Beliefs Regarding Classroom Management Style: Differences Between Urban and Rural Secondary Level Teachers

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The primary objective of this study was to investigate differences between the classroom management style of urban and rural secondary level educators. Data were collected utilizing the Attitudes and Beliefs on Classroom Control (ABCC) Inventory and demographics. The subject pool comprised 145 certified high school teachers employed by three public school districts in the southwest. The majority of the subjects were female (59%) and from urban school districts (73%). Rural teachers scored significantly more interventionist on the Instructional Management scale of the ABCC. Urban teachers scored significantly more interventionist on the People Management scale.

Even though rural school districts account for approximately half of all districts across the nation, urban and suburban districts tend to command the focus of the researchers, media, and government officials (Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992; Stern, 1994). The size of a school and the community it serves interact to create vastly different school climates, and each has their unique set of problems and advantages (Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Lomotey & Swanson, 1989; Roweton & Bare, 1990). Because American schools vary a great deal in their complexity, they must be examined within their context (Hannaway & Talbert, 1993; Stern, 1994).

Despite contextual differences, school reform efforts as well as university teacher education programs typically focus on "generic" preparation with little attention to school context (Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Stern, 1994). In addition, current trends indicate that rural schools of the future will likely see ". . . higher unemployment, lower median income, and higher rates of poverty than metropolitan areas" further emphasizing the importance of contextual study (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, p. 115).

On the surface, urban and rural schools would seem to be mirror images of each other. In fact, many of the strengths of urban schools are weaknesses of rural ones and vice versa. For example, urban schools are able to provide a richness and variety of curriculum often not available in smaller rural schools. Even when smaller schools do offer a broad curriculum, individual students are likely to have problems in scheduling their courses since there may only be one section of each course available (Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Lomotey & Swanson, 1989). In addition, educators in smaller schools are likely to wear more hats, teach out-

side their areas of expertise, have more class preparations, and make lower salaries (Lomotey & Swanson, 1989; Stern, 1994). Therefore, rural areas are likely to be considered training ground for inexperienced teachers and administrators.

Regarding the classroom, rural teachers reportedly perceive a high level of control in five areas: determining the amount of outside assignments given, determining instructional methods, pupil discipline, determining which content and skills to include in instruction, and selecting texts and other instructional materials (Stern, 1994). This is in keeping with Schmuck and Schmuck's (1992) observations of rural classrooms. Crisscrossing the nation, they witnessed a preponderance of teacher talk, unidirectional lecturing, and very few opportunities for student interaction (e.g., cooperative learning).

Simultaneously, the literature points out that educators in urban districts are likely to have higher levels of education and be more experienced than those in rural areas (Lomotey & Swanson, 1989; Roweton & Bare, 1990; Stern, 1994). However, many urban schools seem to lack a general sense of community typically enjoyed in rural schools (Lomotey & Swanson, 1989; Roweton & Bare, 1990). Corcoran, Walker, and White (1988) explain that many urban teachers want better relationships with their students but believe their efforts are impeded by disciplinary problems, large class size, lack of time for individual interaction, busing policies, and lack of student participation in extracurricular activities.

Rural schools, on the other hand, are typically characterized not only by a strong sense of community within the school itself, but also by a sense of being a part of the larger community and an extension of the family (Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Roweton & Bare, 1990). Both teachers and students generally describe the rural experience as more intimate and personal (Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Schmuck

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& Schmuck, 1992). When describing their rural high school student experience, typical responses were, "It was a close-knit family." Perhaps it is not surprising then that Roweton and Bare's (1990) analysis revealed smaller schools in rural communities experienced lower dropout rates and graduated proportionally more students than their urban and suburban counterparts. Similarly, Herzog and Pittman (1995) report that many undergraduates major in education so they will be able to live in a rural community after graduation.

There can be little doubt that there is a strong connection between rural schools and the communities they serve, as Lomotey and Swanson (1989) explain:

> The rural school is seen as an integral part of its community by the educating professionals, students, and other community members. . . . Because the school is one of the community's primary social and cultural centers, school activities are given extensive coverage in the local media. School athletic teams receive the attention given to professional teams in urban areas. The school band is an essential element in any community celebration. School plays and musical concerts are frequently the only cultural events taking place in the community. (p. 443)

Teachers in rural settings are likely to see their students in a broader variety of contexts and have a more holistic perspective. Therefore, it seems likely that these environmental variations would lead to different perceptions and beliefs held by the teachers in these two settings. This study examines the effect of school locale on teachers' classroom management style.

In the minds of teachers, classroom management is considered one of the most enduring and widespread problems in education (Johns, MacNaughton, & Karabinus, 1989; Long & Frye, 1989; Willower, Eidell, & Hoy, 1967). Although often used interchangeably, the terms classroom management and discipline are not synonymous. Discipline typically refers to structures and rules for student behavior, and the accompanying efforts to ensure that students comply with those rules. Classroom management, on the other hand, is a broader, umbrella term describing teacher efforts to oversee a multitude of activities in the classroom including learning, social interaction, and student behavior. Thus, classroom management includes, but is not limited to, discipline concerns.

