Shifting Perspectives in Simulation: Implications to Pedagogical Learning of Preservice Teachers

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Overview

The chapter explores how participating in simulations can help preservice teachers shift their perspective about teaching when they play assigned roles to present relevant ideas, are exposed to different perspectives of their peers and more experienced others, and integrate new ideas with their emerging knowledge. Using two examples of simulations that addressed the issues of classroom management, we will carefully unpack the opportunities simulations provide for perspective taking and shifting, important roles experts can play in simulations, and the importance of a supportive environment, where preservice teachers are expected not to have solid understanding of the issue, with opportunities to learn and grow.

Keywords

Preservice education · Preservice teacher learning · Professional learning community · Teacher collaboration · Simulation

Learning Objectives

By the end of the chapter, the reader should be able to:

- Describe how simulations can allow preservice teachers to develop new ideas about classroom issues and topics by forming opinions, listening to different ideas, revising their opinions, all the while deepening their understanding of the issue.

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- Understand how simulations can help preservice teachers meaningfully collaborate with colleagues and work together to make school decisions.
- Explain certain benefits and pitfalls of simulations involving preservice teachers and instructors, including how preservice teachers talk and problem-solve.
- Explore how experts can play critical roles in a simulation, and identify a few key processes to plan productive participation, including thoughtful presentation of expert ideas.

13.1 Introduction

One of the important challenges of preservice teacher education is to help the teachers gain new perspectives as professionals (teachers) in a short period of time. Most preservice teachers bring their own subjective and narrow understanding of classrooms based on experiences as students and gaining new insights as teachers can take a long time. In this chapter, we explore how simulations may provide focused experiences for preservice teacher learning by requiring them to play a role with informed opinions, participating in discussions with other participants with different ideas, being guided by more experienced education experts, and being supported to change their ideas. We present two examples of simulations where preservice teachers discussed how to handle classroom management issues, to trace how their thinking shifted through the simulations. We discuss the role of experts (teacher educators) in the examples, and how well-designed simulations have the potential to deepen preservice teachers' understanding of classrooms.

Preservice teachers typically require years of classroom experience before they can understand and handle complex classroom issues skillfully. Their early understanding of classrooms can be superficial and narrow, and they tend to quickly judge a situation and hastily try to solve complex problems. It is expected that they will make mistakes and change their perspectives multiple times before feeling confident as teachers. This change can be facilitated by the influence of peers and mentors. In this chapter, we present how preservice teachers can shift their perspectives and gain new knowledge about classroom issues through simulation activities. We use the actual simulation examples in which the authors of this chapter participated as a starting point for deeper analyses of the experiences.

13.2 Perspectives

The literature discusses many dimensions of challenges in preservice teacher education (Grossman, 2009; Stewart & Thurlow, 2000). Among others, preservice teachers' perceptions and understanding of teaching are often limited, primarily based on their own personal experiences as students, and relatively fixed. It requires

a long time and much effort to shift their mindset to imagine themselves as effective teachers (Mewborn & Timinski, 2006). For example, if they have primarily learned mathematics by repetition and drill of basic facts, it will not be easy for them to incorporate problem-based and discussion-focused mathematics instructional methods right away. Preservice teachers' beliefs about good teaching can also be fairly rigid because each preservice teacher's beliefs are subjective and personal. Well-designed preservice teacher education programs provide purposefully-designed experiences to expand their views and perspectives (Kang & Van Es, 2019).

Simulation can provide an ideal experience to expand preservice teachers' perspectives because it allows them to practice skills and emulate them in a safe setting as already indicated in Chaps. 3 and 10. In preservice education, simulation can provide settings in which preservice teachers take on the roles of classroom teachers and make sense of classroom situations with peers using the information provided, without the fear of publicly making mistakes in front of students or supervisors. In other words, preservice teachers (novices) can experience and see teaching as a working system with the central features explicitly highlighted, so that they begin to make sense of how decisions can be made using key elements. When faced with classroom situations, it is difficult for preservice teachers to know what to pay attention to (or not), so simulation can narrow their attention to important aspects of classroom processes. For example, when faced with varied learning needs of students, a simulation can help preservice teachers focus on a few key elements of learning to create differentiated groups and help plan learning activities that maintain high expectations for all groups. A simulation can represent a classroom as a context where preservice teachers can attempt to solve a possible problem by focusing on a few important and manageable elements, discussing with other participants, revising their approaches as they gain a better understanding of the situation, while simultaneously gaining critical knowledge about teaching.

