Classroom behavior: Management and attribution of Mexican teachers

Angélica Aranda

Pedro Sánchez-Escobedo

Facultad de Educación, Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán

Gregory Williams

Pacific Lutheran University

Abstract

The purpose of the study is to describe the perception of primary school Mexican teachers about pupil's behavior in the classroom, and to explore their attributions about the origins of both desirable an undesirable behaviors.

An exploratory field study including 40 randomly selected teachers of third and sixth grade from public primary schools in the city of Merida, Yucatan Mexico was carried out. Teachers responded to a questionnaire containing open questions and checklists of commonly used strategies to manage behavior in the United States.

Results indicated that frequently perceived desirable behaviors include: 1) interest in school related tasks, 2) discipline, 3) an attitude of cooperation, and 4) work in an orderly and clean fashion.

In general, undesirable perceived behaviors were describe as either active (disruptive) or passive (lack o interest in school tasks).

In order to maintain desirable behaviors teachers usually carried the following actions:1) Talk with parents, 2) Increase positive reinforces, 3) Establish formal agreements with students, and 4) provide emotional support to students. To decrease undesirable behaviors teachers suggested the following actions: 1) Talk with students in private, 2) talk to parents, 3) increase positive reinforcements, and 4) establish formal agreements with students.

Attributions related to undesirable behaviors were be clustered in two broad categories regarding their origins: familiar (contextual) and individual (epigenetic).

In third grade, family characteristics were more often related to girls' undesirable behaviors, whereas individual characteristics were more often associated with boys. This attribution pattern though was inverted in teachers of the sixth grade.

In addition, 2/3 of teachers manifested a need to be specifically trained for better handling undesirable behaviors.

Implication for the management and meaning of classroom behavior for Mexican teachers are discussed, identifying similarities and differences with their American counterparts.

Classroom behavior: Management and attribution of Mexican teachers

In contrast with current American literature, little research has been published regarding how Mexican teachers perceive the student behavior in the classroom and what is the attribution they make about the origins of both desirable and undesirable behaviors.

In a global educational perspective, and considering the broad transit of Mexican students across the US border, it is important to document the ways different teachers, such as those in Mexican schools perceive and handle behaviors in the classroom. Mostly, when idiosyncratic factors may play an important role in the establishment of effective behavior management strategies in multicultural educational settings. Fontana (1992), states that research has provided considerable amounts of information indicating that the specific school setting – with its own organization and dynamics - will lead to different repertoires on pupils' behavior (p.59). Likewise, a given behavior maybe perceive differently by teachers from different cultural backgrounds.

Indeed, as Corrie (1991), suggested that the classroom is a complex social context in which key players values and perceptions are important to explain behavior management. As such student's behavior may be perceived differently according to the teachers' culturally derived values toward certain types of behavior.

In Mexico, teachers tend to be rather extremist when attributing undesirable behaviors. Either, they tend to believe that it derives from the students internal turmoil and psychological disposition, undervaluing the role of the social context.. Or, they tend to blame the family context for the child's behavior (Cortés, 2000). Furthermore, teachers and parents usually struggle to get ride of the blame from each other. In this regard, Watkins & Wagner (1991), asserted: "...without a doubt, the family has a decisive and significant influence on the child, parental perspective regarding the school influences the way the

student perceives its role in the school setting...", thus, the types of collaborative efforts to be establish will depend upon factors such as age, grade, parental perspective and teachers disposition to interact with them.

Culturally behavior repertoire in the classroom also depends upon the school atmosphere, the code of specific rules, teacher's styles and expectations toward the child. In this regard, the attribution of teachers about the origins of behavior seem to be an important element to consider, since attribution, as part of the meaning ascribe to behavior, will convey specific response strategies of behavior management (Esquivel, 1999).

Method

The purpose of this study is to describe commonly perceive desirable and undesirable behaviors in Mexican classrooms, and the attribution teachers make about the origins of such behaviors. In addition, a preliminary assessment of teachers' self-efficacy feelings about how to management behaviors in the classroom was carried out.

Subjects

Sample selection was performed by randomly selecting 20 primary schools in the city of Mérida. In each school, 2 teachers from third grade and 2 from 6th grade were invited to participate in the study. Inclusion criteria was the following 1) teachers had taught the same grade in the previous two school years, 2) they voluntarily accepted to participate in the study. Assistant teachers and substitutes were excluded.

