Pre-Service Teacher Preparation Related to Classroom Management Techniques

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Introduction

Teachers are likely to encounter children with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) at least once throughout their career. These students demonstrate internalizing or externalizing behaviors that have a negative effect on their education. Pre-service teachers reported that almost a fourth of their students portrayed some forms of challenging behavior (Westling, 2010). These behaviors were described as defiance, noncompliance, disruption, and socially inappropriate behavior. Westling (2010) reported that dealing with these challenging behaviors take up a significant amount of teacher's time, reduces their effectiveness as teachers, and inhibits the ability of the other children's learning. Despite most teachers feeling inadequately prepared to work with children with EBD, it is believed that more preparation increases one's confidence in one's ability to use effective strategies while trying to improve challenging behavior.

Regardless of the amount of preparation, many teachers are believed to have a strong influence on the development children's behavior. However, this may not be the case when teachers are not adequately prepared to work with children with EBD. Many in-service teachers believe their schools don't have any school wide behavior management strategies (Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010). This becomes a serious issue when the only pre-service education regarding behavior management pre-service teachers receive is in a single special education class. Teachers also lacked knowledge about RTI or PBIS (Tillery et al., 2010), which are popular strategies in behavior management that document behavior in hopes for the child to receive additional help. The key aspects of these approaches are to establish rules and guidelines for expected behavior, teach routines and procedures, and monitor behaviors.

Targeted classroom techniques may be used to create classroom environments that support appropriate behaviors among students with EBD (Trussell, Lewis, & Stichter, 2008). These interventions improve the structure of the classroom, incorporate individual student recognition for academic or behavioral accomplishments, enhance classroom procedures and routines, and improve student accuracy on teacher directed and independent student work. Investigating the classroom intervention strategies being taught to teachers today is essential because research reveals many teachers feel inadequately prepared. For this reason, we are interested in examining preparation through coursework of pre-service teachers and their comfort and knowledge related to classroom management techniques.

Method

The targeted population in this study includes any pre-service teacher enrolled in the undergraduate or graduate program in the College of Education. This study aims to survey 400 undergraduate and graduate education majors. A survey has been constructed to gather information about demographic characteristics as well as views of preparation and readiness to utilize classroom management techniques.

Participants received a consent form before the study, which confirmed the understanding of the individual's rights as a participant. Once the consent form was signed, the participant received the survey. The survey consists of approximately 25 questions. The questions addressed basic demographics, classroom management techniques, and confidence levels in utilizing those techniques.

Results

Characteristics of the Sample

Working in General Education = 12   Graduate = 6
Working in Special Education = 7   Undergraduate = 16

Top Classroom Management Strategies Taught Through Coursework

| |
|---|
| Establish rules and classroom procedures |
| Reinforce appropriate behavior (use positive and/or negative reinforcement) |
| Keep students engaged (implement effective instructional strategies) |

Top Classroom Management Strategies Used While Teaching

| |
|---|
| Reinforce appropriate behavior (use positive and/or negative reinforcement) |
| Establish positive relationships with students |
| Implement consequences for misbehavior |

Classroom Management Strategies Used Most Confidently

Establish positive relationships with students
Establish rules and classroom procedures
Reinforce appropriate behavior (use positive and/or negative reinforcement)

What is your level of confidence related to utilizing the classroom management strategies listed above?
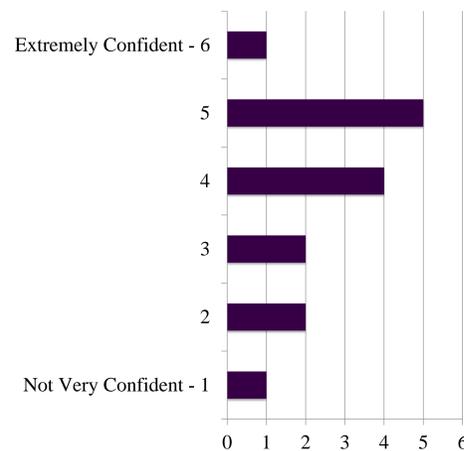
How prepared do you feel related to utilizing classroom management strategies with students with behavioral disorders?
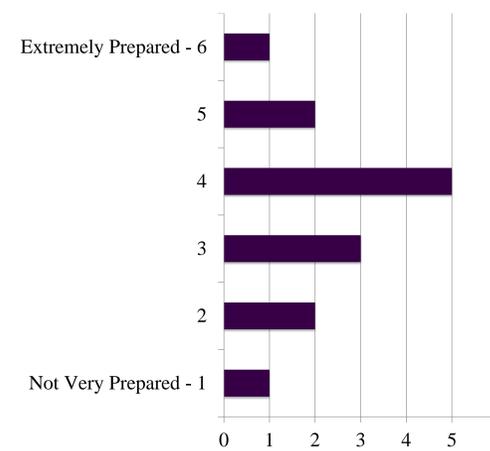
For additional information regarding this study, please contact Karley Weir at karley.weir@mnsu.edu or Dr. Carlos Panahon at carlos.panahon@mnsu.edu.

Conclusions

Contrary to previous research, our data reveals that pre-service teachers enrolled in the College of Education express a knowledge in classroom management strategies and are relatively confident in executing these strategies while being in a classroom. Through this experiment, we chose to analyze specifically what courses help prepare pre-service teachers to use classroom management techniques, especially with children with EBD. We found that there are multiple classes being taught at Minnesota State University, Mankato that addresses these issues. Some include SPED 407 Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, SPED 448 Behavior Management and Learning Environments for Diverse Learners, KSP 320 Special Student in the General Classroom, EEC 325 Classroom Management I, and EEC 424 Special Education and Behavioral Needs in Elementary Education.

We wanted to take our research further and identify which strategies are specifically being taught in these classes. Many of the strategies listed remained popular throughout the survey. The top rated strategies taught in class were also the top rated strategies to use while teaching and to be used confidently. According to our data, pre-service teachers may still be unsure how to utilize disciplinary interventions (teacher reaction, tangible recognition, direct cost, group contingency, home contingency, etc.), create a learning contract with the guardian and student, and utilize functional assessment-based interventions (teach the replacement behavior, improve the environment, adjust the contingencies, etc.). Many students have reported using other means to enhance their skills with implementing classroom management strategies such as field experience, observation of mentor teachers, working with children, and online research. In addition to learning about classroom management strategies through coursework, many students are accessing different sources of knowledge to further enhance their experience in implementing these strategies. The more exposure to classroom management strategies, the more confident these individuals will feel once implementing them in a classroom.

A couple limitations of the study were the small number of participants and the data only being analyzed through descriptive statistics.

Future research may want to reach out to other pre-service teachers at different universities. Data could be utilized in order to influence educational programs to increase their presentation of classroom management strategies.

References

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