

THE EFFECT OF THE PRACTICUM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT BY PRESERVICE TEACHERS.

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ABSTRACT

Classroom management has moved beyond the control of behaviour to the recognition of teacher action to create supportive learning and teaching environments in schools that face complex and changing needs. For preservice teachers, how to manage their classrooms is a very important and vital pedagogical skill to acquire. The skill and knowledge associated with classroom management can be provided through theoretical preparation courses and field teaching experiences. The role of teacher educators is to help preservice teachers develop a base that will facilitate acquisition of superior knowledge and skill in teaching and managing their specialised subject area by linking the theoretical with the practical. The field teaching experience or practicum is seen as an important part and influence in this process.

The aim of this paper is to investigate how a group of 75 preservice specialist physical and health education teachers develop and implement their classroom management systems. Their classroom management concerns, problems, strategies and influences will be analysed. The effect of the practicum, of mastery of the teaching situation gained through progression from 2nd to 4th year together with gender differences will be analysed to detect group changes in patterns and absolute level of responses.

Results of the study gained through quantitative analysis of the data will be given and interpreted. Recommendations will be made for the provision of more effective

pedagogical programs and
strategies to assist future preservice teachers develop classroom
management skills.

Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in
Education Conference 1994, The
University of Newcastle NSW, 27 November © 1 December 1994

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√BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

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Classroom management is broader than the notion of student discipline. It includes all the things that teachers must do to foster student involvement and cooperation in class activities in order to establish a productive working and learning environment (Sanford, Emmer and Clements 1983). Research has shown that a well managed classroom is a task oriented predictable environment where students know what is expected of them and how to succeed. In such a class most students make good achievement gains (Brewer, 1988; Brophy, 1979; Everston & Harris, 1992; Good, 1982; Martin & Norwich, 1991).

Classroom management is a major dimension of effective teaching together with the other tasks of instruction which teaching encompasses: student evaluation, curriculum development and student welfare. The centrality of classroom management to the teacher's role as well as its relationship with learning make it an important area for preservice training and teacher education programs. Research supports this view that the most important pedagogical skill novice teachers need to possess is how to manage their classrooms (Tisher, Fyfield, & Taylor, 1979; Veenman, 1984; Winitzky, 1992) and it continues to be one of the main areas of concern and anxiety for preservice teachers (Cairns, 1981).

The complexity of classroom management has been reported by Doyle, 1986; Emmer, 1984; Emmer & Everston, 1981; Sanford, Emmer & Clemments, 1983. Teacher concerns (Fuller, 1969), common behaviour problems, novice teachers' lack of assertive and managerial skills together with the mental processes and beliefs about teaching (Alder, 1984; Boroko, Cone, Russo & Shalverson, 1979; Short & Short, 1989) have all been shown to contribute to this complex teaching task.

Whilst there is agreement among teacher educators about the relevance and need to provide professional preparation for prospective teachers with the aim of them emerging as competent classroom managers, the content of such courses is often the centre of debate. Most preservice teachers engage in a longitudinal program of professional preparation involving content, methodology and practicum components which aim to equip them for their future teaching roles. The task of teacher educators is to provide students with an appropriate balance of these components in addition to supervision, guidance and support to develop their skills to a point where they can become effective teachers.

Field teaching or practicum comprises a critical component of the preservice phase of teacher development (Fullerton, 1993) and Haberman (1982) describes it as the heart and mind of teacher preparation. Research, however indicates there is a lack of articulation between practicum experiences and course work during training (Barnes, 1987; Watts, 1987) which often leads to the theoretical and practical components functioning in isolation rather than complementing each other. There is a need to develop unifying links between the various stages of teacher education, from academic and pedagogical preparation to practicum experiences.