In a simulation, participants find solutions to certain problems or situations in a given scenario while learning about related topics, proposing ideas, negotiating, and making decisions (Angelini, 2021). It is likely that preservice teachers may come to incomplete or misguided decisions at the start of a simulation, but through discussion with peers, they can flesh out their understanding of the problem and solutions. They are also influenced by facilitators who can guide them toward change by aligning perspectives.

Facilitators can draw on collegiality and expertise to build trust that allows for gradual change through discussion. Simulations can provide a safe environment for preservice teachers to revise their thinking and decisions. Facilitators play a role to moderate the safety of the simulation by intervening and refocusing discussions (de Wijse-van Heeswijk, 2021). In physical K-12 classrooms, many teachers' instructional decisions are final and cannot be reversed (at least for the same students), but in a simulation, preservice teachers can safely entertain different decision paths while being supported by other participants. They can make suggestions and share opinions by taking on a role outside of their experience and attributing their ideas to

this imaginary profile. It is a context of collaborative problem-solving, helping build a foundation for a professional community where teachers support each other's learning.

13.3 About the Simulation Examples in This Chapter

In this chapter, we explore how a simulation can expand preservice teachers' perspectives as they play the roles of school professionals in a supportive collaborative meeting scenario. The authors of this chapter participated in a Virtual Exchange project using simulation in March 2021, which explored different classroom issues represented in scenarios (e.g., teaching methodologies for ELS, using lesson study for professional development). Each simulation group was composed of five or more participants, who were assigned different roles as follows: (1) Head of the school, (2) Pedagogical Advisory Board advisor, (3) Parent Association representative, (4) English Department representative, (5) Service-Learning Department representative, and (6) Special Education Department representative.

Each simulation group included a mix of preservice teachers, in-service teachers working toward a credential, university professors, teacher educators, and/or educational researchers from different educational disciplines. All participants were given the scenario prior to the simulation and asked to think through the situations before joining the team. It is also important to note that these teams are international in nature and participants came from different countries (Spain, Tunisia, Romania, England, Austria, and the United States). To build a community in the simulation group, each team met prior to the simulation meetings during which we addressed the scenarios. We discussed education in our various countries and got to know each other so that everyone could feel safe while participating in the simulation.

During the simulation, participants were tasked with talking through the scenarios by taking the perspective of their assigned profile. In the conversation, participants loosely follow a problem-solving structure of building relationships, defining the problem, analyzing the problem, and deciding on action steps (Musti-Rao et al., 2011). While different chapters of this book will address different aspects of the simulation experiences, we will focus on one of the challenges of the scenario (see Chap. 20: 'School of Valtance' simulation):

> Classroom management: Ten formal complaints have been passed about the ineffective learning environment during English lessons. Students are talking while the teacher is talking, moving around the room freely, and not attending to instruction. ValPAR (the Valtance Parent Association) has required measures to control discipline and the management of the classes during the English lessons bearing in mind that teachers are sought to maintain order and to keep the group on task and moving ahead. How can ValED teachers anticipate when misbehaviors are likely to occur and be proactive to prevent them?

The most effective interventions must be subtle, brief, and almost private. In addition, the teachers need to create a classroom environment with clear expectations and a welcoming tone. Classroom management should be integrated with

classroom activities. Instruction must be engaging and incur that students are active learners. Teachers must create a positive classroom environment where students can take risks and do their best work.

In the following sections, we will first introduce current perspectives and theories on classroom management, followed by two cases of simulation to illustrate how this scenario played out in two teams of which the authors took apart. We will present focused illustrations of interactions from each team, exemplifying the learning of preservice teachers through the simulation.

13.4 Classroom Management Perspectives/Theories

Preparing students to implement models of classroom management is complex and they often have incomplete knowledge in this area. There is evidence that preservice teachers often do not receive enough instruction about classroom management to effectively manage and instruct students who have behavioral difficulties (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). Classroom behaviors are improved when teachers know about the levels of intervention, starting with a school-wide system and telescoping down to the classroom and then the individual student level. One commonly used and current school-wide approach is called positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS; Horner & Sugai, 2015). This model scales up ideas from behavior analysis to establish a school-wide culture that promotes shared values, such as respect, responsibility, and community. There are typically three levels, universal, small group, and individual. There should also be support for students who need more intensive interventions, which should be provided at additional levels. The school culture and development of shared values can be considered one step in a complex system of supporting students' social and emotional development.

At the individual level, a student's behavior can be interpreted as a communication of an unmet need or an issue for which the student does not have the skills to communicate in a calm, verbal way (Greene & Winkler, 2019). Greene and Winkler (2019) discuss a systemic approach of collaborating with students to better understand the skills they are lacking and examining how they communicate unmet needs. This approach, called *Collaborative and Proactive Solutions*, is built around the assumption that students need instruction about how to understand their own behaviors and communicate their needs. Preservice teachers may interpret behaviors and school-wide systems in different ways, so talking through these ideas challenges previous experiences and knowledge.

