Control and Care: The Complementary Roles in Classroom Management

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Abstract

This study examined how classroom management practices—teachers’ control and care—were differentially associated with students’ engagement, misbehavior, and satisfaction with school, using a large representative sample of 3196 Grade 9 students from 117 classes. Results of hierarchical linear modeling showed differential relations: After controlling for students’ gender and socioeconomic status, both control and care were positively related to student engagement. Moreover, control was a significant negative predictor of classroom misbehavior and care was a significant positive predictor of satisfaction with school. Our findings underscore the importance of blending teacher control and care to achieve multiple goals of classroom management.
Control and Care: Their Complementary Roles in Classroom Management

Accumulating research has revealed that classroom management is a critical skill in effective teaching (e.g. Emmer & Stough, 2001; Jones, 1996; Torff & Sessions, 2005; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993), but too many teachers were distressed with the ineffectiveness of classroom management. For example, teacher stress and negative emotion are often related to student misbehavior (e.g. Blase, 1986; Feitler & Tokar, 1992). In search of the causes of and the cures for the persistent problem of engaging student learning and reducing misbehavior, researchers have adopted a broadened view of classroom management which encompasses not only using control and discipline to reduce misbehavior, but also establishing good teacher-student relationships, creating supportive classroom environments, and responding to students’ needs for love, respect, a sense of belonging to and satisfaction with school (e.g. Allen, 1986; Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Emmer & Gerwels, 2006; Emmer & Stough, 2001; Pianta, 2006; Watson & Battistich, 2006).

This broadened view takes into consideration the student-centered and humanistic approach to classroom management, emphasizing care, guidance, and self-discipline (Freiberg, 1999). It is also consistent with the prevailing student-centered approach to instructional reforms. However, the humanistic approach to classroom management, as a crucial component of effective teaching, has not kept pace with instructional reforms (Morse, 1994; McCaslin & Good, 1992).

Understanding how control and care are related to student outcomes has become an increasingly important topic in classroom management and schooling. Especially when recommendations for school reforms are being suggested, research on this issue assumes a particularly important role. However, empirical studies that examined the roles of control and care are relatively scarce. Therefore, the present study views control and care as complementary components of classroom management and seeks to provide empirical support for this view. We focus not only on how control and care are differentially related to behavioral outcomes (misbehavior and engagement), but also to affective outcomes (satisfaction with school).

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are as follows: (a) How much of the total variance in student outcomes (engagement, misbehavior, and satisfaction with school) is accounted for by between-class differences and within-class differences? (b) Do control and care have differential relations to different student outcomes? (c) What are the patterns of interaction between student characteristics (gender and within-class SES, classroom composition (class-mean SES) and classroom management practices (control and care) in predicting student outcomes? (d) Do control and care show additive or interactive patterns in their prediction of student outcomes?

Method

Participants and Procedure

The participants in this study were 3196 Grade 9 students from 117 classrooms in 39 secondary schools in Singapore. The ethnic distribution of the sample was as follows: 75% of the
participants were Chinese, 18% were Malay, 5% were Indian, and 2% were of other ethnic
groups. The gender distribution of the sample was even (51% female and 49% male). The mean
age of the students was 15.5 years.

Schools were randomly selected to participate in the study. About half of the Grade 9
classrooms in each participating school were randomly selected to do the survey. An online
survey was conducted in the computer rooms of the participating schools. The survey included
two forms. Half of the students within each class were randomly selected (through a computer
algorithm) to complete survey form 1 in which students reported their engagement, misbehavior
and satisfaction with school. The other half of the students in the same class completed survey
form 2 in which students reported their teachers’ behaviors. The purpose of doing so was to
mitigate the potential problem of inflating cross-level relations. The average numbers of students
completing forms 1 and 2 per class were 14.2 and 13.1, respectively. All students provided their
background and demographic information.

**Measures**

Considering that the purpose of the present study is to examine the relationship between
teachers’ management practices and students’ outcomes and to provide useful inferential
information for teachers, it is important that the level of conceptualization is consistent with the
level of inference. Therefore we conceptualized and measured of teacher care and control at class
level (e.g. the teacher care about the students) rather than student level (the teacher care about
me). The teacher control scale included items on the frequency of teacher behavior on correcting
misbehavior (e.g. the teacher corrects misbehavior immediately). The teacher care scale included
items on the frequency of a teacher showing warmth, concern, and acceptance to students (e.g.
the teacher shows concern for pupils). We first moved down to the student level to collect
perceptual data and subsequently aggregated students’ perceptions to the class level to establish
the class norm. The average of the within-group interrater reliability across the 117 classrooms
was .86 (SD = .07) for control and .82 (SD = .10) for care. This result suggests that within-class
student ratings are quite consistent, which justifies the procedure of aggregation to derive class-
level measures of classroom management practices. Self-report measures of students’ classroom
engagement, classroom misbehavior, and satisfaction with school were used. Cronbach’s alpha
of the scales used in the present study ranged from .84 to .89. Sample items of the scales are
provided in the Appendix.

**Analyses and Results**

**Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations**

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among the variables used in this study is
presented in Table 1. The class-level correlation between teacher control ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .38$)
and teacher care ($M = 3.72$, $SD = .48$) was .37. The relatively high mean scores of both control
and care show that they are commonly practiced by teachers in Grade 9 English classroom. The
moderately positive correlation between control and care show that they are not mutually
exclusive practices.
Predictive Relations to Student Outcomes

All predictors and outcome variables (except gender) were standardized before running HLM. The one-way ANOVA with random effects model was used to estimate the proportion of within- and between-class variances in the outcome variables (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) measures the proportion of total variance in a variable explained by between-class differences. For self-reported outcome variables, ICC was 8% for classroom engagement, 5% for classroom misbehavior, and 10% for satisfaction with school. For predictors, ICC was 18% for control, 21% for care, and 29% for SES. Chi-square tests were also performed to examine the significance of between-class variances. We found that between-class variances were significant for all the predictors and outcome variables.