Research into concerns of preservice teachers have indicated the value of their use as a presage variable that may influence teacher behaviour in the classroom (Behets, 1990; Fuller, 1969; McBride, 1993; Silvernail & Costello, 1983). Concern about discipline and other management related issues are the most frequently cited topics expressed by preservice teachers when

asked about teaching experiences (Briscoe, 1972; Tonnsen & Patterson, 1992). The importance of these factors in developing an effective learning and teaching environment is well supported by research and therefore the recognition of preservice teachers' concerns in this area is vital to assist in the provision of appropriate preservice training. However within the present system the appropriateness of preservice instruction methods to the specialised subject area, the pressure of pleasing supervisors and the influences of person@environment interactions are areas of constant concern to both students and educators alike.

Through monitoring and identifying the major concerns, problems, strategies and influences relating to classroom management experienced by a group of preservice teachers at each stage of their teacher preparation course, this study aimed to identify any significant factors to assist in improving the preservice preparation of physical education teachers of the future. The practicum is accepted as a major component of a teacher's development and this study sought to monitor any change in preservice teachers' concerns, problems, strategies and influences related to classroom management as a result of the practicum experience.

Classroom management in physical education and the general term classroom refers to the general learning environment. In physical education the learning environment refers to the behavioural conditions in a gymnasium, outside field, pool or traditional class setting (Ratliff, Ratliff and Bie, 1991). In an effective learning environment students listen, follow directions, retrieve and organise equipment, line up or form into groups and work on group or individual tasks. An effective learning environment is essential for teaching and learning to occur but until such an environment is established most of the teachers' time can be spent on attending to students' behaviour and keeping students on

task.

According to Rink (1985), the management of learning in physical education has two aspects. The first involves teacher behaviours and strategies designed to influence and control student conduct and the second includes all the organisational aspects planned and implemented

by the teacher, such as the time, space, equipment and students. Most of the literature on class management focuses on student conduct and strategies to control this. However in a physical education class, organisation may be the more important factor in determining overall class quality. Poor organisation has a negative impact on how and what students learn in sports skills teaching situations and encourages poor student behaviour (Belka, 1991).

Considerable research in recent years has been devoted to the study of teacher concerns of both pre and inservice teachers with the view to identifying and addressing key concerns at appropriate times in a teachers' professional development. This research is based on the work of Fuller (1969) and her three stage developmental theory. This theory has been the basis of a number of research attempts to understand physical education teacher development (Behets, 1990; Boggess, McBride & Griffey, 1985; Fung, 1993; George, 1978; McBride, 1984; McBride, 1993; Wendt & Bain, 1989; Wendt, Bain & Jackson, 1981) and this study aimed to test its validity in the Australian context. The uniqueness of a movement-oriented environment in which teachers often deal with large numbers of students as well as inadequate facilities and equipment, in addition to the administrative duties required, may place limitations on the responses to some parts of this theory. However by identifying and understanding the main concerns of preservice teachers and their occurrence in teacher development, it is hoped that assistance by teacher educators may enable preservice teachers to arrive at more mature levels of concern earlier in their teaching experiences.

Tinning (1987) viewed class control problems and concerns as inextricably linked to the curriculum and feels that it should be characterised by more student responsibility than by teacher-imposed control. He saw class control as the foremost concern of those who are beginning to teach physical education and class management as being recognised later as a necessary ingredient in maximising class control. Although some form of appropriate behaviour must be identified and observed by the class it should not be confined to a set of technical processes used to achieve ends. He suggested a continuum with teacher directed class control at one end and pupil

self@control at the other end.

