

Classroom Behavior: Perceptions, Management, and Attributions of Mexican Teachers

by

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Abstract

This study explores Mexican teacher's perceptions and attributions about student behavior, and management strategies they use in their classrooms. Forty primary-level teachers from public schools in Mérida, Mexico, responded to a questionnaire developed for this purpose. Results indicate that desired behaviors include: interest in tasks, self-discipline, cooperation, and orderly work. Undesired behaviors represented externalizing or internalizing patterns. Teachers' preferred management strategies were: talking with parents and increasing positive reinforcements to increase/maintain appropriate student behavior. They used talking with students and parents to decrease undesirable behaviors. Attributions related to both types of behaviors clustered in two categories: familial and individual. Two-thirds of teachers reported a need to be better-trained in classroom management. Implications for teacher training are discussed.

As the world becomes smaller, countries and cultures become more intertwined; movement across arbitrary political boundaries becomes the norm; and entire cultures, as well as the microcosm of the classroom, are impacted by inclusion of individuals with different cultural and experiential backgrounds. In focusing on the classroom, we have attempted to investigate how teachers in Mexico view their students' behavior. What types of behaviors do they view as desirable? Undesirable? What are their beliefs about the genesis of those behaviors? Lastly, what do the results of this investigation tell us about teacher training in the area of classroom management? We attempted to answer these questions using a questionnaire developed in a related study by Williams, Lahdenpera, and Sanchez (2000). This study looked at cultural differences in classroom behavior and management practices across three countries: Sweden, Mexico, and the USA. This study extends those findings, looking in depth at one of those countries: Mexico. We would hypothesize that there would be congruence among three main areas: the types of behaviors they view as both desirable and problematic; to what they attribute these behaviors; and the management strategies they choose, given those attributions.

In contrast with current United States literature, little research has been published regarding how Mexican teachers perceive, attribute, and manage student

behavior(s) in their classrooms. In a global educational environment, 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 manage behaviors in the classroom. By considering, across cultures, the variables that affect student management, we may be able to learn from our international colleagues methods and procedures that improve student behavior, classroom climate, and contribute to improved student learning. As a part of this process, the ways that individual teachers perceive and manage student behavior cannot be overlooked.

Teachers' Perceptions

Little has been published regarding the perceptions of Mexican teachers with regard to desired, and undesired, student behavior(s). Williams et al. (2000) found that, generally speaking, Mexican teachers tend to focus on behaviors related to on-task engagement. Research by Lahdenpera (1997) supports this view. In a study of Swedish teachers, she found that a greater number of students referred for behavior problems were immigrant children. She suggested that this is because the teachers in her sample perceived the different behavioral repertoires of immigrant children as problematic, instead of just "different." If one considers the individual school a micro-