management skills negatively impacts students and teachers. We then provide recommendations for realigning educational systems that are responsible for failing to develop teachers' skills to address student behavior, and are currently leading to less than acceptable results.

Classroom and Behavior Management Revisited

The term classroom management conjures a range of meanings. Here, we define classroom management as the set of skills, practices, and strategies teachers use to maintain productive and prosocial behaviors that enable

effective instruction in whole-class or small group settings. As LePage et al. (2005) simply state, “Skillful classroom management makes good intellectual work possible” (p. 327). This definition is generally consistent with the way classroom management has been conceptualized in contemporary education research (e.g., Flower et al., 2017; Gage & MacSuga-Gage, 2017; LePage et al., 2005; Oliver & Reschly, 2010). More specifically, key components of classroom management include establishing behavioral expectations (e.g., positively stated rules), explicit teaching, practice, and reinforcement of classroom routines and procedures, and instructive responses to behavioral problems that reduce the likelihood of future behavior problems (e.g., teach alternative behaviors). Specifically, Simonsen, Fairbanks, et al. (2008) have outlined five critical features of evidence-based classroom management practices: (a) maximize structure in your classroom, (b) post, teach, monitor, review, and reinforce a small number of positively stated expectations, (c) actively engage students in observable ways, (d) establish a continuum of strategies to acknowledge appropriate behavior, and (e) establish a continuum of strategies to respond to inappropriate behavior.

In many cases, the terms classroom management and behavior management are conflated as synonyms. In our definition, what distinguishes *classroom management* from *behavior management* in practice is an emphasis on instructional groups as opposed to individual students. *Classroom management* generally refers to management of groups of students in an instructional setting in which prolonged periods of attention to an individual is impossible, impractical, and/or counterproductive (i.e., whole class instruction). Classroom management emphasizes prevention and response to common behavior problems that may compromise classroom instruction or disrupt the learning of peers. Examples of common behavior problems include minor off-task behaviors such as talking to peers during instruction, failure to engage in assigned tasks promptly, distracting fellow classmates, talking out of turn, and others. In contrast, *behavior management* typically focuses on the identification and management of behaviors for individual students. This is commonly accomplished via thoughtfully crafted behavior plans, i.e., functional behavior assessments (FBAs) and behavior intervention plans (BIPs). Individual behavior management requires identification of specific target behaviors that can be shaped or replaced with a more productive or socially appropriate

behavior over time through individualized interventions. For the purposes of this discussion, we will refer to classroom management with the implicit understanding that teachers will often also require behavior management skills to support students with more individualized behavioral needs, and that there is considerable overlap between classroom management and behavior management.

Quality Instruction and Classroom Management

In many cases, the division between instructional practices and those that are nominally ‘behavioral’ are artificial. For example, providing a high frequency of opportunities for students to speak, write, or move in response to instruction, commonly referred to as opportunities to respond (OTRs), is both a behavioral strategy and an instructional one (Haydon, Borders, et al., 2009). Instructionally, OTRs are a means of engaging students to interact with the instructional content. Effective student engagement strategies with instruction are nearly universal in their acceptance as a pillar of quality instruction. From a behavioral perspective, OTRs function as a mechanism to maintain active participation and limit instances of counterproductive behaviors.

We do not intend to suggest that simply featuring engagement and behavior support procedures within and during instruction will result in (or are sufficient for) good teaching. Certainly, classroom curriculum design and the selection of effective instructional strategies are equally critical in establishing a strong foundation for effective teaching. Even so, classroom management is commonly listed among the most critical skills by principals and teachers (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2014), and its importance is confirmed by nearly 50 years of research. Moreover, there is an inextricable and reciprocal link between instructional quality and effective classroom management (Marzano et al., 2003). When instruction is highly engaging, students generally perform tasks that are incompatible with disruptive or off-task behaviors (Gage & MacSuga-Gage, 2017). Engaging students during instruction prevents many, if not most, common behavior problems (MacSuga-Gage & Simonsen, 2015), and effective classroom management techniques enable teachers to provide engaging instruction (Martin, Schafer, et al., 2016; Skiba, Ormiston et al., 2016). Haydon, Conroy, et al. (2010) showed that increased use of individual and

choral opportunities to respond (OTR) by teachers led to a reduction in off-task behaviors by more than 50%, a finding that has been repeatedly replicated over the last decade (Adamson & Lewis, 2017; Dicke et al., 2015; MacSuga-Gage & Simonsen, 2015). In the best of circumstances, effective classroom management allows the teacher to more effectively engage students in academic tasks, which in turn reduces problem behaviors, resulting in a positive feedback loop that benefits students and teachers. Developing teachers' skills in both instruction and classroom management is critical (cf. Martin & Sass, 2010), as one does not guarantee the other.

