

Improving Practice: Community Stakeholders and Professors as Co-Educators in a University Classroom

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Abstract: We describe the creation of an authentic learning experience for pre-service teacher candidates in an elementary classroom management course. This learning experience required pre-service teacher candidates to create a research-based classroom management plan throughout the semester. Next, the pre-service teacher candidates presented their plans and procedures at a mock “Meet the Teacher.” We also describe how community stakeholders served as mock parents for this event and how pre-service teacher candidates felt presenting to people they did not know. There were valuable reflections and lessons learned from both pre-service teacher candidates and community stakeholders through this real-world learning experience.

Introduction

Multiple studies support the need for educator preparation programs to offer and/or require a course devoted to classroom management for pre-service teacher candidates (PTCs) (Klopper et al., 2019; Pierson, 2021). A well developed and structured classroom management course should assist PTCs to acquire the dispositions, strategies, and skills to build an inclusive classroom climate; establish effective rules, guidelines, and procedures; and develop proactive and corrective behavior management procedures as a blueprint for their future classrooms (Eisenman et al., 2015). Ultimately, PTCs should leave a classroom management course with an effective classroom management plan (CMP) that proactively prepares them with modifications and adaptations for use in any future classroom.

In addition to the creation of an effective CMP, PTCs should have authentic practice-based opportunities to present and explain the procedures included in their personal CMP and answer questions related to that plan in a professional, confident manner. This practice-based activity can promote self-efficacy (Rosenberg et al., 2021) and proficiency in the presentation and rationale for their CMP to future families. These authentic, practice-based opportunities should include partners who are stakeholders in the community, and who the PTCs may not know, rather than peers and professors. Inviting people from outside the walls of the university to participate in, assist with, and share lived experiences with PTCs creates a Community of Practice that supports PTCs and the larger local community (Tomkin et al., 2019). This shared experience assists PTCs to understand parents and/or guardians’

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perspectives and learn about the communities in which they may soon be teaching (Zeichner et al., 2016).

Considering this research, our teacher education faculty recently implemented a practice-based learning opportunity that required PTCs in an undergraduate elementary classroom management methods course to share and explain their CMP with mock “parents” at a mock “Meet the Teacher Night.” This type of experiential learning (Harfitt, 2018) allowed community stakeholders to share valuable knowledge and experiences with the PTCs as they served as mock parents in the college classroom. In addition, the PTCs seemed more confident in their self-efficacy and professional visions of implementing their CMP after having the opportunity to practice this task prior to their first “Meet the Teacher Night” (Junker et al., 2021). In this article, we illustrate how this Community of Practice can be a benefit to PTCs and the local community as they transfer knowledge to practice in the university classroom.

Previous Strategy: Classmates as Project Partners

In previous semesters, elementary PTCs learned specific classroom management strategies each week during class. After class, they were expected to personalize the newly learned strategies in ways that would fit their individual personality and style of management and add it to their own CMP. The components of each CMP included (a) Guidelines for Success, (b) Attention Signal, (c) Posted Classroom Rules, (d) Beginning and Ending Routines, (e) Procedures for Managing Student Work, (f) Procedures for Managing Independent Work Periods, (g) Correction Procedures for Misbehavior, (h) CHAMPS (Sprick, Sprick, Edwards, & Coughlin, 2021). Expectations for Classroom Activities and Transitions, and (i) Encouragement Procedures (Sprick et al., 2021). At the end of the semester, the PTCs created digital presentations using Google Slides or PowerPoint to illustrate the components of their personal CMPs then using a laptop, presented the information to peers. The PTCs were randomly assigned a classmate to serve as a “parent” in which they would present their CMP presentation as the “teacher.” Then the “parent” and the “teacher” would swap roles. Table 1 displays a timeline of the CMP creation and student presentation.

Although there were benefits to this strategy, it became evident that presenting to a classmate acting as a “parent” also had limitations. The classmate “parent” completed the same CMP assignment and rarely asked questions that actual family members might pose. Additionally, classmates were familiar with the educational jargon used within the plan. This realization was what prompted faculty to invite community stakeholders to serve as co-educators in the university classroom the following semester to serve as mock “parents.”

Table 1. Timeline of the CMP Creation and Presentation.

Week	CMP Components Taught	Student Tasks
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines for Success Attention Signal 	Create Guidelines for Success and Attention Signal for CMP
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Posted Classroom Rules Beginning and Ending Routines Procedures for Managing Student Work 	Create Posted Classroom Rules, Beginning and Ending Routines, Procedures for Managing Student Work, and Procedures for Managing

Week	CMP Components Taught	Student Tasks
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedures for Managing Independent Work Periods Correction Procedures for Misbehavior 	Independent Work Periods for CMP Create Correction Procedures for Misbehavior and CHAMPS Expectations for CMP
Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CHAMPS Expectations Encouragement Procedures 	Create Encouragement Procedures for CMP
Week 5		Create a digital CMP presentation
Week 6		Present digital CMP presentation at mock "Meet the Teacher"

