

# Good Classroom Management for Ethnic Minority Students? A Comparison of the Strategies that Preservice and Inservice Teachers Use to Respond to Student Misbehavior

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## Abstract

*Teachers respond differently to the misbehavior of ethnic minority students as compared with that of ethnic majority students. This finding can be traced back to teachers' stereotype-driven cognitions and behavior. Moreover, preservice teachers have been shown to apply harsher interventions in response to student misbehavior than inservice teachers. In a quasi-experimental study, we found that inservice teachers' responses were less severe than preservice teachers' responses to student misbehavior. Even more interesting, preservice teachers' interventions were ethnically biased, whereas inservice teachers' interventions did not differ by students' ethnic origins. The findings are discussed with respect to consequences for teacher education.*

*Keywords:* preservice teachers, managing behavior, quasi-experimental design

## Introduction

Ethnic minority students are faced with various disadvantages in educational systems worldwide. Their academic achievement tends to be lower than that of their ethnic majority peers (De Feyter & Winsler, 2009; Fleischman, Hopstock, Pelczar, & Shelley, 2010; Gijsberts & Dagevos, 2010; Reardon, Valentino, & Shores, 2012; Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton,

2006; Stanat, Rauch, & Segeritz, 2010), and teachers' stereotypical expectations of this lower achievement affect their grading and judgments of these students (Glock, 2016a; McCombs & Gay, 1988; Peterson, Rubie-Davies, Osborne, & Sibley, 2016; Sprietsma, 2013).

Albeit achievement and teachers' achievement judgments have a profound influence on students' self-concept (Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004), educational careers (Brunner, Anders, Hachfeld, & Krauss, 2013), and motivation (Pintrich & de Groot, 1990), other factors are vital in daily classroom interactions as well. Teachers behavior in the classroom—such as their choice of instructional strategies (Gräsel & Göbel, 2011) and the quality of their classroom management—also have profound influences on student outcomes (Romi, Lewis, & Katz, 2009). In particular, classroom management and strategies for handling student misbehavior seem to be impacted by students' ethnicity.

In this vein, research has shown that teachers punish ethnic minority students more harshly and suspend them from school more often (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 2011). However, despite this correlational research, there are still no studies that have been able to provide—via a rigorous experimental design—a way to draw stringent causal conclusions about the influence of students' ethnicity on teachers' interventions for student misbehavior. Experimental studies have identified stereotypical biases in preservice teachers' handling of student misbehavior, as ethnic minority students have been found to be more likely to receive interventions and tend to receive harsher interventions than their ethnic majority peers (Glock, 2016b, 2017).

Whereas preservice teachers have had fewer opportunities to practice their intervention strategies in the classroom and might therefore rely on stereotypes to a greater extent (Kokkinos, Panayiotou, & Davazoglou, 2004), experienced teachers might have had ample opportunities to explore effective strategies. However, what is not known so far is whether experienced teachers differ from preservice teachers in their handling of student misbehavior and, in this vein, in their stereotypical biases regarding classroom management strategies.

## **Teacher Expectations**

Since Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) conducted their pivotal study on the impact of teacher expectations on student achievement, teacher expectations have been shown to have not only positive but also negative effects (Jussim & Harber, 2005) on student achievement as well as on teacher judgments. These negative effects were found to be stronger for stigmatized groups such as ethnic minorities (Jussim & Harber, 2005). Along these same lines, research has shown that teachers expect ethnic minority students to show lower achievement (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007) and consequently judge ethnic minority students less favorably than they judge ethnic majority students (Glock, 2016a; Pigott & Cowen, 2000; Sprietsma, 2013; Tobisch

& Dresel, 2017). This finding has also been found to hold for preservice teachers (Glock & Krolak-Schwerdt, 2013; Parks & Kennedy, 2007).