The use of feedback is another good example of practices that are not exclusively academic or behavioral. Providing specific, actionable, performance feedback enables improved academic performance by pinpointing specific actions which the student can take to either avoid future errors or replicate current success. Specific feedback also serves as a mechanism for reinforcing productive behaviors. Each interaction with a student engaged in an academically productive task may reinforce the engaged behavior simply by means of attention from the teacher.

There is no denying the impact of engaging instruction on the creation of a productive learning environment. Prevention of behavior problems through quality instruction is essential. But even the most skilled teachers are likely to encounter student behaviors that are disruptive, disengaged, or unproductive. Becoming an effective teacher requires high levels of skill in both effective instructional practices that prevent behavior problems and effective responsive strategies that maintain a productive learning environment over time. Teacher training programs, therefore, must arm teachers with instruction and behavioral skills they can use strategically to provide the optimal learning environment for students.

Teacher Preparation and Classroom Management

More than a decade ago, Oliver and Reschly (2010) conducted an analysis of teacher preparation programs to determine the extent to which universities require classroom management coursework as a degree requirement. Of the participating institutions only 27% offered a course focused on classroom management skills. The remaining institutions included classroom management

content, “dispersed within various courses or had courses specific to individual behavior management interventions” (Oliver & Reschly, 2010, p. 193). Among the full sample, less than half included content on establishing a structured classroom environment, providing active supervision, increasing student engagement, establishing school-wide behavioral expectations, and or developing classroom routines.

Freeman et al. (2014) reviewed course offerings in classroom management, and voluntarily submitted course materials from teacher preparation programs. Only 65% of these materials demonstrated evidence of teaching evidence-based content. Though the majority of teacher education programs responding to a survey reported that they did offer instruction in classroom management strategies, such as establishing rules and creating positive climates, fewer programs reported inclusion of evidence-based classroom management strategies, such as specific strategies to increase appropriate behavior and decrease inappropriate behavior. Freeman et al.'s findings, as well as those from a similar study by Flower et al. (2017), indicate that many pre-service teachers do not receive important content necessary for the success of students and teachers. It is important here to note that descriptions of evidence-based practices may differ widely across researchers and agencies. We use the term ‘evidence-based’ here to refer to those practices that have been shown to be effective by credible research (see Odom et al., 2005 for description and discussion), and advocate, similarly to Freeman and colleagues (2014), that classroom management strategies that are taught in pre-service educator preparation programs should exhibit the traits of evidence-based, or credibly researched and vetted practices.

Coursework and Field Experience

Deciding what skills and content to include within the practical limits of teacher training curricula has been one of the preeminent challenges of teacher education. Given the depth and breadth of skills teachers need to be successful, it is difficult to squeeze necessary coursework and field experiences into a 4- or 5-year program. Even if one considers that teacher preparation programs merely provide a foundation that will eventually be supplemented by career-long professional development and practical experience, the need to keep training programs within a reasonable cost and timeframe

means university faculties must make very hard choices about what goes in and what stays out of the curricula. Like so many other topics in education, there is no consensus regarding the essential elements of teacher training. Public education is a dynamic enterprise that requires flexibility, context specificity, and mindfulness of cultural and societal values, many of which are geographically and culturally localized. K-12 students are not a monolith, and neither are communities. They are a dynamic amalgam of individuals with various learning histories, dispositions, culture, goals, and values. Providing a quality educational experience that serves the needs of students within a given community requires understanding and responding to the goals and values of individuals and families within that community. It is incumbent upon teacher educators to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to best meet the needs of students, and fulfill the goals of education in a democratic society. To strive for anything less is a disservice to students and the citizenry writ large. Teacher educators have a responsibility to ensure the training they provide is well-aligned with the needs of students and teachers in the field, as well as the communities they serve. It simply makes sense, then, to shape the contributing education systems in such a way that enables the values and goals of a community to come to fruition.

Still, teacher training programs across the United States fail to provide the basic classroom management skills teachers need. As of 2015, analysis of data from National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE; now known as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation) indicates that less than 15% of teacher preparation programs require coursework in classroom management for all graduates seeking teacher licensure (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2015). This mismatch between teacher training and the needs of students and teachers is a fundamental flaw in contemporary education systems in the United States.