Within this study, classroom management was defined as a multifaceted construct that includes three broad dimensions—instructional management, people management, and behavior management. Dimension one, instructional management, includes monitoring seatwork, structuring daily routines, and allocating materials. The manner in which these tasks are managed contributes to the general classroom atmosphere and classroom management style (Burden, 1995; Kounin, 1970; McNeely & Mertz, 1990; Weinstein & Mignano, 1993). The people management dimension pertains to what teachers believe about students as persons and what teachers do to enable them to develop. A large body of literature indicates that academic achievement and productive behavior are influenced by the quality of the teacher-student relationship (Burden, 1995; Evertson, Emmer, Clements, & Worsham, 1997; Ginott, 1972; Glasser, 1986; Gordon, 1974; Jones & Jones, 1990; Weinstein, 1996). As Weinstein (1996) explains, "teachers are good when they take the time to learn who their students are and what they are like, . . . when they laugh with their students, . . . and when they are both a friend and a responsible adult" (p. 76). The third dimension, behavior management, is similar to, but different from, discipline in that it focuses on planned means of preventing misbehavior rather than the teacher's reaction to it. Specifically, this facet includes setting rules, establishing a reward structure, and providing opportunities for student input.

Wolfgang and Glickman (1980, 1986) conceptualized a framework to explain teacher beliefs toward development that can be extended to classroom management. Based on a combination of psychological interpretations, their continuum illustrates three approaches to classroom interaction—noninterventionist, interventionist, and interactionalist. The noninterventionist presupposes that the child has an inner drive that needs to find its expression in the real world. Proponents of transactional analysis or Gordon's (1974) teacher effectiveness training are considered noninterventionists. At the opposite end of the continuum are interventionists—those who emphasize what the outer environment does to the human organism to cause it to develop in its particular way. Traditional behavior modification provides the theoretical foundation for the interventionist's school of thought. The noninterventionist is the least directive and controlling, while the interventionist is most controlling. Midway between these two extremes, interactionalists focus on what the individual does to modify the external environment, as well as what the environment does to shape the individual. The theoretical underpinnings for the interactionalist viewpoint is provided by theories such as those developed by Alfred Adler, Rudolph Dreikurs, and/or William Glasser (Wolfgang, 1995). Teachers subscribing to an interactionalist perspective strive to find solutions satisfactory to both teacher and students, employing some of the same techniques as noninterventionists and interventionists.

The assumption is that teachers believe and act according to all three models of discipline, but one usually predominates in beliefs and actions (Wolfgang & Glickman, 1980; 1986). Therefore, the application of these various theories emphasizes teacher behaviors that reflect the cor-

Table 1
Sample Items from the ABCC Inventory

Instructional Management	I believe it's important to continuously monitor students' learning behavior during seatwork.
People Management	Students in my classroom are free to use any materials they wish during the learning process.
Behavior Management	When students behave appropriately, I will provide a reward of some kind such as points toward a party or free time.

responding degrees of power possessed by student and teacher in all facets of classroom management. Because classroom management style can be influenced by environmental and situational factors, the primary objective of this study was to investigate the classroom management styles of urban and rural secondary level educators.

Methods

Participants

Data were collected from 145 certified high school teachers employed by three high schools in two public school districts in the southwest. Two were large high schools located in an urban district; the other, small and rural. The subject pool was composed of 2% African-American, 0.7% Asian, 71% Caucasian, 22% Hispanic; 4% were of other ethnic origin.

The majority of the subject pool comprised female teachers (59%) employed by urban high schools (73%). Participants ranged in age from 23 to 63 years ($M = 41.7$). Experience ranged from zero to 37 years ($M = 13.6$). In concert with the literature, rural teachers reported fewer years teaching experience ($M = 11.6$ years) than their urban counterparts ($M = 15.2$ years). Rural teachers reported their typical average class size as approximately 21.5 students compared to urban classrooms of 32.3 students.

The urban high schools tapped in this study represent two of many located in a city with five universities (4 private, 1 public), 13 independent school districts, and a population of approximately 1.5 million. Both high schools are in the same district, have ethnically diverse enrollments of approximately 3,000 students, and are located in relatively affluent areas of the city. The school district has 7 high schools and its own police department.

The rural high school has an enrollment of approximately 700 students and is located in a town of approximately 6,000 people. The community is 45 miles from the nearest interstate highway, 50 miles from the nearest teacher training program, and 120 miles from the nearest major city. The nearest movie theater is 45 miles away. The community is primarily Hispanic and blue-collar. The school district is the largest employer in the county and, as is the case with most small towns, school activities are often the focus of the community.

Measures

Data were collected using the Attitudes and Beliefs on Classroom Control (ABCC) Inventory. The ABCC Inventory is designed to measure teachers' perceptions of their classroom management beliefs and practices. It comprises 26 Likert format statements and includes three scales: Instructional Management (14 items), People Management (8 items), and Behavior Management (4 items). (See Table 1 for sample items.)

