The Classroom Management Experiences of Educators in Diverse Classrooms: Informing Teacher Education
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Abstract
The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the phenomenological nature of seventy-two education professionals and to report findings to express the cognitive strategies employed regarding classroom management. The research questions sought to determine participant’s perceptions of classroom management strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners in the classroom. The research study findings suggest that in any classroom with management strategies, students respond to caring teachers. Therefore, a culturally responsive classroom that provides differentiation of classroom strategies appears to be the best for students with diverse needs. These results can inform teacher educators as to the strategies identified by current teachers as most effective in providing classroom management for diverse classrooms.

Introduction
Commonly, teachers think of consequences when referring to classroom management tools. This phenomenon can be exacerbated with diverse learners such as English Language Learners (ELL), children with special needs, or culturally sensitive children. Ducharme & DiAdamo (2005) proposed that behavior problems are identified at an increased rate in children with special needs to include noncompliance. However, this can be an issue of disproportionality caused by a lack of adequate effective classroom management strategies necessary to meet the needs of all diverse learners. Therefore, all forms of diversity in the classroom need to be addressed to maintain effective classroom management and to support optimum learning.

Culturally Responsive Classroom
Culturally Responsive Teaching ensures that teachers “make standards-based content and curricula accessible to students and teach in a way that students can understand” (Rajagopal, 2011, para. 1). Further, culturally responsive teaching strives to honor, celebrate, and respect students’ differences (LaCour, 2016).

The same concepts of culturally responsive teaching can be applied to classroom management to ensure equality while providing a classroom environment that meets the needs of all diverse learners. By establishing classroom management strategies which honor, celebrate, and respect students’ differences, teachers can address behavioral concerns of all students in the classroom. Further, classroom management strategies should be accessible to all learners and be provided in a way that all learners can understand.

Barriers to Classroom Management
Addressing all the needs of a diverse classroom can be a daunting task for any education stakeholder. Many times, teachers, particularly new teachers, do not possess adequate skills or experiences to establish adequate classroom management strategies to meet the needs of all diverse learners in the classroom (Freiberg, 2002). Yet, classroom management is one of the primary responsibilities for education professionals. Often teachers develop their strategies
through their own experiences in the classroom, essentially through trial and error which can take several years (Freiberg, 2002).

Learning can be difficult in any case, but this is especially true if the classroom is a chaotic environment (Barbetta, Norona, & Bicard, 2005). Thus, classroom management strategies become a daily struggle for a productive classroom where learning must take place. In a productive classroom, teachers have considerable influence over student behavior and management. Therefore, the question becomes, “Are we doing it right?”

To address this important question, this research study sought to ascertain the cognitive strategies of professionals working in today’s classrooms regarding classroom management. It is important for all education stakeholders to know what professionals think is important and what they think are the right solutions to management in a diverse classroom. Seventy-two research participants volunteered to participate in a questionnaire assessment, independent interviews, and member checking focus groups to provide a snapshot representative of their own experiences.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the phenomenological nature of seventy-two education professionals and to report findings to express the cognitive strategies employed regarding classroom management. The research questions proposed were: (a) What classroom management strategy do you find to be the most effective in meeting the needs of diverse learners in your classroom; (b) What barrier do you most experience that prevents classroom management strategies from being effective with diverse learners in your classroom; and (c) How do you overcome this barrier? OR if you were unable to overcome this barrier, what would help you overcome this barrier?

Phenomenology is the qualitative research design used in this study. In phenomenological research, the researcher seeks to utilize the participants’ own words to describe the experiences of individuals who have lived the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenological research focuses on experiences and the meaning of those experiences on the participants in their natural settings (Groenewald, 2004; Padilla-Diaz, 2015; Schram, 2003). All the participants in this research study were educators with lived experience in real classrooms and school settings (see Table 1).

Participants

A variety of education stakeholders responded to a questionnaire assessment with a response rate of 72 related to classroom management for diverse learners in today’s classrooms. Participant professionals’ opinions about the importance of classroom management on a scale of 1 to 5, ranged from a .72 response percentage for not that important to a 41.76 percentage for very important. Interestingly, the study participants reported one year of experience at 36.72 a percentage rate to .72 percentage rate at five years of classroom experience. Another interesting finding among volunteer research participants was the wide range of professions reported as educators. Some education professionals who participated in this study were behavior specialists of different specialties and others were support personnel for instruction. One participant reported to “train soldiers.” However, all research participants held degrees at the graduate level or were currently completing graduate courses in education at the time of data collection.
Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Management</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Classroom Position</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale of 1 to 5</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.72%</td>
<td>1 36.72 ABA Program Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>2 5.04 After School Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.44%</td>
<td>3 0.00 Behavior Analyst/Therapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.92%</td>
<td>4 7.02 Early Intervention Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.76%</td>
<td>5 .72 ESE Teacher IBT Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Substitute Teacher Trains Soldiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lead Teacher Aide Speech Pathologist</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. Participants = 72

Ensuring Trustworthiness and Rigor

Qualitative validity refers to the process the researcher undergoes to verify the accuracy of the findings from the perspective of the researchers, participants, and the readers of the study (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenological researchers commonly conduct member checking to corroborate the findings with the participants as a means to ensure validity (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). The process of member checking includes providing the participants specific components such as the themes or major findings to confirm the accuracy of the findings and to provide an opportunity for any inaccuracies to be corrected (Creswell, 2014; Simon & Goes, 2011).