Experts within the overlapping fields of school reform and teacher preparation have eloquently espoused the idea that classroom management training be included as a staple of all teacher training programs leading to state licensure (Dicke et al., 2015; Oliver & Reschly, 2007; Simonsen, Fairbanks, et al., 2008). To further the point, we suggest that training teachers in the principles and practices of evidence-based classroom management (within a positive behavior support framework) is a necessary first step for improving the quality of teacher

training, and coordination with ongoing professional development efforts is essential to meet the practical and ethical demands of the profession.

Numerous researchers (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016; Dicke et al., 2015; Flower et al., 2017; Oliver & Reschly, 2010; Simonsen, MacSuga-Gage, et al., 2014) have highlighted the importance of classroom and behavior management in teacher training. While it is critically important for teacher preparation programs to understand *what* skills to teach, programs also need to consider *how* to best teach practices and develop skills within the context of a teacher preparation program. To wit, a systematic review of the literature examined common elements of effective practices for preparation of pre-service teachers in classroom management (VanLone, 2018). Researchers found that across the literature, multi-component interventions were most effective when it came to improving use of specific, evidence-based classroom management skills, and increasing knowledge and efficacy in effective classroom management practices. Based on their findings, guidelines for effective teacher preparation in classroom management are recommended. These include providing direct instruction in classroom management practices, modeling specific skills, providing guided practice opportunities, scaffolding support, and offering immediate, specific, performance-based feedback to pre-service teachers. Additionally, using technology such as simulations can further support these effective practices. Finally, teacher preparation programs should thoughtfully interweave instruction and practice opportunities throughout both coursework and field experiences.

Ongoing Professional Development

One may argue that teacher training programs are merely a starting point for building a highly competent workforce of educators. This is certainly true, as it is not practical or feasible for teacher candidates to develop a complete package of knowledge, skills, and experience within their collegiate teacher training programs. Professional knowledge grows with experience, mentorship, and continued participation in professional learning opportunities. Nevertheless, the development of critical instructional skills and habits aligned with the best evidence on teaching and learning is critical to the success of teachers and students. Given the high rates of teacher attrition previously mentioned, it is foolhardy to

think ongoing professional development is a sufficient substitute for developing good classroom management habits at the initial stages of training. If teachers are to benefit from experience, they need to begin their careers with a basic set of skills that enables them to manage challenging student behaviors and sustain a career.

There is very little evidence that ongoing teacher professional development substantively impacts student achievement. In a comprehensive review of professional development and student level effects in core academic areas, researchers found that out of 1343 published studies only 132 (approx. 10%) included actual evidence of increased student achievement in math, science, or language arts that could be in any way attributed to teacher professional development. Of those, only nine (less than 1%) met important standards of evidence (Yoon et al., 2007). While research on teacher professional development has identified specific elements of effective programs such as having a strong content focus and active participation, several studies containing these elements have not been effective (Hill et al., 2013). Finally, in a comprehensive review on effective teacher professional development, Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017) identified seven characteristics of effective programs. However, of the 35 studies included in their review, not one study focused specifically on improving teachers' classroom management practices.

In the most effective professional-development situations, teachers receive engaging and meaningful training from highly knowledgeable and experienced individuals, followed by a mechanism of in-situ support (i.e., coaching). It is then assumed that changes in teacher behavior will yield positive changes in students' behavior. As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, most professional development sessions measure success or failure based on the degree to which teacher behaviors change as a result of training. Rarely (< 10%) are student outcomes measured directly as a means of determining if such professional development is effective as part of empirical research.

Furthermore, once individuals have developed poor classroom management practices, these can be remarkably difficult to change. Even among individuals that exhibit a change in behavior, participants often regress to prior patterns of behavior (Kwasnicka et al., 2016). This phenomenon is one of the most replicated findings in all of psychological science. It is critical, therefore, that teachers develop practices and habits of effective

management during the earliest stages of training, and before ineffective practices become established.

National, State, and Local Requirements

The degree to which teachers receive classroom management training varies widely by institution and state. A review of the literature on current state policy and practice revealed clear gaps in the preparation requirements for pre-service teachers (Freeman et al., 2014). Despite the fact that most states require accredited teacher preparation programs to include some instruction in classroom management, there are virtually no descriptions regarding the specific content that must be included, how training should be delivered, which skills must be demonstrated, nor how institutions are held accountable for providing such instruction and training. Only 28 states require programs to provide instruction in evidence-based classroom management practices. Though classroom management and behavior management requirements are often higher for teacher candidates enrolled in special education programs, pre-service teachers in alternative programs (i.e., emergency, accelerated, and alternative licensure) face lower requirements than those in traditional programs.

