

# Differences between experienced and student teachers' perceptions and interpretations of classroom management events

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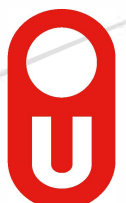
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## Differences in experienced and student teachers' perceptions and interpretations of classroom management events

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Developing teaching expertise requires learning to manage the complexity of the classroom to achieve meaningful student learning outcomes (i.e., effective classroom management). This ability is considered a distinctive attribute of expert teachers (Hattie, 2003). Before engaging in other aspects of professional development, teachers must first become competent, effective classroom managers (Berliner, 1988). Yet beginning teachers typically struggle with classroom management and cite it as a major source of concern (van Tartwijk, Veldman, & Verloop, 2011).

Differences in the ways beginning and experienced teachers perceive and interpret the complexity of the classroom explain the challenge effective classroom management presents for beginners. Research has shown that when visually processing the classroom, experts relate what they view to their own classroom and teaching practice, using well-developed classroom knowledge to interpret what is happening, whereas novices lack the experience and practical knowledge to relativize their perception of classroom events. Experts cautiously evaluate and interpret classroom events, often qualify their interpretations, and convey an awareness of myriad variables affecting the classroom, even when this information is not visually present. Novices, however, give inconsistent, 'flat' interpretations which often contradict those offered by experts. (Carter, Cushing, Sabers, Stein, & Berliner, 1988).

To better understand classroom management skill development, we investigated how teachers at different stages of professional development describe classroom management. We were interested in how novices diverged from experts in their perceptions and interpretations, and what these divergences might indicate about classroom management concerns. The questions addressed here are:

- (1) How do expert and novice teachers' classroom perceptions differ when viewing lesson videos?
- (2) Which teaching and learning topics do teachers focus on, and how do expert and novice teachers differ in this respect?

### Methods & Materials:

There were 39 participants: 20 experienced teachers and teacher-trainers (experts); 19 student teachers (novices). Authentic lesson videos, ranging in length from two to four minutes, served as stimuli. Videos were selected on the basis of displaying pertinent classroom management issues, making them likely to promote participant commentary. Shorter scene segments were used for cued retrospective recall interviews in which participants were asked to comment on which classroom events they observed and how they were relevant to classroom management.

Participants' verbalizations were coded to identify qualitative differences based on a coding scheme developed using grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006). Four categories of codes emerged from the data. These referred to descriptions and interpretations of events, the main topic or focus expressed in the statement, the time reference (contemporaneous, prospective, or retrospective) expressed, and the aggregated cognitive

processing expressed. The first three categories applied to idea units, which were sentence-like segments containing a clear core idea, and the fourth to participants' complete, non-segmented descriptions. To validate the coding scheme, two coders coded 31% of the verbal data and the interrater reliability was calculated for each code category. Krippendorff's alpha results for all four categories ranged between 0.88 and 0.98, averaging at 0.93.

### Results:

Mixed-design ANOVA analyses were conducted with expertise level as the between-subject variable and specific codes per type as within-subject variables. Although all four coding categories were analyzed and showed main effects for expertise, due to spatial limitations we concentrate here on codes concerning the topic and focus of participants' statements. Topic/focus codes showed a main effect for expertise,  $F(13,25) = 3.13, p = .01, \eta^2 = .62$ . Specific codes in this category were: focus on student learning; focus on discipline/rules; student on- or off-task; abnormal student behavior; typical kind of student; typical kind of situation/event; contextualized comment/suggestion; generalized comment/suggestion; self-as-teacher comment/suggestion; teacher role and influence; teacher does/says nothing; and no code applicable. Specific codes showing significant expertise differences are discussed below.

### Discussion and Conclusions:

Mixed-method analysis of the data showed a number of expertise-based effects. Regarding research question one: although novices and experts often referenced the same classroom events, their interpretations of these events was rather different, especially in terms of the topic and focus of their statements. Thus, regarding research question two: experts expressed significantly more commentary related to a focus on student learning and frequently linked student attention and behavior to the role and influence of the teacher in classroom interactions. Their statements were highly contextualized, and they often recognized and referred to typical situations occurring in the classroom. Novices' predominantly focused on describing off-task student behavior. They rarely framed classroom situations in terms of typicality and provided significantly more off-topic utterances. Novices' statements were framed more as a perceived lack of discipline in the classroom, explaining how students were inattentive, distracting, or weren't following classroom rules and behavioral norms. Although experts also frequently referred to student engagement and behavior, they consistently referenced the learning taking place in the classroom.

Differences identified between experienced and student teachers convey not only divergent perceptions, topics, and foci, they suggest differing goals of what classroom management entails, especially regarding student learning and teacher interaction. Experts' perceptions were closely connected to the goal of ensuring that learning is taking place, while novices' perceptions expressed goals connected to preserving or restoring discipline and on-task behavior. Our findings extend current theories on teachers' visual processing and reinforce the relationship between teacher expertise and student learning gains. In conjunction with further research, these findings can help support beginning teachers' professional development of the vital skill of classroom management and help bridge expertise-based gaps in student learning outcomes.

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