Final sample consisted of 20 teachers, 20 from each grade. The mean age was 43 years old ($\underline{sd}$ = 4.9). On the average these teachers have been working in the school for 22 years ($\underline{sd}$ = 4.8).

<u>Instruments</u>

A questionnaire containing multiple choice and open – ended questions was developed that collected also general information about the participants and explored: identification, attribution, and handling of both desirable and undesirable behaviors. It also investigated the feelings of efficacy of teachers regarding handling of undesirable behaviors. It also included checklists with commonly used behavior management in the US (Williams, Lahdenperä & Sánchez, 2000).

The instrument was tested in a pilot administration with teachers of schools not included in the sample.

Results

Desirable behaviors in the classroom

General Categories

General categories were developed by analyzing the teachers' descriptions of the 3

most common desirable behaviors their pupils showed in the classroom. Frequently quoted

statements were clustered by affinity. Four general categories were obtained as a result of

the qualitative screening: 1) Show interest in activities and class related tasks (demonstrate

effort, is careful when elaborating assignments, 2) Shows discipline (ie. Polite, respectful),

3) Cooperative attitudes (work with others, social skills) and 3) works in a clean and

orderly fashion (accommodates books, comes to class clean). Table 1 illustrates desirable

behaviors by rank order and grade.

The two first categories were more frequently quoted in both grades, whereas no

differences were found between grades amongst the last two. It is interesting to underline

the fact that teachers valued behaviors related to work and order in the classroom. No

teacher manifested any behaviors related to common expected desirable behaviors in the

US such as independence, autonomy or creativity.

Grade and Gender differences

Questions directed to distinguish differences between males and females were

directly asked to participants by instructing them to think about the best and worst behaved

boy and girl. Then, they were asked to describe the behaviors they exhibited. Table 2

summarizes quoted behaviors (Insert Table 2 around here).

No differences were found regarding gender. However, regarding grade, statistically significant differences were found with respect to a higher interest in school tasks from 6th graders as compared to 3rd graders ($X2 = 4.26$; $p = > .05$).

<u>Attributions regarding desirable behaviors</u>

Data was obtained by asking teachers to depict the behavior of a girl and a boy they considered to demonstrated a desirable behavior in their classroom most of the time. Responses were categorized and clustered by affinity and analyzed qualitatively, establishing two broad and general categories of attribution.

1) Familiar causes. For example: 'parents exercise a good supervision on them'. 'there is a good family support network', 'they have acceptable role models at home'. etc.

2) Individual causes. For example: 'is his/her nature', 'she/he likes to be that way', She/he is a responsible person'.

Table 3 summarizes results.

Teachers of third grad seemed to attribute family characteristics to girls desirable behavior, whereas they attributed more often constitutional characteristics to boys' desirable behavior. No other statically significant differences were found.

<u>Strategies to maintain desirable behaviors.</u>

Teachers were presented with a modified checklist used in a cross comparative study regarding the control of behavior in American, Danish and Mexican children (Williams, Pirjo and Sanchez, 1999). They were asked the 6 strategies they more often used to handle desirable behaviors in he school. Table 4 illustrates preferences.

Excepting from 'getting support from parents' more often used in 6th grade and 'provide emotional support' more frequently selected in 3rd grade. In general, strategies selected by teachers in both grades ranked in a similar way. It was also found that some strategies are used only with boys: 'Provides emotional support' , 'Establish particular goals', and 'provides successful academic experiences'; whereas others are used exclusively with girls: 'Focus on problem solving', 'consult with special education teachers'. Speaking with the student in private was claim to be the most frequently used strategy for boys and girls in both grades.

Undesirable behaviors in the classroom

General categories

Frequently quoted undesirable behaviors were clustered in two broad categories

1) Disruptive behaviors (actives), such as fight, swear, lie, destroy, take other students materials and so forth.

2) Show little interest for the school work (passive), such as fail to do the homework, lack of responsibility and lack of interest in the lecture. Table 5 illustrates frequencies by grade.

In order to explore for grade and gender differences. Teachers were asked the most common undesirable behaviors boys and girls present in their classroom. Table 5 illustrates results.