13.5 Motivating Good Behaviors for Learning Through Belonging (Case 1)

In this simulation team, there were five preservice teachers who played various assigned profiles stated above, along with one teacher educator (first author of this chapter) who provided insight as a pedagogical advisor, and another teacher

educator as the head of the school. The head of the school asked the pedagogical advisor to start this portion of the simulation by stating her ideas regarding the situation. The advisor explained how classroom management should not be solely seen as punishing children and controlling/correcting their behaviors, but rather as creating safe classroom communities where students are motivated and engaged to learn (thus providing fewer opportunities for unwanted behaviors). Having classroom routines that students can anticipate what is going to happen during their days creates safety, and a sense of belonging to want to work together helps students monitor their own behaviors.

Following this statement, a few preservice teachers shared their ideas. Clarissa, who was given the role of special education advisor (all names are pseudonyms) said how using everyday life examples in teaching English learners helped increase engagement so that the students could communicate what they already knew, to make the language learning more meaningful. Lilly (as the service-learning specialist) said how teachers could plan and teach creative lessons that were more interactive for students. At this point, another preservice teacher, Lindsey (as head of the parent association), shared her thinking:

> Lindsey: … if the classroom atmosphere is not positive, like students chit-chatting in the back, it will make the lesson less effective. These students make it difficult for other students to understand, and make the lesson useless. And they won't be able to do the homework because they don't understand what is taught in class, and parents can't help, either. I think classroom management is the most important thing in teaching.

What Lindsey says above is her reality, and developmentally appropriate for a preservice teacher who has not spent many hours in classrooms. She perceives that the time she spent planning a lesson, to make the lesson adequate, could be easily ruined by a student's misbehaviors. She added how no student will learn as a result of the misbehavior, then not be able to do homework and their parents would not be able to help. It is important to note that while Lindsey is making a considerable leap in her argument in this hypothetical case, it is the reality for her as a new preservice teacher, and we must accept where she is in her professional learning trajectory.

What followed Lindsey's sharing is other preservice teachers contributing their ideas to shift the discussion path to emphasize classroom community, without explicitly disagreeing with Lindsey:

> Chrissy (as head of the English department): I think that creating a sense of community is most important as a part of classroom management …
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> Aki: … when students are talking to each other, like chit-chatting, telling them not to talk and silencing will not guarantee learning, right? The students may continue to think about other things outside of the lesson while not talking. Behavior is just one indicator of learning, but there are so many other things that can be going on. If students are talking, they may be excited about something about the lesson. Invite them to bring the ideas to the whole group. Other students may learn, too.
>
> Chrissy: … maybe small behaviors do not need to be corrected. We want to understand the reasons for these behaviors. We can let them talk it out in lessons …

> Clarissa: … also, as teachers, we are modeling our expectations. We are not perfect. Mistakes are part of life, and we can make them (mistakes) a part of the lesson too …

As illustrated above, the group took on Lindsey's initial idea and example and extended it productively toward solutions on how to work with student misbehavior (chit-chatting). Lindsay listened carefully to everyone's ideas. She then changes the direction by presenting another example of student misbehavior:

> Lindsey: … I agree with everybody that the classroom environment is important. And anticipating misbehaviors and handling them in face-to-face classrooms are easy, but it is harder with online teaching. Some students may turn off screens and do other things. And if one student misbehaves, it will distract the rest of the class. What can we do about that?

It is clear with her new example that Lindsey is still struggling with the notion of how to handle the imperfect behaviors of students. The head of the school calls on the pedagogical advisor for her input:

> Aki: … It is important to establish expectations in classrooms at the beginning of the school year that all students belong, they are liked, and all their behaviors are acceptable as long as they don't hurt each other physically or emotionally. One bad behavior will not define the student, and they will always be a part of the community, but we also want to understand why behavior happens if it is not productive for everyone's learning. When a behavior is observed that makes us (teachers) curious why, we want the student to be able to explain it back to us. When they do, it then becomes an issue for the classroom community to decide whether or not it is acceptable. If the teacher quickly judges and tells the student to stop behaving in a certain
>
> way, it can become a power struggle. Trust and relationships in the classroom community will work better to change behaviors.

Following this, another preservice teacher eagerly chimes in:

> Yana (as English department advisor): Students can explain what is bad in their behaviors. Teachers can do that for their behaviors, too. This creates shared values … I don't like to call it "control" as I don't want to be a bossy teacher.