Fink and Siedentop (1989) promoted a more authoritarian approach with rules relating to safety, warm up routines, participating fully, movement and use of equipment, appropriate dress and paying

attention as the most common rules and routines which must be enforced and practised at the beginning of the year or time with classes to prevent discipline problems beginning. Many writers have expressed concern about the increasing discipline and management problems encountered in the physical education setting. One of the early researchers of management methods in physical education was Kennedy (1982) who conducted an extensive study and developed an elaborate descriptive analytical system to monitor the disciplinary episodes in the physical education classroom. Siedentop (1983) also categorised student discipline problem behaviours into four main categories which he used to monitor and evaluate classroom behaviours in physical education classes. Gallahue (1985) stated that positive discipline is needed in physical education and that teachers who take steps to set boundaries of acceptable behaviour have few problems. He suggested that teachers with effective discipline practices tend to be efficient planners, good communicators, thorough assessors of behaviour and are consistent of their expectations of students. Batesky (1986) made suggestions for better management in physical education classes and these include teacher behaviours such as a planned discipline strategy, showing respect for students, and correcting but not over@reacting to behaviour. He stated that overall discipline goals should keep students on task, show them responsibility, and teach good human relations. Kirsch & McBride (1987) felt a positive learning environment will reduce problems and suggest that good student rapport, sensitivity, and understanding combined with prompt, consistent, and reliable actions from the teacher can contribute to the attainment of this positive environment. They believed teachers must be prepared to deal with discipline and have strategies to help confront problems if and when they arise.

Other particular concerns are those associated with the learning environment in physical education and,

as previously stated, class size is usually larger than other practical subjects and often many special education students with behaviour problems and learning disabilities are mainstreamed into physical education classes. The physical education teacher has to establish control over students who may have been sitting at a desk for a long period and then often have difficulty controlling their behaviour in an open arena (Rimmer, 1989). It is therefore vital for physical education teachers to develop a cohesive pupil control ideology and corresponding repertoire of control techniques and management strategies to prevent undermining the teaching and learning environment (Henkel, 1989).

The development of routines, rules and expectations at the start of the school year or teaching session with students has been revealed as highly predictive of the differential gains in achievement and attitude across the entire academic year (Brooks, 1985; Brophy & Good, 1986; Sanford, Emmer, &

Clements, 1983). Effective teachers had room arrangements, equipment storage managerial and instructional routines and class rules which were taught to students during the first few days of the school year or class. These teachers also articulated high yet realistic performance expectations and it was made clear that learning was the focus of the class. Fink and Sidentop (1989) conducted the first research into these issues as they relate to the physical education class. They studied the start of the school year strategies of seven specialist teachers with different length of teaching experience but all considered effective teachers by their peers and superiors. The results of this study showed that regardless of the time allocation, years of experience, or year level taught, each teacher had clear expectations and established basic routines. The researchers pointed to the importance of the ability to outline expectations and set routines at the start of the year and claimed that less experienced teachers do not have to be overwhelmed by managerial problems and can perform effectively if they have acquired these skills in their preservice training programs.

Class closure has also been identified as a significant physical education management concern and an area which needs close attention. After a lesson of physical activity

students are more likely to misbehave when entering the changeroom or returning to a classroom if the teacher has not spent time with students as a group settling them down and providing feedback in relation to management and organisation of upcoming lessons (Aicinena, 1991; Fink and Siedentop, 1989). While Siedentop suggested that being an effective manager is more important than being a skilled disciplinarian in physical education teaching, many teachers focus on the conduct aspect of management and neglect the organisational aspect. Preservice teachers, lacking the experience needed to predict what will happen during lesson implementation, may plan without giving enough consideration to organisation of students and equipment. Gender differences in classroom management problems experienced by male and female teachers have also been documented in international studies (Wheldall & Merrett, 1988).

It can therefore be seen that physical education teachers do have particular concerns in relation to classroom management but there is also a strong similarity to general classroom teachers in the need to establishing instructional routines, provide opportunities to practice and giving consistent and specific feedback on process behaviours. There is a universal need for teachers of all disciplines to manage well therefore attaining the degree of order necessary to facilitate learning.