Such teacher expectations are assumed to be derived from stereotypes (Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1996), which are defined as generalized knowledge about the traits, attributes, and behaviors people who belong to a particular social group show (Smith, 1998). Hence, stereotypes provide people with expectations about how the members of a particular social group will behave (Hamilton & Trolie, 1986), and they are derived from people's own experiences with the members of the group, family, the media (Sherman, 1996), or society (Ehrlich, 1973).

People have been shown to rely less on stereotypes when they have more information about a target person (Kunda & Thagard, 1996). This implies that people make more stereotypical judgments when only little information about a target person is available (Kunda & Spencer, 2003). On the other hand, research has provided inconsistent results regarding the influence of experience with the members of a certain group, as experimental research has shown that, with increasing experience, stereotyping increases (Sherman, 1996). However, research on intergroup contact has suggested that, with increased contact (i.e., experience with the members of the group), prejudice decreases (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2008). Applied to teacher expectations, greater experience with students from minority groups as well as the abundant information teachers have at hand about the students in their class might explain why, in naturalistic settings, the effects of teacher expectations on student achievement are typically small (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Madon et al., 1998).

In experimental laboratory settings, however, teachers are provided with very sparse information about the students, and they rely on their stereotypical expectations when judging students (Madon et al., 1998). This might explain why the findings reported above have been found to hold for both preservice and inservice teachers. The two teacher groups have little information at hand, and the only way to fill in the gaps in the information about the student is to rely on stereotypes in order to derive a judgment. Hence, it makes sense to speculate that inservice as well as preservice teachers would show stereotypical biases in their handling of student misbehavior, which is one of the main tasks involved in classroom management.

## **Handling Students' Misbehavior - A Critical Part of Classroom Management**

Classroom management is broadly defined as all actions undertaken to create or to maintain order in class (Emmer & Stough, 2001). Even though many tasks are included in this very broad definition (e.g., building a positive teacher-student relationship or implementing instruction; Jones, 1996), preservice (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006) as well as inservice teachers (Tsouloupas, Carson, Matthews, Grawitch, & Barber, 2010) are mostly concerned with discipline problems and strategies that will help them handle

student misbehavior. Ineffectively managed discipline problems result in high feelings of stress in teachers (Clunies-Ross, Little, & Kienhus, 2008), and this might, in turn, reinforce their use of ineffective strategies.

Punishments and sanctions have been shown to be quite ineffective as they often result in the more frequent occurrence of student misbehavior rather than in reductions (Lewis, Romi, Qui, & Katz, 2005). With respect to reactive strategies, teachers tend to respond to actual student misbehavior instead of applying proactive strategies in order to prevent student misbehavior before it occurs (Safran & Oswald, 2003). However, whatever proactive strategy teachers apply, sometimes students disrupt the lesson even in the face of good classroom managers, and then reactive strategies must come into play. Aside from very severe student misbehavior such as physical aggression, which does not occur often (Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, & Conway, 2014), punishments and harsh strategies have been found to be less effective (Turnbull et al., 2002) and should therefore be avoided.

Because most student misbehavior is mild (Kulinna, Cothran, & Regualos, 2006), interventions in which teachers do not overreact and punish these minor misbehaviors tend to be best (Allday, 2011). For example, when misbehavior is very minor, planned ignoring (Brophy, 1995; Gable, Hester, Rock, & Hughes, 2009) or nonverbal responses such as staring at the student can be effective (Kodak, Northup, & Kelley, 2007). These two intervention strategies correspond with suggestions for good classroom management, as they allow teachers to follow the instructional plan and to intervene—at least when they use nonverbal responses—without interfering with their ability to instruct the rest of the class (Doyle, 2006).