Improved Strategy: Co-Educators in the University Classroom

The semester long CMP assignment and final presentation were the same as described above. One major difference was that classmates no longer served as "parents." Instead, community stakeholders volunteered their time and expertise to serve as stand-ins for future family members. The faculty initiated this change by compiling a list of individuals from the community who would replace peers as previously designed. The stakeholders were recruited based on expertise, availability, and/or willingness and contacted via an email correspondence that included an explanation of the class project, a timeline of project completion, and an invitation to participate. Community stakeholders (one for each pre-service teacher candidate) agreed to participate in the practice-based "Meet the Teacher" project. The community stakeholders were made up of educators and non-educators. The PTCs were informed that a mock "Meet the Teacher" event would take place during a regularly scheduled class meeting. During this event, PTCs would present and answer questions regarding their CMP to a "parent." On the day of the event, the PTCs arrived early to set up and ensure their technology was working properly. While the PTCs were preparing for their presentations, the faculty met briefly with the "parents" in another location.

The faculty reviewed the CMP assignment requirements and answered any questions from the community stakeholders. The faculty asked the community stakeholders not to introduce themselves or share any personal information until after the PTCs presentations. The practice-based opportunity was designed this way to prevent novice teacher candidates from feeling intimidated if they were paired with a current or retired educator. To ensure random pairing, each stakeholder (parent) was assigned a name tag with a number on it. After all questions were answered, the faculty escorted the stakeholders to the class where the PTCs were waiting to greet them. The community stakeholders were asked to go to the table that matched the number on their nametag. The PTCs began their presentation by introducing themselves as the classroom teacher and proceeded to explain their CMP. "Parents" were encouraged to ask the PTCs questions throughout the presentation to clarify any questions they may have about the CMP and how it might impact their "child." Table 2 displays the self-reported profession and/or previous experiences of the "Parent" or stakeholder volunteer.

Table 2. Profession and/or Previous Experiences of “Parent” Volunteer.

Parent	Profession/Previous Experiences
Parent 1	Vice-President of PTO at local elementary school, mom, and youth sports coach
Parent 2	Retired elementary principal, assistant principal, and classroom teacher
Parent 3	Director of Admissions in Higher Education
Parent 4	General Contractor and Fire Chief
Parent 5	Retired elementary teacher
Parent 6	Retired elementary principal for 25 years
Parent 7	Retired elementary principal for 25 years
Parent 8	Impact Director for a local community
Parent 9	Youth Coordinator, professor, pastor, therapist
Parent 10	HR Manager of local university, father of an elementary teacher
Parent 11	Stay at home mom, small business owner, former elementary teacher
Parent 12	Director of Teacher Education Service, Higher Education
Parent 13	Retired elementary teacher and assistant principal
Parent 14	Retired administrative assistant, higher education
Parent 15	Director of Marketing and Communication and parent of elementary student
Parent 16	Current principal at elementary school (recently elected to County Superintendent)
Parent 17	Board of Education member, former elementary teacher, and principal
Parent 18	Former elementary teacher
Parent 19	Social Media Manager, former elementary school teacher
Parent 20	Current elementary principal, former elementary teacher
Parent 21	Insurance agency, owner
Parent 22	Retired elementary/middle school teacher and principal

Feedback From Mock Parents and Pre-Service Teachers

At the conclusion of the presentations, the community stakeholders were asked to introduce themselves to the PTCs. There were many gasps and excited comments from the PTCs as the “parents” explained their experiences as current or retired educators, parents,

business owners, etc. This allowed for more meaningful discussions between the PTCs and stakeholders related to the perspectives given during the presentation. It was evident through these discussions that the stakeholders were very knowledgeable about classroom management through their previous experiences. Stakeholders that were parents were able to ask specific questions that he/she would ask their own child's teacher. In addition, stakeholders that were not parents or educators, were able to ask authentic questions about the educational jargon that was used throughout the presentation. Advice was shared, questions were answered, and encouragement was given.

At the conclusion of the practice-based experience, both PTCs and stakeholders were asked to provide feedback by completing a structured Exit Slip consisting of two prompts. While many PTCs reported feeling nervous at the start of their presentations, overall, they found the experience enjoyable. They reported an increase in confidence as they interacted with stakeholders. One PTC noted, "It was nerve wracking at first, but then if felt like I was talking to my granddad." (See Table 3). Stakeholders noted the thoughtfulness, excitement, and empathy expressed by the PTCs. They better appreciated how classroom teachers manage today's classrooms. One stakeholder concluded, "She is thinking deeply about what she will do in the classroom. Also, she was more prepared than she thought." (See Table 4).

Table 3. Pre-service Teachers' Exit Slip Questions and Responses.

Question 1: How did you feel presenting to a "Parent" that you did not know?	Question 2: What did you learn about the Meet the Teacher experience?
I had so much fun! I was very confident and enjoyed answering questions about my future classroom.	That is not scary hardly at all and go slow
Really nervous	Take it slow! It is not as big of a deal as I am making it!
I felt confident but slightly nervous	That it was very stressful, but when you are finished, you will be proud of yourself.
Excited and nervous	It was scarier in my head than it really went. That I can do it!
At first, I was nervous, but once we started talking, I was comfortable	I learned that meeting parents is not as scary as I thought.
Nervous and scared, but fun!	I learned that I need to explain things more slowly, and that I am confident with my management plan.
I felt like it went well. She asked a lot of important questions.	That I was nervous, but it was a good experience. Take it slow and not rush.
It was nerve wracking at first, but then if felt like I was talking to my granddad	Being overprepared is good. Parents will always ask questions involving their children.

