



Evidence in Action

A K20 Center Research Brief

Reducing Reality Shock: The Effects of Classroom Management Skills Training on Teachers

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Introduction

Teachers often experience “reality shock”—a sharp mismatch between expectations formed during teacher preparation and the realities of classroom practice. Prior research cited by the authors consistently shows that classroom disturbances and student misbehavior are among the strongest sources of stress, emotional exhaustion, and early attrition for novice teachers. Despite widespread recognition of the importance of classroom management, teacher preparation programs, particularly in Germany, where this study was conducted, have provided limited structured opportunities for beginning teachers to systematically develop these skills.

The authors identify a clear gap in both research and practice. While classroom management is widely viewed as essential, few studies have experimentally tested whether classroom management training can prevent or reduce reality shock by improving teachers’ perceived skills and well-being. This study responds to that gap by developing and evaluating a classroom management training program for teachers and comparing it to stress management training and no training.

Methodology

Research Design:

The study used a longitudinal experimental design with three groups:

- Classroom management training
- Stress management training
- Wait-list control (no training)

Participants were followed over time, with data collected before the intervention, approximately 4-5 months after training, and again 10-12 months after training.

Sample:

- Total participants: 97 beginning teachers
- Final analytic sample: 56 teachers who completed all survey waves
- Average age: 27.6 years
- Gender: 69% female



- Teaching context: Teachers in the German Referendariat (a paid induction phase combining coursework and classroom teaching)
- School levels represented:
 - Primary (Grades 1-4)
 - Lower secondary vocational
 - Intermediate secondary
 - Academic secondary (up to Grade 13)

Participants were teaching while simultaneously completing formal induction requirements in schools and teacher training colleges.

Intervention Descriptions:

The classroom management intervention was developed by the researchers and consisted of seven structured sessions covering:

1. Classroom organization
2. Rules and procedures
3. The beginning of the school year
4. Maintaining a classroom management system
5. Managing problematic student behavior
6. Interpersonal teacher-student relationships
7. Communication (verbal and nonverbal)

Sessions 1-5 were adapted from the Classroom Organization and Management Program (COMP), modified to fit the German school context. Two additional sessions emphasized interpersonal relationships and communication, focusing on how teacher behavior is perceived by students.

Instructional methods included:

- Group discussions using real classroom cases
- Collaborative group work (e.g., classroom layout planning)
- Role play to practice management routines and responses
- Structured self-reflection questionnaires

The intervention was delivered by trainers with expertise in classroom management and teacher education.

Stress Management Training (Comparison Group):

A standardized stress management program (AGIL) focused on general stress reduction strategies, including time management and progressive muscle relaxation. This group served as an active comparison condition.



Dosage:

- 3 sessions (2 full-day sessions + 1 follow-up)
- Total instructional time: 19 hours
- (16 hours initial training + 3 hours follow-up)

Data Analysis:

Researchers used repeated-measures analyses to compare changes over time across groups while accounting for baseline differences. Planned comparisons were conducted to identify specific differences between the classroom management, stress management, and control groups.

Results

Beginning teachers who participated in the classroom management training reported significantly higher self-efficacy in classroom management and greater perceived instructional success than those in the stress management or control groups. These effects were stable up to one year after training.

Both training groups showed better well-being outcomes than the control group, including lower emotional exhaustion and rumination. Notably, the classroom management group reported significantly less emotional exhaustion and fewer ruminative thoughts than the stress management group. The findings suggest that addressing classroom-specific challenges can improve both teaching effectiveness and teacher well-being.

Application into Practice

This intervention can be used by districts, teacher preparation programs, and induction supports to strengthen beginning teachers' classroom management skills and reduce early-career stress.

Action steps for implementation:

1. Provide structured classroom management training.
2. Include explicit instruction on rules, procedures, and proactive management strategies.
3. Integrate interpersonal and communication skill development.
4. Use interactive methods such as role play and real classroom case discussions.
5. Allocate approximately 19 hours over multiple days, including a delayed follow-up session.



Work Cited

Dicke, T., Elling, J., Schmeck, A., & Leutner, D. (2015). Reducing reality shock: The effects of classroom management skills training on beginning teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 48, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.01.013>