In order to prevent students' misbehavior, teachers frequently establish clear classroom rules, procedures, and rituals, which provide the students with clear and consistent patterns of the behavior teachers will accept or not (Brophy, 2006; Malone & Tietjens, 2000). Once established, teachers can use rule reminders as an intervention strategy (Allday, 2011), and this strategy has been deemed effective when the rules are consistent, are easy to understand, address the desired behavior, and are small in number (Malone & Tietjens, 2000). Another mild strategy is a brief verbal response such as calling the students' name (Brophy, 1995) or issuing a quick command (Gold & Holodynski, 2015). Positive interventions such as positive reinforcement and praise can also be effective (Gable et al., 2009). However, these strategies are reserved for positive and appropriate behaviors (Little & Akin-Little, 2008). They can be considered indirect interventions with respect to student misbehavior because such strategies are applied when the appropriate and not the inappropriate behavior has occurred (Landrum & Kauffman, 2006).

Research has shown that teachers tend to make use of these mild strategies as well as of positive interventions (Little & Akin-Little, 2008) but also apply harsher strategies such as punishments (Kulinna, 2008; Lewis et al., 2005). Such a wide range of intervention strategies has also been shown among preservice teachers (Glock, 2016b) with preservice teachers being

more likely to apply punishments as compared with experienced teachers (Tulley & Chiu, 1995). Preservice teachers theoretically know about mild and effective intervention strategies but do not believe they can be applied successfully (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012). The application of harsher intervention strategies reflects preservice teachers' needs to demonstrate authority (Wubbels, Brekelmans, den Brok, & van Tartwijk, 2006), and a more flexible way of teaching seems to develop only with practice (Berliner, 2001a). In this vein, inservice teachers focus more on applying positive reinforcement and ignoring the misbehavior (Fernández-Balboa, 1991) as well as on using proactive classroom management in order to prevent student misbehavior (McCormack, 1997).

Corresponding to the empirical findings on teacher expectations and the differential treatment of ethnic minority students, we expected that ethnic minority students would be more likely to receive an intervention than ethnic majority students, indicating a stereotypical bias in judgments. In addition, according to findings on the handling of student misbehavior, we expected that inservice teachers would be more likely to apply mild intervention strategies as compared with preservice teachers. Hence, we expected two main effects but no significant interaction between students' ethnicity and teacher expertise.

## Method

### Participants and Design

One hundred forty (113 female) inservice and 143 preservice teachers (113 female) participated in the study. Inservice teachers were on average 41.13 (SD = 11.69) years old and had a mean teaching experience of 13.77 (SD = 11.49) years. Preservice teachers' mean age was 23.99 (SD = 3.27) years, and they had an average teaching experience of 21.89 (SD = 43.32) weeks. The study had a 2 (expertise: preservice vs. inservice teachers) x 2 (students' ethnicity: ethnic minority vs. ethnic majority background) between-subjects design.

### Materials

**Student misbehavior.** We chose a description of student misbehavior previously used in other research (Glock, 2016b). The misbehavior that was described involved talking out of turn, and two different students performed the behavior: (a) an ethnic majority student and (b) an ethnic minority student. Ethnicity was indicated by the names given to the students.

**Classroom practices.** The classroom practices were derived from the literature (Gable et al., 2009): ignoring, classroom rules, nonverbal signals, and verbal responses. Participants were asked to indicate how likely they would apply these practices, all of which are mild. However, classroom management strategies that do not interrupt the lesson plan can be considered more mild than those strategies that shortly interrupt the lesson. Therefore, "ignoring" and "nonverbal signals" can be referred to as more mild than

"classroom rules" and "verbal responses", as in the latter strategies, the teacher minimally interferes.

**Demographic questionnaire.** We compiled a questionnaire for assessing participants' age and gender. Inservice teachers were asked to indicate their teaching experience in years, whereas preservice teachers were asked to report their teaching experience in weeks.

## Procedure

Inservice teachers were visited in their schools, whereas preservice teachers were tested in the rooms of the university. After providing informed consent, participants were told that they would be presented with the description of a misbehaving student and that they should imagine that this student was a member of the class they were currently teaching. Half of the participants read about an ethnic majority student, and the other half read about an ethnic minority student. After reading, participants were provided with the four different classroom practices. For each practice, participants were asked to indicate the likelihood that they would apply this practice on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not likely at all*) to 7 (*very likely*). When participants had finished these ratings, they were administered the demographic questionnaire, thanked, and debriefed.

