

A Comparison of Classroom Management: A Study of American, Russian, and Turkish Schools

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Abstract

Classroom management issues for teachers have direct implications on teachers and students. This study focused on comparisons of classroom discipline problems in the state of Texas, in a Russian province, and in a school in Turkey. The study analyzed how similar or dissimilar the classroom discipline issues are of these three different cultures, and what effect this might have had on the level of stress for teachers. The surveys were conducted electronically using a survey that collected quantitative data that was used for comparison. This study found that discipline issues are very similar, and often-times the same for teachers in these three very different regions of the world. There were eight items, of a total of twenty-four, that reported agreement between at least two of the countries surveyed. The data also revealed a few differences due to the nuances of the cultures that were studied.

Key words: Classroom Discipline, Teacher Stress, International Classroom Discipline

Introduction

As one of the authors of this study, Dr. Patricia Williams walked into a Houston Texas elementary classroom, the substitute teacher was literally screaming, “Sit down and shut up!” However, students ignored the command and continued laughing and playing chase around the classroom. The student teacher, an older man, backed against the wall with panic and fear engraved on his face. Today he was being observed and evaluated. How was he going to gain control? Were both the substitute teacher and student teacher stressed? Absolutely! Research has indicated that teacher stress is a real issue in classrooms everywhere that is sometimes tied to discipline problems. Our study compared classroom discipline and classroom management in different social and economic settings and shows that similar situations can happen in Russia, Turkey, the United States, and around the world.

According to the studies about classroom management, many articles abound that center on ways to cope with teacher stress due to students’ lack of discipline. According to Ramon Lewis’s (1999) study results, “most concerned teachers also express a greater tendency to get sick as a result of the stress” (p.155). He suggested that professional development programs assist teachers in sharing power with students and reflecting on coping strategies (Lewis, 1999). Jones, Bailey, & Jacob (2014) concurred, with the belief that effective management entails “supporting students to manage themselves throughout daily learning and activities” (p. 19). As noted by Clement (2010), a Google search for classroom management showed over five million hits, and Amazon.com listed 11,000 books available for purchase on the topic. Many texts outline a clear correlation between teacher stress and student discipline which is tied to the effectiveness of classroom management. What is the connection between classroom management and discipline? Classroom management is a much broader area that emphasizes

quality instruction as a way to minimize disruptions. Discipline typically refers to what teachers do to respond to students who are behaving inappropriately (Lewis, 1999).

In conducting the Annual Pi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitude toward the Public Schools, which has been administered for over twenty years, the staff's first question to those being interviewed was an open ended question concerning the biggest problem facing schools in their communities (Bushaw & Calderon, 2014). This opened-ended question with no prompts provides insight into the American public's beliefs. Throughout the years, the public has named discipline issues as one of the top problems. In order to lower teacher stress and to help manage classroom misbehavior, we first need to know more about what discipline problems are actually causing the greatest discomfort that may initiate a teacher's desire to leave the classroom permanently. Do discipline issues that cause this discomfort (stress) differ among American (in this specific case, Texas), Turkish, and Russian teachers?

Methodology

To discover the differences in discipline issues that caused teacher stress among American, Turkish, and Russian teachers, we emailed a 24-item questionnaire, similar to the one developed by Wright, O'Hair, and Alley (1988), to participants in the three countries. We discovered that some problems, such as passing notes, seemed unimportant to all teachers, regardless of where they taught, possibly because of technology changes. For instance, students now simply send text messages. However, other misbehaviors seemed prevalent in all countries and with all age groups.

Participants consisted of a representative sample of Texas pre-K-12 public school teachers, student teachers, and methods students; Turkish elementary and secondary school teachers; and Russian elementary and secondary school teachers living in Syktyvkar, Komi Republic, Russia. During 2014, one of the authors, Dr. Koptelov, translated the survey into

Russian and emailed a letter, along with the questionnaire, and received responses from over 70 participants. The results were then translated back into English for comparison and interpretation. Also, a graduate student who used the survey instrument for her 2007 thesis translated it into Turkish, and over 200 participants returned their questionnaires. (Demir, 2007)

The demographic section asked participants to indicate their age, gender, years of teaching experience, educational background and degree(s) held, school size, type of district, and grade level(s) they taught. The survey section dealt with how much teacher stress particular discipline problems caused. These 24 items included a list of misbehaviors, such as grooming in class, being rebellious, and talking at inappropriate times, with response categories ranging from “very little” to “great” concern. Then, the open-ended question section asked about additional common discipline problems within and outside the classroom.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

While most respondents from Texas and Russia were female teachers, those from Turkey were mainly male teachers. Furthermore, the participants from all three countries were primarily elementary school teachers. We had responses from 335 experienced teachers in Texas, as well as 660 from elementary and secondary pre-service teachers. There were 59 responses from Russian in-service teachers and 225 responses from Turkish in-service teachers. Both urban and suburban school settings were part of the demographic makeup in all three countries. Overall, the responses showed more similarities than differences when comparing the three teacher groups.

Similarities

The years of experience reported by teachers in all three countries were very similar. Grade levels, on average, were also very similar. Koptelov, Maninger, and Sullivan (2015) found, when comparing the highest degree of concern, cheating topped the list in Texas and

Russia. Nonparticipation and grooming were similar. (Koptelov, et. al, 2015). When comparing the lowest degree of concern, there were also similar concerns such as notes, snacking, tardiness, fads, and extortion. (Koptelov, et.al, 2015).

Differences

Russian teachers reported that noises were the biggest problem; they also mentioned cliques and tattling as major concerns. Turkish participants stated that talking and non-participation caused them the highest degree of discomfort. They stated that class clowns and students touching others were serious problems as well. Interestingly enough, the major problems in 1987 for all Texas classroom educators were talking and non-participating. By 2003, the top contenders became fighting and rebellion, along with insubordination.

In 2006, Texas teachers decided that drugs were becoming another significant problem. Russian and Turkish educators, however, did not believe that drugs were a problem in their schools. Also, by 2006, Texas participants included fighting as another high degree discipline problem in the classroom. At that time, in Russia and Turkey it was of little concern. These are some differences in the reported misbehaviors facing Turkish, Russian, and Texas teachers.

Discussion

Our research study explored the teacher discomfort (stress level) caused by specific student discipline problems; teachers from three countries (Texas-USA, Russia, and Turkey) with completely different populations were contacted. Interesting similarities resulted even though the surveys were done throughout different time periods. However, results from the surveys in Russia and United States were more similar than those of Turkey. For example, most Turkish participants were men, while the vast majority from Russia and Texas were females.

For a more thorough analysis of the data, we intend to conduct a survey simultaneously in all three countries. We have already started e-mailing a new survey in Texas to obtain more

current data. Our plans are to complete a biannual survey and data collection, with input from administrators, as well as pre-service and in-service teachers. In addition, it is important to survey participants who teach the same grade level and are either interning or teaching in similar types of schools. Such data will allow for a more precise analysis, producing practical recommendations for teachers to help them lower their stress levels and to enjoy their teaching experiences even more.

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