A four category response scale for each item was used (describes me very well, describes me usually, describes me somewhat, describes me not at all). Beliefs were classified on the continuum originally suggested by Wolfgang and Glickman (1980, 1986) that reflects the degree of teacher power over students. Higher scores indicate a more controlling, interventionist approach while lower scores are indicative of a less controlling approach.

The ABCC Inventory has been shown to be a reliable, valid instrument useful in the empirical examination of classroom management styles (Martin, Yin, & Baldwin, 1998b). Previous research on the concurrent validity of the ABCC Inventory shows the 3 scales are related to selected personality traits of teachers. Internal-consistency reliability coefficients for the three scales were .82, .69, and .69 for Instructional Management, People Management, Behavior Management scales, respectively (Martin et al., 1998b).

Results and Discussion

A series of one-way ANOVAs was conducted to examine the effect of school setting (urban vs. rural) on the three scores derived from the ABCC. Due to multiple orthogonal comparisons, the Scheffe method ($\alpha = .05/k$, $k =$ number of comparisons) was applied to adjust the com-

Table 2
One-Way ANOVA: Urban-Rural High School Teachers & ABCC Inventory Scales

	Urban		Rural		
ABCC Scale	M	SD	M	SD	F
Instructional Management	39.73	6.03	43.05	5.31	8.747*
People Management	22.47	3.69	19.56	3.75	17.341**
Behavior Management	12.88	2.41	13.00	2.30	.069

*$p < .01$. **$p < .001$.

parison-wide alpha level (Scheffe, 1959). Results revealed statistically significant differences regarding the Instructional Management and People Management scales. The remaining scale, Behavior Management, did not result in a statistically significant difference (see Table 2).

Rural high school teachers ($M = 43.05$) scored significantly higher (more interventionist) than their urban counterparts ($M = 39.73$) on the Instructional Management scale. These results are in concert with the literature as rural teachers reported the perception of control over instructional components of classroom management similar to those measured by this ABCC scale (Stern, 1994). Similarly, in their study of rural classrooms, Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) found a preponderance of teacher talk, unidirectional lecturing, and very few opportunities for student interaction—also indicative of a controlling approach to instruction.

Conversely, urban teachers ($M = 22.47$) scored significantly more interventionist than the rural teachers ($M = 19.56$) on the People Management scale. The general nature of the rural setting means teachers are more likely to see their students outside of class—at the grocery store, in church, and so on. Rural teachers are more likely to know students' families. As teachers in rural settings wear more hats, they typically take on the sponsorship of extracurricular activities and, according to Schmuck and Schmuck (1992), regularly spend 2 to 4 hours after school interacting with students. No doubt, spending additional time with students in a more informal setting allows teachers and students to see each other differently thus tempering the relationship. Rural teachers are also more likely to have a variety of class preparations (Stern, 1994), thus increasing the likelihood of teaching students' siblings and/or instructing the same students more than once during the high school experience. Urban teachers, on the other hand, are likely to have fewer opportunities to interact with and develop relationships with individual students.

When interpreting these results, one alternative scenario seems worthy of consideration. These results could be mediated by differences in the class size typically found in urban and rural schools. However, this is unlikely as class size correlated significantly with only one of the three scales (People Management), and that correlation was low ($r = .27$, $p < .01$; see Footnote 1). Furthermore, previous research has revealed little to no relationship between class size and classroom management styles as measured by the ABCC scales (Martin, Yin, & Baldwin, 1998a). While providing teachers with smaller classes makes classroom changes possible, Pate-Bain, Achilles, Boyd-Zaharias, and McKenna (1992) conclude that further teacher training is necessary for change to occur.

It is possible—perhaps likely—that urban and rural teachers are inherently different from each other. As Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) explain, rural teachers reported

> not just a love for a physical place; it also had to do with their deep need for long-term, close, and personal relationships. As urban individuals, they would feel alone, cut off from community and their roots. In their small-scale environments, they had developed a sense of community. . . . They saw themselves as trying to avoid the detached, anonymous, and disconnected lives of people in urban settings. . . . The teachers believed that their actions could call out a response from others more readily in a town of 4,000 than in a city of 4 million, more effectively in a district of 2,000 than one of 20,000 or 200,000. (p. 59)

This gives rise to a "chicken and egg" kind of question: Are teachers different because they teach in an urban vs. a rural setting? Or do they choose different settings because they are different? Personalities and preferences of urban and rural educators are possibilities for future research.

Additionally, a number of other questions remain unanswered: What are the unique professional development needs of urban and rural teachers? How can universities best prepare preservice teachers to effectively enter a variety of instructional contexts? Is classroom management style related to student achievement? What other situational factors influence teachers' classroom management styles? Does the ethnic composition and socioeconomic status of the teacher and/or the student body influence classroom management style and, if so, in what ways?

In summary, there can be little doubt that urban and rural teachers encounter different experiences at school. Yet educational policymakers and university teacher preparation programs generally do not consider these educational contexts. A better understanding of these school environments would be beneficial not only to educational policymakers and teacher preparation programs, but ultimately to the teachers, to our students, and to the learning process.

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