Currently, the local control of education *and* the academic freedom afforded to university faculty combine to enable a patchwork of teacher education programs that vary greatly by institution. Findings from a study of 74 teacher education programs examining the classroom management instructional practices in teacher preparation programs indicate great variation across programs, and little adherence to evidence-based practices (Flower et al., 2017). The effectiveness of training is very difficult to measure given this variability, as is the determination whether such training meets the needs of students and teachers in K-12 schools. To more effectively enact state requirements and ensure teacher candidates receive the necessary training already required in 28 states, state departments of education must provide greater clarity and specificity on the content that is to be included during teacher training programs. It is our belief that states and local regulators are in a unique position to develop a core set of principles and practices that allow for customization at the local level, while at the same time enabling consistency and alignment between teacher training and K-12 schools.

Statewide Support

The specific training and coursework necessary to be granted a teaching license greatly influences the course offerings of teacher training programs. Teacher licensure is typically controlled by state level departments of education or elected state boards. If they wish to have their graduates eligible for employment as teachers, colleges and universities will need to ensure their programs meet the minimum requirements of their respective states. As previously mentioned, slightly more than half of all states require some form of classroom management training. The specifics of how teachers will be trained, however, and the specific skills teacher candidates must acquire are generally left to the discretion of each institution of higher education. Classroom management training currently comes in innumerable forms, ranging from none at all, to large lectures (> 200 students) 3 h per week, to close apprenticeship from experienced professionals. Training may be embedded within the content area of other courses, spread across multiple courses, or set as a stand-alone course within university training programs.

To maximize the likelihood of successful and sustainable change in classroom management training, it is important that state licensure requirements align with the training best suited to meet the demands of children in schools. Vague and ambiguous state requirements send the message to colleges and universities that classroom management training is non-essential. Given the pressures to limit the number of required credits, increase graduation rates, and maintain high rates of licensure and employment, the absence of specific state classroom management requirements endangers the sustainability of classroom management courses that are already subject to the whims of higher education faculty and administrators.

Given the leverage of state regulators over teacher licensure requirements, state Departments of Education (DOE) are uniquely positioned to make swift and meaningful change. State licensure requirements should include specific training in evidence-based classroom management practices that includes both coursework and field-based opportunities to practice and hone new skills. Such requirements already exist in other critical areas such as special education. For more than 30 years, the vast majority of states have required training in instruction for students with disabilities for all general education teachers through required coursework, field experience,

or both (Geiger, 2006). Changing licensing requirements to include specific classroom management training aligned with the best available research is a necessary step toward alignment between teacher training and the needs of students and teachers in the field. We strongly urge state DOEs to work directly with teacher education programs to ensure state requirements are specific enough to meaningfully impact teacher education programs, and aligned with the best available evidence and the needs of teachers and students in the field.

We recognize that top-down changes from state departments rarely receive a warm and enthusiastic reception from a majority of teacher educators. Changes that result in more prescriptive or restrictive requirements can be viewed by faculty as a potential threat to instructional independence and academic freedom. It is certainly not our intent to suggest all universities must use the same curricula and deliver classroom management training in the same way. Changing state requirements to include specific classroom management training merely establishes a basic set of requirements with ample room for customization at the discretion of each institution. Moreover, the concepts of teacher certification and licensure exist to ensure all teachers have a minimum level of skill and expertise necessary for competent performance as classroom teachers. Aligning state requirements for classroom management with the needs of teachers and students serves to more fully realize the purpose of state licensure and positively impact both students and teachers.