## Results

The ratings were submitted to a 2 (expertise: preservice vs. inservice teachers)  $\times$  2 (students' ethnicity: ethnic minority vs. ethnic majority background) MANOVA, which revealed significant main effects of expertise,  $F(4, 276) = 35.20$ , Wilks'  $\Lambda = .66$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.34$ , and students' ethnicity,  $F(4, 276) = 13.44$ , Wilks'  $\Lambda = .84$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.16$ , as well as a significant interaction,  $F(4, 276) = 13.35$ , Wilks'  $\Lambda = .84$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.16$ . To explore these effects further, ANOVAs were computed on each classroom practice.

### Ignoring

The ANOVA on ignoring revealed no significant main effect of ethnicity,  $F(1, 279) = 0.06$ ,  $p = .80$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$ . The main effect of expertise was not significant,  $F(1, 279) = 3.43$ ,  $p = .07$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$ . The two-way interaction was significant,  $F(1, 279) = 7.90$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$ . Whereas experienced teachers were more likely to ignore the ethnic minority student ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ) than the ethnic majority student ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ),  $t(138) = 2.07$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = 0.35$ , preservice teachers showed a trend in the opposite direction as they were more likely to ignore the ethnic majority student ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ) than the ethnic minority student ( $M = 2.59$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ),  $t(141) = 1.89$ ,  $p = .06$ ,  $d = 0.33$ .

### Nonverbal Signals

The ANOVA computed on the likelihood of nonverbal signals revealed no significant main effect of ethnicity,  $F(1, 279) = 3.24$ ,  $p = .07$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$ .

The main effect of expertise was significant,  $F(1, 279) = 127.63, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.13$ . Experienced teachers ( $M = 5.90, SD = 1.73$ ) were more likely to apply this intervention strategy than preservice teachers ( $M = 4.54, SD = 1.86$ ). The main effect was qualified by a significant two-way interaction,  $F(1, 279) = 14.05, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.05$ . Experienced teachers' responses did not differ between the ethnic minority ( $M = 5.69, SD = 1.85$ ) and ethnic majority student ( $M = 6.10, SD = 1.60$ ),  $t(138) = 1.39, p = .17, d = 0.24$ , whereas preservice teachers were more likely to nonverbally respond to the ethnic minority ( $M = 5.13, SD = 1.96$ ) than to the ethnic majority student ( $M = 3.97, SD = 1.58$ ),  $t(141) = 3.89, p < .001, d = 0.65$ .

## Verbal Responses

The ANOVA conducted on verbal responses yielded significant main effects of ethnicity,  $F(1, 279) = 33.21, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.11$ , and expertise,  $F(1, 279) = 49.63, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.15$ . Participants were more likely to respond verbally to the ethnic minority ( $M = 5.68, SD = 1.63$ ) than to ethnic majority student ( $M = 4.50, SD = 2.23$ ). Preservice teachers ( $M = 4.35, SD = 2.27$ ) were less likely to respond verbally than experienced teachers ( $M = 5.81, SD = 1.46$ ). The two main effects were qualified by a significant two-way interaction,  $F(1, 279) = 35.46, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.11$ . Among experienced teachers, no differences between the ethnic minority ( $M = 5.79, SD = 1.38$ ) and ethnic majority student emerged ( $M = 5.83, SD = 1.55$ ),  $t(138) = 0.16, p = .87, d = 0.03$ . However, preservice teachers were more likely to respond verbally to the ethnic minority ( $M = 3.97, SD = 1.58$ ) than to the ethnic majority student ( $M = 3.97, SD = 1.58$ ),  $t(141) = 7.41, p < .001, d = 1.24$ .