After consideration of the literature and current research in the area of classroom management this study aimed to investigate how a group of preservice specialist physical education teachers implement and develop their classroom management systems. Their concerns,

problems, strategies and influences were analysed. The effect of the practicum together with experience and mastery of the teaching situation progressing from 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year was analysed to detect group changes in patterns and absolute level of responses. The research questions which evolved for this study were:

1. What are the main concerns of preservice physical education teachers?
2. What are the most common behaviour problems experienced by preservice physical education

teachers?

3. What are the most common management strategies employed by preservice physical education teachers?

4. What do preservice physical education teachers see as the greatest influence in developing their classroom management system?

5. Is there any change in preservice physical education teachers' classroom management concerns, problems, strategies and influences after the practicum experience?

6. Are there any significant differences in the classroom management concerns, problems, strategies and influences experienced by male and female preservice physical education teachers after practicum?

7. Is there any difference between 2nd, 3rd and 4th Year preservice physical education teacher's classroom management concerns, problems, strategies and influences experienced after practicum?

METHODOLOGY

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The sample selected for this study was a group of 75 second, third and fourth Year Bachelor of Education (Physical & Health Education) preservice teachers. Data for the study were collected by means of a questionnaire which was piloted in 1992 with a group of 30 students. The piloted questionnaire was analysed and clarified through focus group discussions and the refined questionnaire was administered in 1993 to the sample group two weeks prior to a mid year 40week practicum experience and again one week following the practicum. \sqrt

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The questionnaire had five sections with Part A © Background Information seeking general information relating to sex, age, stage of preservice training and pre or post practicum. Section B © Physical Education Concerns instrument was adapted from the Teacher Concerns

Questionnaire Questionnaire developed by George (1978) and based on Fuller's theory of teacher development which identifies three main stages beginning teachers pass through, namely self, task and impact. Part C © Classroom Management Problems Instrument was based on a questionnaire developed by Wheldell and Merrett (1988) to determine the types and frequency of troublesome classroom behaviours in secondary schools. Part D was the Management Strategies instrument compiled by the researcher which sought to identify the most commonly used management strategies and were based on those identified by Tierney et al (1990) and represented preventative, supportive and corrective methods. The final part of the instrument, Part E © Influences on Classroom Management asked respondents to consider the most commonly cited sources of influence and rate their influence on the development of their management systems.

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√DATA ANALYSISf

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The data generated by this study was subjected to computer analysis using SPSS for the VAX/VMS using simple descriptive descriptive statistics and six attitudinal measurement scales were developed for the four sections within the questionnaire to provide valid and reliable measures for analysis of relationships between the data. Physical Education Concerns had three subscales identified when constructed and these were validated by undertaking factor analysis and Cronbach alpha reliability calculated to determine the unidimensionality and internal consistency of these scales. These items loaded on their intended scales (Table 1) and the remaining Part C, Part D and Part E of the questionnaire were refined using Cronbach alpha reliability measures with items being discarded if they were reducing the reliability of a scale when that scale had a reliability lower than .7.

Once the final items in the six scales were established the

relationships between the data were analysed to determine gender and preservice stage differences and any significant changes as a result of the practicum experience. The three methods employed included T-tests, a number analyses of variance to determine any significant differences in the six scales and, where appropriate, the Scheffe procedure was then employed to distinguish where significant differences occurred between responses from 2nd, 3rd and 4th year preservice teachers. The 0.05 probability level was required for all tests of significance. Missing data was not a constraint in this study.

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RESULTS

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Analysis of the questionnaire data provided descriptive information for each part of the questionnaire which enabled the first four research questions to be answered. Firstly Part B © Physical Education Concerns responses (Table 1) found the main concerns of the preservice physical education teachers were those associated with Self, "doing well when the supervisor was present" and "maintaining class control".

Table 1

Secondly, analyses of the responses to Part C © Classroom Management Problems (Table 2), highlighted the most common behaviour problems experienced by preservice physical education teachers to be "talking out of turn" and "idleness/slowness".