Culturally Relevant Practices

Culturally responsive teachers view their students' diverse cultural, racial, and linguistic experiences as valuable instructional resources that contribute to learning and development rather than barriers to success (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). Sugai et al. (2012) describes "culturally and contextually relevant" as a consideration of specific student variables (e.g. ethnicity, race, gender, socioeconomic status, geographic location) and learning histories when choosing and implementing effective practices. Though implementing evidence-based classroom management practices should lead to the formation of a positive, nurturing learning environment, it is important that teachers consider the context and culture of their students. For example, teachers can develop lesson plans and collaborative-based learning activities that represent the languages and cultures of their students, and they can

involve families and students in choosing meaningful reinforcers. Additionally, schools can monitor data and implementation fidelity to determine where supports are needed for improved practices (Sugai et al., 2012). Without effective, culturally responsive classroom management, historically marginalized student populations, including students with disabilities and those who are language, ethnic, and/or racial minorities are more likely to experience harsh discipline (USDOE, 2014). This includes the use of timeout and seclusion, restraint, suspension, and even expulsion. Researchers have suggested that these punitive practices lead to negative short and long-term outcomes for students (Reinke & Herman, 2002; Rumberger & Losen, 2016; Scheuermann et al., 2016). The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) has addressed use of these harmful practices and outlined guidance for addressing school climate and discipline practices (U. S. Department of Education, 2012). This guidance has focused on marginalized populations of students. As an alternative to ineffective, harsh discipline practices, the DOE recommends implementing multi-tiered behavioral support frameworks, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) that focus on the use of preventative, proactive classroom management and behavioral support strategies.

When considering how best to prepare teachers for the behavioral challenges of contemporary classrooms, it is important to ensure the practices and strategies used to maintain an orderly learning environment do not flatten the cultural identity and expression for students. That is, classroom management practices should serve to communicate the value of difference within the learning environment rather than simply train everyone to act similarly. When teaching the norms and expectations for engagement with instruction, for example, teachers must be careful not to denigrate the cultural norms and behaviors of students outside the classroom. Norms of conversation and engagement can vary widely across cultural groups. Vocabulary, pronunciation, and informal rules for conversational exchanges are important aspects of culture that must be recognized and valued. It is also important that, when teaching classroom expectations for conversation and discussion, one does not explicitly or implicitly communicate that the classroom expectations are *right* and others are *wrong*. Instead, teachers must use classroom management strategies that are culturally mindful and appropriate for the population.

Classroom Management in Post-Pandemic Schools

In a move to online and blended learning environments spurred first by technological innovation, and more recently by the global pandemic of COVID-19, it may be tempting to dismiss classroom management as either a relatively unimportant aspect of teacher training or simply a vestige of face-to-face education that no longer applies to modern schooling. There are certainly some classroom management strategies, such as proximity control (Gunter et al., 1995), which no longer apply to an educational environment in which social distancing is necessary to preserve the health and safety of teachers and students. Likewise, strategies such as active supervision (Colvin et al., 1997) are untenable in asynchronous online learning environments.

We believe, though, that effective classroom management training is now more important than ever. As schools reopen after quarantine restrictions and state-ordered closures, teachers and students will return to environments in which face-to-face instructional time may be limited by staggered schedules and increased physical distance, and supplemented with online learning. The altered learning environment places even more pressure on teachers to limit off-task behaviors and ensure in-school instruction is engaging and productive. Teachers will need the skills to redirect students quickly and minimize disruptions. Even if virtual learning remains a large part of the school experience, students and teachers are likely to benefit from effective training in classroom and behavior management in order to keep students motivated, on-task, and productive.

Furthermore, ensuring students abide by new safety rules and procedures will be critical for maintaining a safe learning environment. Teachers will need a full toolkit of skills and strategies to ensure students practice critical preventive behaviors (i.e., social distancing, handwashing) and respond effectively when students exhibit behaviors that risk the health and safety of themselves or others (i.e., any physical touching, sharing food or objects). By leaning heavily on the tenets of effective classroom management, teachers are more likely to be able to maintain an environment that is both safe and conducive to learning.

Points of Caution

It is critically important to note that we are in no way suggesting that classroom management be taught in

isolation or devoid of context. We argue quite the contrary. Classroom management courses taught in college classrooms or in online courses should, ideally, be paired with a field experience in which teacher candidates have opportunities to observe, practice, and receive expert feedback in authentic school settings. Likewise, teachers must learn how to integrate preventative and responsive behavior management strategies and practices within effective content area instructional practices. Effective, engaging instruction begets fewer behavior problems and vice versa. Nevertheless, given the importance of classroom management, as stated above, all teacher education programs should include — at a minimum — a course focused specifically on classroom management as a core requirement in teacher education.