## Rule Reminder

The ANOVA on reminding the students about the class rules revealed significant main effects of ethnicity,  $F(1, 279) = 39.87, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.13$ , and expertise,  $F(1, 279) = 106.21, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.28$ . The ethnic minority student ( $M = 5.46, SD = 1.58$ ) was more likely to be reminded of the class rules than the ethnic majority student ( $M = 4.28, SD = 2.23$ ). Experienced teachers ( $M = 5.84, SD = 1.37$ ) were more likely than preservice teachers ( $M = 3.89, SD = 2.10$ ) to apply this intervention strategy. The two-way interaction was significant,  $F(1, 279) = 38.56, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.12$ . Whereas preservice teachers were more likely to remind the ethnic minority student ( $M = 5.09, SD = 1.72$ ) than the ethnic majority student ( $M = 2.74, SD = 1.77$ ) of the class rules,  $t(141) = 8.03, p < .001, d = 1.35$ , experienced teachers did not show differences in their tendency to remind ethnic minority ( $M = 5.85, SD = 1.32$ ) versus ethnic majority students ( $M = 5.83, SD = 1.43$ ),  $t(138) = 0.08, p = .93, d = 0.01$ .

## Discussion

The results revealed some expected as well as some unexpected but nonetheless interesting findings. Overall, experienced teachers were more likely than preservice teachers to apply milder intervention strategies such as ignoring and nonverbal responses. These allow teachers to follow the

lesson plan, while simultaneously intervening students' misbehavior without interrupting the current activities. This finding is in line with previous research, which suggested that preservice teachers do not really believe in the effectiveness of these mild interventions (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012) and feel the need to demonstrate authority (Wubbels et al., 2006), which they do not think they can do by using only mild interventions. Moreover, preservice teachers relied on their stereotypical expectations when judging the likelihood of the application of the different intervention strategies. They were more likely to apply most mild intervention strategies to the ethnic minority student, while simultaneously more often apply ignoring as the mildest intervention strategy to ethnic majority students' misbehavior.

Even though we provided our participants with very sparse information, and such situations are assumed to increase stereotyping (Madon et al., 1998), preservice teachers are particularly susceptible to relying on stereotypes, even in a more naturalistic setting. Teaching is stressful (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001) and requires teachers to manage an abundant number of tasks simultaneously under high cognitive demand (Santavirta, Solovieva, & Theorell, 2007). This holds true in particular for preservice teachers who have not yet had the opportunity to develop routines that can help them free up some of their cognitive resources (Berliner, 2001b). It is these situations in which cognitive resources are tied up that lead to stereotyping even when the information about the target person may be rich (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991; Pendry & Macrae, 1994).

Preservice teachers' stereotypical biases can also have a profound influence on their students' future classroom behavior (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). Preservice teachers begin their teaching careers treating ethnic minority students differently in the face of the same misbehavior performed by an ethnic majority student. Students are particularly sensitive to teachers' fairness (Shapiro, 1990), and they see the main cause for their misbehavior as the result of the unfair treatment by their teachers (Miller, Ferguson, & Byrne, 2000; Miller, Ferguson, & Moore, 2002). Students of unfair teachers often react with violence (Vieno, Gini, Santinello, Lenzi, & Nation, 2010) and aggressive behavior (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Such behaviors are serious misbehaviors to which teachers might respond with punishment as a last resort (Wubbels, 2011). In turn, teachers' own aggressions and harsh interventions result in a higher frequency of student misbehavior (Lewis et al., 2005). These processes reduce teachers' potential to build positive relationships with their students (Ferguson, 2003).

However, positive teacher-student relationships have been found to be crucial for effective classroom management (Marzano & Marzano, 2003), reducing student misbehavior (Chiu & Chow, 2011), and increasing student motivation (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011).

Our results consistently indicated that experienced teachers did not treat students differently depending on their ethnic background, whereas preservice teachers did. This result implies that teachers pursue one main goal when it comes to student misbehavior, namely, re-establishing order in class and thereby neglecting the ethnic background of the student. This might reflect the idea that people do not process information that is



irrelevant to their actual goals (Blair, 2002), and even though stereotypical expectations often work automatically, perceivers' goals can result in a difference between judgments based on stereotypes and judgments based on individual information (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). In this sense, experienced teachers might believe that mild responses to minor student misbehavior are effective classroom management strategies that work for all students alike.