Thirdly Part D © Classroom Management Strategies (Table 3) indicated the teachers in this study used the preventative strategies of "clear directions" and "clear expectations" most often in their physical education classes.

Finally this group of preservice teachers responded to Part E © Influences on Classroom Management

(Table 4) by identifying the "practicum experience" as having the greatest influence on the development of their management systems.

The data were examined to determine if the relationships between the variable of sex and stage of training in the pre and post practicum responses. The items in the questionnaire were refined into six scales (Table 5) after confirmation of their reliability and validity. Once this was established the mean scores for the pre and post practicum responses were contrasted using two-tailed t-tests and resulted in a significant decrease in the six scales.

Secondly, investigations into the relationship between the variables of sex and the six scales revealed that for this group of preservice teachers the males and females recorded similar responses with the two areas of exception. The female response to Part D © Strategies indicated they anticipated or were required to employ management strategies more often than their male counterparts. The female students also recorded the practicum experience as a significantly greater influence on the development of a classroom management system than the male preservice teachers.

When the variables of both sex and stage were analysed for interaction with the practicum experience,

it revealed a significant response for the Concerns © Impact scale by the 4th year female students who indicated they adopted a student oriented learning approach based on catering for the pupil's growth and needs.

Finally, further analysis of the scale responses revealed significantly different concerns, problems, strategies and influences for each stage of preservice training with the exception of the Concerns © Self scale which remained constant. However, when the differences between the groups were analysed for each scale, the 3rd year preservice teachers in this study recorded significantly lower responses to the Problems and Strategies scales in both pre and postpracticum indicating the possible effects of the preservice preparation course restructuring and the lower pressure experienced in the mid-course stage of preservice training.

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√DISCUSSIONf

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This study has shown that the development of classroom management is recognised by these students as an important part of their preservice training and the practicum is an significant component of process. The results supported the developmental nature of acquiring skills in classroom management and would be further validated by conducting a longitudinal study with a group of preservice teachers as they progress through their training into inservice teaching.

As in previous studies, the preservice teachers in this study indicated reduced concerns after the practicum which provided teaching experience and an opportunity to trial their management systems. Discipline and management continues to be a strong concern throughout preservice teacher training. Preservice teachers need assistance and guidance from both tertiary and school personnel in assuming sole responsibility for class management in a non@custodial way. Knowledge of these patterns of concerns during professional preparation should be used by tertiary educators to provide assistance to prevent or alleviate some of these concerns at the appropriate stage of development.

This study confirmed the existence of differences in relation to management problems experienced and the frequency of strategies employed by male and female physical education teachers. This indicates a need for both tertiary educators and cooperating teachers to provide assistance to the female preservice teacher in developing appropriate strategies and a challenging curriculum for the female students. Research has shown that good management and organisation must focus more on content and the substance of what is being managed and less on behaviour outcomes. In the current

climate of school reform pupils need to be challenged, given responsibility and problem solving opportunities rather than repetitive learning exercises (Everston and Harris, 1992).

The results of this study reinforced the value of preventative and supportive strategies necessary for effective management and discipline. The need for expectations to be clearly defined, the establishment of routines and the provision of positive reinforcement and feedback about both performance and behaviour confirm previous research as basic to effective classroom management practice (Doyle, 1990; Emmer, Everston, & Anderson, 1980; Everston, 1989). Finally, the study validated the practicum's role as an occasion for learning to develop and implement management skills by preservice teachers (Turney et al., 1985; Zeichner, 1986). Researchers in the area of practicum have argued that it should encourage preservice teachers to inquire, experiment and reflect on their teaching practices in addition to acquiring "craft" knowledge from the inschool experience. This type of experience combined with sound specialist knowledge will lead to the practicum experience becoming more than a process of osmosis. It is hoped that from this base educators can develop a relevant theoretical and practical framework to assist future preservice teachers in developing, implementing and maintaining classroom management practices to support learning in physical education.

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