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ABSTRACT
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were coded to identify strategies that student teachers would and would not
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majority of student teachers' responses focused on talking to the students,
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Running head: PRESERVICE

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Management Strategies: Underachieving Students

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Abstract

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Preservice Teachers' Knowledge of Effective Classroom
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Perspective

Classroom management involves creating an orderly environment where learning can take place. In fact, "effective classroom management has been shown to increase student engagement, decrease disruptive behaviors, and enhance use of instructional time, all of which result in improved student achievement" (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993, p. 262). It is one of the major concerns of beginning teachers yet; beginning teachers often fail to plan effectively for classroom management (Weinstein, Woolfolk, Dittmeier, & Shankar, 1994). Thus, disruptive students become a major source of teacher stress (Abel & Sewell, 1999), which can eventually lead to teacher burnout.

One of the types of students identified by effective teachers to hinder learning in the classroom is the underachieving student (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992). Brophy and McCaslin define underachieving children as those perceived to "do a minimum to just get by" and who "do not value school work" (p. 62). It is a label given to students by teachers who perceive these students to perform below their potential in the classroom. Underachieving students may include those identified as gifted as well as the non-gifted.

Possible reasons for underachievement include emotional issues, peer group pressure, a lack of appropriate curriculum, and undiagnosed learning disabilities (Baum, Owen, & Dixon, 1991; Baum, Renzulli, & Hebert, 1994). Students often misbehave to receive attention rather than wait for the positive attention they need from a caring teacher. Other students fail to achieve in order to fit into an undesirable peer group. Some students do not succeed when they are unchallenged in the classroom. Others may not admit they are having problems learning. Successful teachers can effectively reverse the underachievement cycle by taking the time to get the know students, becoming facilitators of instruction, treating students like practicing professionals, observing, reflecting, and identifying strategies to help students overcome problems, and consistently demonstrating patience and belief in their students (Baum, Renzulli, & Hebert, 1994).

Perfectionist students are identified as underachievers when they express very low aspirations or impossibly high aspirations. The result can be an underachiever (Brophy, 1996c) who is unable to achieve because of their unreasonably high expectations. Strategies for working with this type of student include building a friendly, supportive environment, allowing for mistakes, and encouraging students (Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1989).

Failure syndrome students are another example of underachievers. They often have low self-concepts, defeatist attitudes, or appear to become frustrated and give up easily. These students often under perform in the classroom. Successful teachers use a combination of support, encouragement, and task assistance to help improve the work habits of these students (Brophy, 1995; Brophy 1998b).

Undergraduate teacher preparation programs typically address the topic of classroom management as a small part of Educational Psychology or peripherally as part of discipline techniques in Child Development courses. As students enter their student teaching experience, they often arrive in the classroom with brief coverage of a variety of different approaches to

classroom management and a limited exposure to diverse populations and field experiences. Many students enter teacher preparation programs, "not merely lacking knowledge about effective classroom management but also harboring mistaken attitudes and beliefs (misconceptions) that are likely to persist unless directly confronted and refuted" (Brophy, 1987, p. 28). Accreditation agencies are arguing for teacher preparation programs to include working with diverse populations in more field-based settings (NCATE, 2000). According to Ryan and Cooper (2004), classroom management requires "a thorough understanding of theoretical knowledge and research findings, as well as practical experience" (p. 166).

Thus, the present study was initiated in response to feedback received from graduates of our undergraduate teacher preparation program at the university. Systematic program evaluation efforts by our College of Education continue to reveal that student teachers and beginning teachers feel least prepared and confident in dealing with issues related to classroom management. Feedback from local school districts and other concerned citizenry also indicate that teachers felt inadequately prepared to cope with problem students who frustrated teachers' attempts to teach.

Objectives

The present study was developed to identify preservice teachers' knowledge about effective and ineffective classroom management strategies. A prerequisite to developing a coherent curriculum that addresses issues related to classroom management is the identification of preservice teachers' knowledge about classroom management.

In keeping with the AERA 2003 theme of Accountability for Educational Quality: Shared Responsibility, teacher preparation programs must conduct educational research to help develop a more effective program of instruction. This should empower graduates with effective classroom management practices and help prepare them to continue this practice as teachers in the schools. This empowerment will enhance the quality of instruction in K-12 settings.

Method and Data Source

Student teachers of the undergraduate teacher preparation program at a southern rural public university were asked to generate classroom management strategies in response to hypothetical problems that occurred in the classroom. Data in the form of extended written responses were obtained from student teachers at the end of their student teaching experience in the fall and spring semesters. The teacher preparation program at this university is tightly sequenced with each education course serving as a prerequisite for the following course. Students first enroll in Foundations of Education followed by Educational Psychology, Child Development, Instructional Design, Methods, and finally Student Teaching.

At the end of the fall and spring semesters, student teachers that represented the entire graduating class were given a written assignment in a group setting. Of the 95 responses, 80 were considered usable. The sample included 56 females and 13 males. Approximately 85% of the respondents were Caucasian.