It is also important to note that the argument presented here must not be conflated with any argument for uniform content or pedagogy. Outside the broad goal of teaching teachers practices and strategies that are grounded in empirical research, there is little to be gained from standardizing classroom management curricula, instructional methods, textbooks, or other aspects of teaching. Flexibility in response to local contextual factors, the developing needs of teacher candidates, and the needs of schools are essential to successful training. Teacher education programs must have the professional freedom to make necessary and appropriate curricular and programmatic decisions in the best interests of students, schools, and the community.

Likewise, we recognize teacher training curricula are limited in the number of courses that it is reasonable to include in training programs with limited time, resources, and personnel. Making programmatic changes requires careful navigation of policies and procedures, including those at the local and state levels. Colleges and universities have a responsibility to their students to keep credit-hour requirements at a level that does not create undue financial strain and is conducive to timely degree completion. The preponderance of research described above nevertheless suggests that the inclusion of classroom management as a staple of teacher education curricula is well worth the return on investment, particularly with regard to teacher stress, attrition, and — most importantly — the impacts on student learning and social-emotional health.

Lastly, although effective classroom management may prevent many common behavior problems in group settings, it should not be viewed as a means for

managing extant behavior problems that are harmful, profoundly disruptive, or persistent. Behaviors unresponsive to low-intensity strategies or those that severely compromise the safety or learning of others should be treated through a structured behavior intervention plan developed with the assistance of an individual trained to handle such issues, such as a certified applied behavior analyst or positive behavior support consultant. Teachers of students with such behaviors should seek assistance as soon as such behaviors become apparent.

Realignment and Potential Solutions

To better serve students, teachers, and communities, we recommend three potential actionable steps that teacher preparation programs and collaborating districts can take to address the many challenges described above. First, all teacher education programs leading to licensure must include a course in which the primary purpose is developing explicit, evidence-based, culturally and contextually relevant classroom management skills. The emphasis should be on implementing proactive strategies, reinforcing desired behaviors, preventing and responding effectively to off-task and disruptive behavior, and encouraging high levels of active engagement. Pre-service teachers are novices, and therefore courses focused on classroom management should include opportunities for students to practice skills and receive feedback. For example, pre-service teachers can analyze case studies and videos of classroom teaching and participate in simulations (i.e., role plays, avatar-based interactive virtual classrooms) focused on specific classroom management skills. As students gain knowledge and practice newly learned skills, instructors can provide differentiated support to target individual pre-service teacher needs.

Second, field-based experiences and student teaching should provide explicit support and coaching of classroom management skills. Coaching should be provided by both university-based supervisors and host classroom teachers. For this reason, it is critically important that school-based host teachers understand the specific practices and how they can support pre-service teachers' development and application of these skills in a classroom setting. Explicit modeling of practices is essential. As pre-service teachers begin to implement practices in host classrooms, both university-based supervisors and

mentor teachers can provide specific and ongoing performance feedback.

Finally, state departments of education serve as a bridge between the needs of students in local schools and teacher candidates in training. State-level requirements codify training and skill requirements that align with the most pressing behavioral needs of teachers and students.

For this reason, continued communication between stakeholders is a necessary component of successful realignment. Teachers, state officials, and university faculty should periodically convene to examine trends in the teaching profession, review current data, assess alignment, and make changes as necessary.

Conclusion

Our aim in the preceding commentary is not to encourage college faculty, teachers, or state administrators to standardize teacher education curricula, nor to dictate specific actions for communities in which we do not live. Our aim is to draw attention to a major misalignment in educational systems and provide a practical means of improving such systems for the benefit of teachers, students, and communities.

Given commonly faced challenges to instruction, behavior, and social-emotional health, teachers must be effectively trained to prevent and respond to behaviors that jeopardize the teaching and learning experience for students. Ineffective classroom management negatively impacts the learning of students, contributes to teacher attrition, and perpetuates a host of other issues (cf. Freeman et al., 2014; Oliver & Reschly, 2007, 2010; Stough et al., 2015). To address this, the preparation of teachers must include conceptual and theoretical knowledge of student behavior and learning, as well as explicit training, feedback, and coaching in evidence-based classroom and behavior management practices. Such training must be contextualized within a system of teacher licensure and ongoing support that both recognizes and formalizes classroom and behavior management as key to teacher and student success. With due respect for the limits of teacher education programs, we strongly urge colleges and universities dedicated to quality teacher training to establish classroom management courses paired with meaningful, supervised field experiences as a staple element of the training of all teacher candidates. Inclusion of such training

requirements would mark a major step forward in the alignment of higher education and K-12 systems, and may ultimately prove critical to the success of students and teachers in today's schools.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest None.

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