It can be observed that active behaviors are more cited in 3rd grade students, whereas passive behaviors associated to a lack of interest in the school work were more

frequently reported in 6th grade. Statistical analysis of homogeneity showed no differences

between graded (1.80) and gender (.20 gl 1)

Attribution of undesirable behaviors

Two general categories were derived from the analysis of teachers response to open-

ended questions:

1) Familial causes: Lack of supervision, family conflict, divorce, lack of role

models.

2) Epigenetic factors: It is their nature', personality, emotional turmoil, learning

disabilities and so forth.

Frequencies by grade and gender are illustrated in table 6.

In both grades teachers tend to identify familial factors associated to girl's

undesirable behaviors, whereas they tend to identify epigenetic factors with the behavior of

boys.

Management of undesirable behaviors

Using the same checklist, teachers were asked to mark the 6 strategies they more

often use to reduce undesirable behaviors in the classroom. Table 7 summaries results.

Strategies more often used with boys are: get support from parents , nag the student

in the classroom. Regarding girls, teachers mostly talk to them in private and provide

emotional support.

Educational system support

Regarding the management of classroom behaviors, the majority of teachers (72.5%) claim to obtain n support whatsoever from the school system.

Those who identifies sources of support mention: visit of special education teachers (12.5%), training courses in the summer (10%) and conferences and other events (5%)

In addition, 85% of teachers asserted that what they learned during their teacher training was insufficient to handle behavior in the classroom. Furthermore, 70% o participants. Congruently, 62.5% of teachers required some kind of training to improve their handling of behaviors in the classroom. Proposed activities were: workshops about specific behavior control techniques(32.5%); and Child psychology courses (17.5%).

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to identify the perceptions and attribution of teachers about desirable and undesirable behaviors in the classroom, and explore differences by grade and gender.

Results in general support the idea that teachers privilege behaviors associated with motivation towards school achievement and the respect of rules and other students rights.

References.

Amigo, C., Tatti, V. y Samuel, L. (1996, 4 de agosto). Nueva relación de los chicos y la autoridad. El Clarín Digital. Buenos Aires, República de Argentina.

Bandura, A. y Ribes, E. (1975). Modificación de behavior. Biblioteca Técnica de Psicología. Editorial Trillas. México, D.F.

Barba, J., González, J., Martínez, M. et.al. (1985).<u>La disciplina control en la escuela primaria. Estudio de caso en 4 escuelas de Aguascalientes.</u> Tesis de licenciatura. Volúmenes I y II. Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes. Aguascalientes, México.

Biasutti, B. (1979). <u>Guía para una education no represiva</u>. 2da. Edición. Ed. Sígueme. Madrid, España.

Calvo, J. (1994). <u>Education y Filosofía en el aula</u>. Colección Papeles de Pedagogía.
1era. Impresión. Ed. Paidos. España.

Castro, I. e Guzmán, G. (1985). La Pedagogía de los Derechos Humanos. <u>Revista Cero en</u> <u>Behavior.</u> Año 5, No.21-22. México, D.F.

Clarizio, H. Y Mc.Coy, G. (1981). <u>Trastornos de la behavior en el niño.</u> 2da. Edición. Ed. El Manual Moderno. México, D.F.

Cohen, J. (1980). <u>Behavior y condicionamiento operantes</u>. Serie Temas de Psicología No.5. 4ª. reimpresión. Editorial Trillas. México, D.F.

Cortés, G. (2000) Escuela Normal Superior de Yucatán. Personal communication.

Council for Exceptional Children. (1978). <u>Managing inapropiate behavior in the classroom</u>. ERIC ED 371506 90. U.S.A.

Department of Justice. (1984). <u>Not just punishment: discipline in schools that work. A handbook for Chicago</u>. ERIC ED 227926   PSO13103. U.S.A.

Disciplina o Convivencia. (1978). <u>Revista Zona Dirección.</u> No. 11. Dirección y Gestión. Buenos Aires, República de Argentina.

Dobson, J. (1989). <u>Atrévete a disciplinar</u>. 1era. edición. Editorial Trillas. México, D.F.

Esquivel, L. (1989). Las atribuciones causales del éxito y el fracaso escolar. Revista de la Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán. Volumen 4, Número 169. Mérida, Yucatán , México.

Esteve, J. (1994). El malestar docente. 3era. edición, revisada y ampliada. Editorial Paidós. Barcelona, España.

Evertson, C. y Emmer, E, Clements, B. et.al. (1984). Classroom management for elementary teachers. Prentice-Hall, Inc. New Jersey, U.S.A.