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were analyzed, and emergent themes developed as a natural phenomenon of the cyclical nature of the qualitative research process. The focus of data analysis in a phenomenological study is to understand the meaning of the phenomenon (Simon & Goes, 2011). According to Creswell (2014), a phenomenological analysis should include horizontalization of data referring to the listing of all relevant information with equal weight, grouping information into units of meaning or themes, including the participants’ descriptions where applicable, and analyzing the data for common elements repeated by the participants (Simon & Goes, 2011).

Results

The volunteer education professionals reported a plethora of strategies to employ for management in the classroom (see Table 2).
Table 2. What classroom management strategy do you find to be the most effective in meeting the needs of diverse learners in your classroom?

Themes

Positive Reinforcement (24)  Rewards (13)  Consequences (11)

Subthemes

Diversity (10)  Expectation (10)  Individual Needs (10)
Token Economy (9)  Procedures (8)  Consistency (7)
Effectiveness (6)  Rules (6)  Cultural Responsive (5)
Praise (5)  Schedule (5)  Visual (5)

Note. Consequences

Positive reinforcement was the most common strategy reported by the participants. Using rewards and consequences were also thematic. Research supports the idea of positive reinforcement. The use of positive behavior supports and the avoidance of common classroom mistakes (Alderman, 1999) contribute to the development of a psychologically supporting environment. Specific reinforcements such as tokens and praise were noted by the education professionals as effective.

Clear expectations along with clearly communicated standard procedures, predictable rules, and a consistent schedule were also reported by the study participants as the most effective classroom management strategies. Smith & Bondy (2017) support that maintaining a predictable schedule and routines will help students feel secure and decrease anxiety, frustrations, and challenging behaviors. Helping students stay aware of the schedule and informing them of any changes to the schedule will help students know the expectations.

Diversity, noted as thematic and cultural responsiveness noted as a subtheme of the question about classroom management strategies, was also reported by the researchers. Moreover, an awareness of learning styles of students and making an attempt to address these learning styles was also noted in this research study. A large variety of classroom management strategies became evident in the data analysis process. Although, some education professionals reported classroom management of low importance, the scope and experience of corrective strategies were evident in this study.

Barriers to effective classroom management strategies became evident in the data responses (see Table 3).
Table 3. What barrier do you most experience that prevents classroom management strategies from being effective with diverse learners in your classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity (9)</td>
<td>Support Staff (8)</td>
<td>Individuality (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subthemes**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated</td>
<td>Expectation (5)</td>
<td>Home (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies (5)</td>
<td>Motivation (5)</td>
<td>Time (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Consistency*

Education professionals appeared to have more focused thoughts regarding how effective these strategies are with diverse learners in the classroom.

Smith & Bondy (2007) report an important barrier regarding the health of the mother during prenatal care. In addition, inadequate health care of the student and maltreatment in form of negligence and/or physical and emotional injury (Zirpoli & Melloy, 2001) can play a role in the classroom behavior of children. Social factors, such as racial discrimination and poverty can cause severe stress (Barkley, 1997).

Education professionals reported the importance of support staff and the family to help with motivation and differentiated instruction for children in the classroom. The individuality of students was also thematic with the study participants. Diversity of this kind is as important to some of the education professionals as other reported types of diversity. Addressing all forms of diversity should be a top priority for all educators.

How do educators over these barriers? (see Table 4).

Table 4. How do you overcome this barrier? OR if you were unable to overcome this barrier, what would help you overcome this barrier?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcement (8)</td>
<td>Consistency (6)</td>
<td>Expectations (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication (5)</td>
<td>Differentiated Instruction (5)</td>
<td>Peer Students (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support Staff (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Culturally Responsive Classrooms*

Again, help from support staff, peer students, or reinforcement of any kind remained a high priority for the research participants. Consistency and expectations also became major themes when answering this question. Communication is also a common theme across the research questions. Even though the education professionals that participated in this study and...
the low number of years of experience they had, it became evident that the participants had knowledge of classroom management strategies.

**Conclusion**

The focus on experiences of phenomenological research design suits this research study’s purpose of understanding classroom management strategies of diverse learners. There were several themes that emerged both within and across research questions; communication, family and staff support, motivation, consistency, and expectations. Researchers as well as education participants became aware of the importance of providing a culturally responsive classroom which included differentiation of instruction to meet the needs of the diversity of the students.

Training for education professionals working with a diverse learning population in the classroom are needed to yield substantial improvements. In addition, research on multicomponent interventions could provide important data that could prove helpful. The volunteer participants in this study were somewhat informed of classroom management strategies. They also appeared to understand the difference in behavior management and other classroom management strategies even though the participants had five or less years of teaching experiences. Also, it is important to note these educators either held graduate degrees in education or were pursuing graduate degrees in education.

As with any classroom management strategies, students respond to caring teachers. One fundamental strategy in working with defiant behavior is to establish and maintain a psychologically supportive classroom environment (Patrick, Turner, Meyer, & Midgley, 2003). Therefore, a culturally responsive classroom that provides differentiation of classroom strategies appears to be the best for students with diverse needs.

The results of this research can be used to inform teacher education programs regarding the classroom management strategies identified as most effective in meeting the needs of diverse learners in the current classroom. Through these results, teacher educators can identify those strategies which have been perceived as most positively addressing diverse learners. These strategies can be integrated into curriculum to ensure that pre-service teachers have experience with these strategies prior to entering the classroom. Further, the barriers most often experienced by these educators, as well as the means for overcoming barriers, have been identified. By understanding effective strategies and the barriers experienced by current educators in the field, teacher educators can better prepare pre-service teachers to meet the needs of all diverse learners in today’s classroom setting.

**References**


Rajagopal, K. (2011). *Create Success!* ASCD.