The students were to discuss strategies they would use in dealing with two hypothetical vignettes depicting underachieving/alienated behavior and also discuss specific strategies that may

not work (see Appendix). Underachieving children are perceived as those who "do a minimum to just get by" and "do not value school work" (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992, p. 62). These were a subset of the vignettes used by Brophy and McCaslin. The vignettes were attached to the cover sheet in a randomized order.

The researchers collected students' completed responses. A research assistant trained in the coding system coded the extended responses. The coding system incorporated a subset of the categories represented in the universal coding system for vignettes (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992).

Results

In responding to the scenarios about Carl who can do good work but seldom does and Nancy who is oriented toward social relationships and does just enough to get by, the preservice teachers most frequently would talk to the students (n = 56); involve parents (n = 51); reinforce appropriate behavior (n = 34); and rearrange the classroom (n = 31).

Among the strategies that were considered ineffective with this type of problem student, the most frequently cited was confronting the student in front of the class (n = 46). In addition, yelling at the student (n = 23), lecturing the student (n = 21), or punishing the student (n = 20) was considered ineffective in managing underachieving students.

A preponderance of our respondents were female hence the data were not analyzed by gender. Further, most of the pre-service teachers were majors in elementary teaching thus the data were not amenable to a breakdown by certification level.

Discussion and Educational Importance

Classroom management research can provide a knowledge base with a coherent set of principles to help teachers make the decisions necessary to effectively manage their classrooms (Emmer & Stough, 2001). Yet, Kagan's (1992) synthesis of research studies on teacher education indicates teachers perceived a "lack of connection" between information provided in teacher preparation programs and the real classroom (p. 156). To help gifted underachievers the teacher must create a climate of "excitement, anticipation, personal satisfaction, and low pressure" (Whitmore, 1985, p. 3). Teachers must also understand that "parents are particularly important in preventing social or emotional problems" (Webb, 1994, p. 3).

Underachieving students "are indifferent to school, contribute minimum work output, and are not challenged by school work and are poorly motivated" (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992, p. 63). They can include gifted students, perfectionists, or even failure syndrome students. These students display a variety of behavioral symptoms and explanations given for their behaviors are diverse. Thus, the literature on how to address the problem of underachievement contains a myriad of strategies (Brophy, 1996b).

The results of this study show that preservice teachers, in response to underachieving behavior, would talk to the student, contact parents, reinforce appropriate behavior, and rearrange the classroom. They would not yell, lecture, or punish the student. They do not, however, suggest strategies that focus on meeting the individual learning needs or emotional needs of the student. Thus, student teachers may not demonstrate an understanding of the motivational underpinnings

of underachieving students.

Brophy (1996b) suggests that there is considerable disagreement in the literature regarding effective strategies for dealing with underachieving students. In his seminal work on problem students, he found that "teachers' responses to questions about underachievers reflected differences of opinion seen in the scholarly literature" (p. 148). Underachieving students in addition to resisting school related tasks may also be viewing these tasks as devoid of meaning. Brophy (1996b) recommends that teachers help students develop the "motivation to learn schema" by modeling a genuine interest in learning and its intended benefits. Brophy (1996a) goes on to suggest that as teachers develop "their role as facilitators of students' socialization into the learning environment, teachers can create the potential for having a significant impact on the lives of problem students" (p. 3).

Our data seem to suggest that preservice teachers have not developed an understanding of how to work with underachieving students to meet their individual needs. However, their management system may still be evolving and they may not have developed a well-articulated system for dealing with problem students. Thus they may not employ strategies that are specific enough to produce enduring effects. "Good classroom management implies more than eliciting student cooperation in maintaining order" (Brophy & Alleman, 1998, p. 56). Good classroom management must be preventive rather than reactive and teachers can develop well-managed classrooms through teaching desirable behaviors to their students (Emmer & Stough, 2001).

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Appendix

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Directions: Given on the following page are two descriptions of problem students that teachers often identify as time consuming, frustrating, and/or worrisome to teach. For each problem student described, discuss in <u>as much detail as possible</u>:

a.   Specific strategies you would use in dealing with this type of student.

b.   Specific strategies that may <u>NOT</u> work with this type of student.

SCENARIO 1: Carl can do good work, but he seldom does. He will try to get out of work. When you speak to him about this, he makes a show of looking serious and pledging reform, but his behavior doesn't change. Just now, you see a typical scene: Carl is making paper airplanes when he is supposed to be working.

a.

b.

SCENARIO 2: Nancy is oriented towards peers and social relationships, not schoolwork. She could be doing top-grade work, but instead she does just enough to get by. She is often chatting or writing notes when she is supposed to be paying attention or working. During today's lesson, she has repeatedly turned to students on each side of her to make remarks, and now she has a conversation going with several friends.

a.

b.

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