Fontana, D. (1992). La disciplina en el aula. 1era. edición en México. Editorial Santillana. México, D.F.

Golant, M. y Golant, S. (1997). Discipline a su preescolar y siéntase a gusto. 3era. impresión. Editorial Diana. México, D.F.

Herbert, M. (1994). Entre la tolerancia y la disciplina. 2da. edición. Editorial Paidós.

Barcelona, España.

Kazdin, A. (1978). Modificación de behavior y sus aplicaciones prácticas. Editorial El Manual Moderno. México, D.F.

Kohn, A.(1998). The risk of rewards. ERIC ED 376990 Dec 94. U.S.A.

Las jerarquías en las escuelas. (1996, 4 de agosto). El Clarín Digital. Buenos Aires, República de Argentina.

La violencia física en los colegios argentinos. (1996, 2 de diciembre). El Clarín Digital. Buenos Aires, República de Argentina.

Los docentes y el poder. (1996, 4 de agosto). Un tema que no existe en los profesorados. El Clarín Digital. Buenos Aires, República de Argentina.

Madsen, Ch. y Madsen, C. (1974). <u>Teaching / Discipline. A positive approache for educational developement</u>. Copyright. Second edition. Allyn and Bacon. Boston, U.S.A.

Marino, J. (1996,26 de marzo). Las amonestaciones ya no sirven para educar<u>. El Clarín Digital.</u> Buenos Aires, República de Argentina.

McClellan, D. y Katz, G. (1996). <u>El desarrollo social de los niños: una lista de cotejo</u>. ERIC ED 401049.

McIntire, R. (1980). <u>Psicología de la behavior para padres y teachers</u>. 1era. reimpresión. Editorial Pax-México. México, D.F.

Melero, J. (1996). <u>Conflictividad y violencia en los centros escolares</u>. 2da. edición. Editorial Siglo XXI. México, D.F.

Moore, S. (1997). <u>El papel de los padres en el desarrollo de la competencia social</u>. ERIC ED 40833 PSO 25396. U.S.A.

Morais, J. y Pérez, M. (1997). <u>Disciplina escolar. Evaluación de las behaviors problemáticas por</u> <u>el profesorado</u>. IberPsicología 2.3.6

Moreno, S. (1981). <u>Family participation in children´ s education. Envolvimiento de los padres en la education de los niños</u>. ERIC ED 227926 PSO 13103. U.S.A.

Nutten, J. (1982). <u>Teorias de la personalidad</u>. 1era. Edicion en castellano. Ed. Paidos. España.

Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1989). <u>La disciplina positiva</u>. Spanish translation of ED 327271.

Parejo, J. (1995). <u>Comunicación verbal y no verbal. El cuerpo y la escuela</u>. 1era. edición. Editorial Paidós. España

Pell, E. (1989). <u>Hacer lo mejor de la education de su niño: Una guía para padres</u>. ERIC ED 322238 UDO 27158.

Ramírez, F. (1997). <u>Percepciones de los alumnos sobre su disciplina en el classroom de clases</u>. Tesis de licenciatura. Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán.

Ramírez, G. (1990). La pedagogía de los derechos humanos. <u>Revista Cero en Behavior</u>. Año 5, No.21-22. México, D.F.

Sabatino, D., Sabatino, A. y Mann, L. (1983).<u>Discipline and behavioral management</u>. Copyright. Aspen Systems Corporation. U.S.A.

Sanz de Acedo, M. (1997). <u>Psicología. Mente y Behavior</u>. 2da. ed. Ed. Desclee de Brouwer. España.

Sánchez, A. (1984). <u>Aproximación al estudio teórico de la disciplina escolar</u>. Base de datos REDINET.

UNICEF. (1998). <u>¿Son las escuelas amigas de los niños?.</u> WAWA/ 8.

Vallet, R. (1978). <u>Dislexia</u>. 3era. edición. Ed. ceac. Barcelona, España

Vázquez, J. (1995). <u>Las relaciones sociales en el aula</u>. 2da. edición. Instituto Michoacano de Ciencias de la Education. Michoacán, México.

Volnovich, J. (1996, 4 de agosto). Las nenas, discriminadas. <u>El Clarín Digital</u>. Buenos Aires, República de Argentina.

Walker, J. y Shea, T. (1991). <u>Behavior management</u>. Fifth edition. Macmillan Publishing Company. New York, U.S.A.