Some limitations of the current research should be mentioned. Because experienced teachers did not show these stereotypical biases, it makes sense to ask when this shift occurs and whether preservice teachers can be trained in the use of effective classroom management strategies and in the appropriate—and thus fair—application of intervention strategies. Teacher educators are therefore required to overcome the gap between theory and practice (Maskan, 2007) and to implement courses in which preservice teachers can practice strategies in a safe university environment. In future research, it will be of particular interest to investigate stereotypical biases in the handling of ethnic minority and ethnic majority misbehavior by applying either a longitudinal design or by using teacher groups that are at different points in their teaching careers.

Furthermore, we did not assess preservice and inservice teachers' ethnicity. This might, however, have an impact on their interactions with students, in a way that teachers who stem from ethnic minorities themselves handle ethnic minority students differently than ethnic majority teachers. In this regard, it has been shown that teachers evaluate students more positively if they share an ethnic background (Downey & Pribesh, 2004). Above that, ethnic minority preservice teachers have generally more positive attitudes toward ethnic minority students (Hachfeld, Schroeder, Anders, Hahn, & Kunter, 2012). Therefore, future studies should survey teachers' ethnicity as well.

Concerning inservice teachers, information about their school districts were not raised, although it might play a role. School districts vary in their number of ethnic minority students (Ditton & Krüsken, 2007; Häußermann, 2002). This might have consequences on teachers' practices as well, as inservice teachers' experience with ethnic minority students differs as a function of their respective schools. Teachers with regular contact to students from ethnic minorities might change their stereotypes toward this student group (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998) and might consequently also change their classroom practices.

We conducted a laboratory study and neglected to use a more naturalistic setting in the classroom. This procedure allowed us to draw stringent causal conclusions regarding the influence of students' ethnic background. Even though previous research that reported differences in the handling of student misbehavior in a naturalistic setting had controlled for student misbehavior (Bradshaw et al., 2010), some problems remained. "Real" students differ not only in their ethnicity but also in their achievement, motivation, intelligence, attractiveness, and so on. These variables might contribute to how teachers handle student misbehavior. In this vein, research has, for instance, shown that attractive students' misbehavior is perceived as less severe (Dion, 1972)

and punished less (Sharma, 1987). Relatedly, high performing students have been found to actually show lower rates of misbehavior (Weishef & Peng, 1993), and this might also contribute to teachers' application of intervention strategies, particularly when teachers develop such stereotypical expectations.

Finally, we presented our participants with the different intervention strategies and did not provide them with the opportunity to freely choose their preferred strategy. Such a procedure might prove valuable in future investigations because research has shown that ethnic minority students are punished more harshly in comparison with ethnic majority students in naturalistic settings (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Hence, it would make sense to ask whether teachers' preferred strategies for responding to student misbehavior would also differ in the experimental setting we applied in this study. Relatedly, the student misbehavior was fixed in our study, too. Only talking out of turn and no other misbehaviors were presented. However, it might also be of interest to investigate not only whether preservice and inservice teachers differ in their responses to more severe misbehavior but also whether teachers' expectations would also be found to bias these responses depending on students' ethnicity.

Despite these limitations, it is becoming more and more important to reduce ethnic biases in the handling of student misbehavior, particularly when considering the large wave of refugees entering Europe in the last few years. It is not only the children of the refugees but also the refugees themselves (given that they are under 25 years and illiterate; Spiegel Online, 2017) who are attending schools and are becoming members of the classrooms teachers are working in. In this sense, our research highlights the need for a more fine-grained understanding of the influence of teachers' stereotypical expectations on their judgments and behavior, not only in the domain of academic achievement but also in their daily interactions in the classroom. ■

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