The next set of HLM analyses was performed to evaluate the predictive relations between classroom management practices and student outcomes, controlling for students’ gender and SES. For this purpose, gender and SES were entered into the model as control variables. SES was group-mean centered at level 1 and grand-mean centered at level 2, such that SES was partitioned into the within-class component (SES_w) and between-class component (SES_b) (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Model 1 was used to examine whether classroom management practices predicted student misbehavior, engagement and satisfaction with school, controlling for the effects of gender, SES_w, and SES_b, as well as how the two management practices (control and care) interacted with classroom mean SES and interacted each other in predicting student outcomes.

Model 1

\[ Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} (\text{Gender}) + \beta_{2j} (\text{SES}_w) + r_{ij} \]

\[ \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} (\text{SES}_b) + \gamma_{02} (\text{Control}) + \gamma_{03} (\text{Care}) + \gamma_{04} (\text{SES}_b \times \text{Control}) + \gamma_{05} (\text{SES}_b \times \text{Care}) + \gamma_{06} (\text{Control} \times \text{Care}) + u_{0j} \]

\[ \beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} \]

\[ \beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20} \]

\[ Y_{ij} \] is the dependent variable; control and care are aggregated from individual students’ ratings to the class level). \( r_{ij} \) is the level 1 residual term; \( u_{0j} \) is the level 2 residual term for the intercept.

In all the HLM analyses, we tested whether the slope parameters for gender and SES_w were random or not. For all the outcome variables, the random effects for the slopes were not significant at \( \alpha = .05 \). Thus, both \( \beta_{1j} \) and \( \beta_{2j} \) were treated as fixed parameters\(^1\).

The results are presented in Table 2. After controlling for gender and SES, both control (\( \gamma = .136, p < .01 \)) and care (\( \gamma = .085, p < .05 \)) were positively related to student engagement.

\(^1\) The fixed slopes of gender and individual SES suggested that the slopes were parallel and no interaction between potential predictors (control and care) and gender and individual SES. A supplementary analysis was done by entering control and care in the fixed slopes of gender and individual SES for all outcomes. None of the interaction was significant.
Moreover, control was a significant negative predictor of classroom misbehavior ($\gamma = -.076, p < .05$) and care was a significant positive predictor of satisfaction with school ($\gamma = .072, p < .05$). We found significant interaction only when satisfaction with school was used as the outcome variable. Specifically, the SESb × Control interaction was negatively significant ($\gamma_{04} = -.184, p < .01$), whereas the SESb × Care interaction was positively significant ($\gamma_{05} = .071, p < .05$). Our findings showed that the relation between control and satisfaction with school tended to be negative in high SES classrooms but tended to be positive in low SES classrooms. On the contrary, the relation between care and satisfaction with school tended to be more positive for high SES classrooms. A practical implication is that teachers may emphasize more care and less control in managing high SES classrooms. Nonsignificant results for interaction tests in the prediction of misbehavior and engagement suggest that relations between classroom management and these outcomes are consistent across males and females, across students with different SES ranking in each class, and across classes with different mean SES. The lack of interaction between control and care in the prediction of misbehavior, engagement, and satisfaction with school indicates that control and care make unique (or additive) contributions to the prediction of outcomes. That is, control and care do not moderate each other in the predictive model.

**Educational significance**

The present study provides empirical evidence for the complementary roles of teacher care and control in classroom management. Teacher care is advocated by researchers and practitioners to meet students’ needs for love and respect, to engage student learning, and to fit the agenda of student-centered instructional reforms (Brophy, 1999, 2006; Evertson & Harris, 1999; McCaslin & Good, 1992). The present study supports this approach on the basis of its facilitating role in engaging student learning and enhancing students’ satisfaction with school life. Moreover, teacher control is still effective in reducing misbehavior and engaging student learning. Taken together, the finding of the complementary roles of control and care in classroom management suggests that teachers may blend control and care in the classroom to achieve multiple outcomes.
Reference


Appendix

Student Engagement (5 items): I pay attention well.

Classroom Misbehavior (6 items): I walk around the classroom.

Satisfaction with School (4 items): I am glad to be in this school.

Teacher Control (4 items): The teacher corrects misbehaviour immediately.

Teacher Care (4 items): The teacher shows concern for pupils.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations Among Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tr>
<td>Student level</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Student engagement</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Classroom misbehavior</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Satisfaction with school</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>-.17**</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>4. Gender</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.10**</td>
<td>-.08**</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>5. Individual SES</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.05*</td>
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<td>6. Control</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Care</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Mean SES of the class</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 2
Results from the Interaction Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Misbehavior</th>
<th>Satisfaction With School</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed effect</td>
<td>γ</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>γ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>γ00</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>.043</td>
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<tr>
<td>SESb (γ01)</td>
<td>.051*</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>-.077*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control (γ02)</td>
<td>.136**</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>-.076*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Care (γ03)</td>
<td>.085*</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>-.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SESb×Control (γ04)</td>
<td>-.015</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>-.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SESb×Care (γ05)</td>
<td>-.018</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>-.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control×Care (γ06)</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slope</td>
<td>GENDER (γ10)</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SESw (γ20)</td>
<td>.063*</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01.