Watkins, C. y Wagner, P. (1991). <u>La disciplina escolar</u>. 1era. edición. Editorial Paidós. Barcelona, España.

Wielkiewcz, R. (1986). <u>Behavior management in the schools. Principles and procedures</u>. First printing. Pergamon Press. U.S.A.

Williams, G., Lahdenperä, P., & Sánchez, P. (2000) Intercultural differences in the classroom behaviour and teaching pedagogy –An Analysis across three countries. Innovative Approaches to Intercultural Education

Woods, P. y Hammersley, M. (1995). Género, cultura y etnia en la escuela. 1era. edición. Editorial Paidós. Barcelona, España.

Woods, P. (1986). La escuela por dentro. 1era. edición. Editorial Paidós. Barcelona, España..

Woolfolk, A. (1990). Psicología Educativa. 3era. edición. Editorial Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana. México.

Table 1

Categories of desirable behaviors in the classroom by grade.

Categories	Rank	3er. grade	6º grade
		F	F
Shows interest in classroom tasks	1	21	26
Shows discipline	2	15	17
Demonstrates a cooperative attitude	3	9	9
Works in a clean and orderly fashion	4	2	2

Table 2

Frequencies obtained by gender and grade in each category (N=80)

Category	Gender Towards		Grade	
	Boys	Girls	3º	6º
Shows interest in school tasks	26	23	20	29*
Shows discipline	8	8	10	6
Demonstrates a cooperative attitude	5	4	7	2
Works in a clean and orderly fashion	1	5	3	3

Table 3

Attribution categories of desirable behaviors by gender and grade

Category	Third grade		Sixth grade	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Family origin	9	12	13	12
Constitutional origin	11	8	7	8

Table 4

Frequency of strategies used by grade to promote desirable behaviors

Strategy	General (n =40)	3rd (n =20)	6th (n = 20)
Get support from parents	28	14	14
Increase positive reinforcements	22	10	12
Establish formal agreements	20	8	12
Stress rules	18	7	11
Provides emotional support	18	11	7
Rewards with privileges and extra activities	13	6	7
Speak to students in private	13	6	7
Teach specific abilities	12	3	9
Provides successful academic experiences	10	3	7
Takes away privileges	9	5	4
Establish partial goals	7	3	4
Set example with other students	6	3	3
Provides a written report for the students	6	4	2
Focus in problem solving	6	4	2
Reports to the Principal	5	3	2
Ignores undesirable behaviors	2	0	2
Consults with special education teachers	4	2	2
Consults with other teachers	3	1	2
Punish undesirable behaviors	3	2	1
Consults wit a psychologist	2	2	0
Handles behavior charts	2	1	1
Nags the student in the classroom	1	0	1
Uses token economy	1	0	1
Expels from the classroom	0	0	0
Uses group punishments	0	0	0

Table 5

Frequency by grade and gender of undesirable behaviors

Categoría	3rd grade		6th grade	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Disruptive behaviors	12	13	11	8
Little interest in school tasks	8	7	9	12
Total	20	20	20	20

Table 6

Frequency of attribution of undesirable behaviors by gender and grade.

Category	3rd grade		6th grade	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Familial causes	6	12	11	12
Epigenetic factors	14	8	9	8

Table 7

Frequency of strategies used to reduce undesirable behaviors

Strategy	General (n =40)	3rd (n =20)	6th (n = 20)
Speaks with students in private	36	17	19
Gets parents support.	30	16	14
Increase positive reinforcement	24	11	13
Establish formal agreements with students.	18	10	8
Stress rules	14	8	6
Consults with special education teachers	14	7	7
Informs the principal	13	7	6
Provides emotional support	13	6	7
Focus on problem solving	11	5	6
Reward with privileges and extra responsibilities	9	3	6
Consults with a psychologist	8	4	4
Consults with other teachers	8	4	4
Teaches specific social abilities	7	3	4
Cancel privileges	6	2	4
Punishes undesirable behaviors	5	0	5
Establishes individual goals	5	0	5
Provides successful academic experiences	5	1	4
Ignores undesirable behaviors	4	2	2
Expels from classroom	2	1	1
Set examples with other students	2	2	0
Provides a written report	2	2	0
Nags in the classroom	1	0	1
Uses behavior charts.	1	0	1
Uses group punishments	1	0	1
Uses token economy	1	1	0