Question 1: How did you feel presenting to a “Parent” that you did not know?	Question 2: What did you learn about the Meet the Teacher experience?
I felt comfortable, I felt relieved	That I can talk to my parents about my classroom plan without being scared.
I was super excited and nervous. It went really well.	How to humanize parents.
I was nervous, but I liked talking to someone I didn't know.	I talk too fast and repeat myself, but I was more prepared than I thought.
I was nervous at first, but it went smoothly, and I enjoyed it.	I need to explain in some areas better
Nervous but ready	To be confident while presenting material to parents
I felt like I did great. I was able to talk throughout the presentation and parent was able to ask questions	I learned many times parents don't understand and to explain thoroughly

Table 4. “Parents” Exit Slip Questions and Responses.

Question 1: What did you learn from your “Teacher” and/or this experience other than his/her Classroom Management Plan?	Question 2: What advice do you have for your “Teacher” about today or his/her future classroom?
Her personality was a gift as a teacher. She was confident and able to answer my questions.	Keep smiling and teaching the kids because they are our future. Remember teachers make a difference.
She cared about making sure that each student performed at their level, felt included, yet was accountable.	It's okay to discipline appropriately. Homework is not all bad.
He had a lot of great ideas and seemed excited about connecting with his future students.	Be willing to try things and if something is not working, be willing to adapt for different learning styles and backgrounds.
Very eager to learn and willing to make changes. I learned more about new things to do in the classroom today.	More guys like him are needed in elementary education.
She had a lot of information she learned in class to share but needs to practice more specifics of implementing the plan.	Anticipate actual changes to your plan as needed.

<p style="text-align: center;">Question 1: What did you learn from your “Teacher” and/or this experience other than his/her Classroom Management Plan?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Question 2: What advice do you have for your “Teacher” about today or his/her future classroom?</p>
<p>She is thinking deeply about what she will do in the classroom. Also, she was more prepared than she thought.</p>	<p>Be flexible when planning your classroom.</p>
<p>I learned that future teachers are committed to really thinking through their classroom processes.</p>	<p>Realize that sometimes in the classroom, your plan will change to “fit” the students in the classroom.</p>
<p>He was a well-spoken student that really seemed to understand individual differences in students. He seemed to truly empathize with students that don’t have an adult at home to help with assignments.</p>	<p>Remember that some parents won’t know all of the “education speak” like you do.</p>
<p>She seems to have a great mindset as to what she wants/needs in behavior management. Seems really great with younger kids.</p>	<p>Slow down and over explain. Make sure and explain procedures for everything.</p>
<p>Teachers are required to document so much information, very little is left to chance.</p>	<p>Always be an advocate and supporter of the student and parent. You're going to need them.</p>
<p>Student was very nervous. He jumped right in the presentation. He needs to work on being more personable to win the parents over.</p>	<p>Keep your fire and passion for children.</p>
	<p>Set rules and expectations from the very beginning.</p>
	<p>At one point she mentioned that students could be “wild” after a holiday break. I would suggest used different verbiage such as excited, restless, or inattentive.</p>
	<p>Be careful not to disclose too much personal information about your fears or insecurities to the parents.</p>
	<p>Keep your lines of communication open with your parents. Be firm, but fun.</p>
	<p>Learn to give “grace.”</p>
	<p>Kids thrive on structure and positive attitude.</p>

Reflections and Implications

After reading feedback from stakeholders and PTCs reviewing end of semester course evaluations, it was evident that the newly implemented practice-based opportunity was beneficial for community stakeholders and PTCs alike. The original assignment requiring PTCs to create a CMP was valuable. However, the opportunity for PTCs to present in a real-world setting with “parents” was highly effective in increasing confidence and self-efficacy for PTC’s. Some specific implications learned through the assignment include:

- Community stakeholders are willing and excited to assist in college classrooms when needed to serve as co-educators.
- Minor changes in assignments can make a big difference in the authenticity of the information and skills learned.
- Retired educators feel valuable and needed as they share their previous classroom experiences.
- Community stakeholders without educational backgrounds better understand the tasks that teachers must think through and implement daily.
- Pre-service teachers realize they can explain and answer questions related to CMPs in their future classrooms.
- Pre-service teachers can reflect and identify areas in which they need to focus to grow as a professional.
- “Parents” represent many different family structures and populations.

Final Thoughts

As educators, we spend much of our time reflecting on personal classroom practices. We can quickly identify strategies that are both effective and ineffective. However, many times we abandon an ineffective strategy because we think we have failed, or it would be too much work to “fix” the strategy. Faculty learned through this experience that a minor adjustment or update to an existing instructional strategy can make a tremendous impact on student learning. Through this project we were able to demonstrate continued faculty development and share with PTCs and stakeholders the importance of community engagement and conversation in co-education.

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