The case above illustrates how preservice teachers may perceive classroom management as the persistent and most challenging aspect of teaching (Henson, 2001). As their understanding of classroom interaction is limited, many preservice teachers at this career stage may see lessons as choreographed plays, so any interruptions are unwelcome. Thus, they attempt to stop these interruptions as quickly as they can. With years of teaching, many experienced teachers come to learn that simply extinguishing a behavior in one place will not change the root cause. If we want to make a sustainable change, we must try to understand where the behavior is coming from and why, and take a purposeful approach to change it or learn to work with it. As research shows, creating safe classroom communities and nurturing positive community experiences will motivate students to work more productivity for the sheer desire to belong (Ginsburg & Wlodkowski, 2019; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994).

If the pedagogical advisor was to present a different and more-traditional view that strict and structured behavior management is important and necessary, the discussion in this simulation group could have taken a different direction. In fact, if preservice teachers come from traditional US classrooms, they are likely to have experienced classroom management programs based on positive and negative reward systems (e.g., Assertive Discipline). These programs focus on changing behaviors using external stimuli but rarely address the reasons and needs behind the behaviors. Thus, many preservice teachers in this situation could come with beliefs that controlling behaviors externally is important, not knowing that motivating students through social connections is possible. The flexibility and the eagerness of most of the preservice teachers in this simulation group to take on the new ideas were refreshing. While Lindsey remained uncertain about how to handle concrete classroom management situations, she was also feeling the pressure from her peers that creating a safe classroom environment might work to manage unwanted behaviors. It is also possible that Lindsey consciously took a strong stance because of the profile she was assigned in the simulation—a representative of the parent association—for which the association is the one who raised the management issue in the scenario.

13.6 Collaborating to Develop a Consistent Plan (Case 2)

In this simulation team, there were five participants: four preservice teachers preparing to teach English to learners who speak other languages and one special education teacher educator (the second author of this chapter) in the United States. The preservice teachers who were present played the following roles: one head of school and two English teachers. I played the role of the special education teacher.

The classroom management discussion started with me stating that this scenario was my favorite and the head of school suggested that I set up the discussion. I described classroom management as an umbrella term that includes the rules, procedures, classroom environment, how students participate, how teachers transition from one task to the next, and how to address students' behaviors. In this definition, most of "classroom management" falls under the teacher's control. If something goes awry, it is an opportunity for the teacher to revisit rules, procedures, transitions, and how students feel in the classroom.

Misbehaviors happen for many reasons, but I wanted to frame the discussion around what teachers can do to be more consistent and proactive in their planning to avoid a discussion in which the teachers and head of school would blame students for their behaviors.

After the introduction, Lena (all preservice teacher names are pseudonyms) said that we should build on previous behaviors and teacher reactions and keep a record of these so we can plan how to react as behaviors arise again. She stated the importance of a "Plan B" for reacting to students' misbehaviors.

> Lena: Maybe what we can do first is notice the misbehavior, like after it happens you can call the student and tell them that next time if you feel you need to do this, then you just raise your hand and tell me. When you acknowledge it, you need to make them know that what they did was noticed and then you can talk about it in class in a general way.

Lena's comment about acknowledging the behavior and allowing the student to identify their own needs reflected her understanding that behavior is completely under the student's control. Although many teachers believe this, behavior can also be a student's attempt to communicate unmet needs (Greene & Winkler, 2019). After Lena's comment, I shifted the discussion to individual aspects of classroom management, such as teaching students alternative behaviors and behavior planning, then I tried to reenter my role by asking the English teachers about the other teachers in the department. Do they all have clear rules and procedures for their students?

> Julia: We need to work on that. I don't know how the rest of the teachers' work, but I try to create an atmosphere of respect and to set some rules and limits, but to be close to my students and make sure I know them. If they did something they can tell me because there is trust, but I guess it's hard for other teachers.

> Jody: You have to build trust; you don't just get it. Some of the teachers have trouble with that. So, you can come to me as the special education teacher to make plans.

Since I mentioned plans, I then proceeded to talk about the process of behavior intervention plan meetings and answered questions about behavior plans, non-violent crisis intervention, and responding to dangerous behaviors instead of allowing another student to build on what Julia was talking about in terms of building trusting relationships with students. After talking a bit more about collaborative plans, we brainstormed ways to prepare all of the teachers in the school to work with students with challenging behaviors and agreed to add this topic to the weekly professional development sessions that we had decided to conduct earlier in the simulation.

Julia shifted the conversation to an idea about being more consistent across the school, which demonstrates an introductory understanding of PBIS. Julia presented the first step and then I built some instruction about the multiple tiers of PBIS in the following interaction. When a preservice teacher shares developing idea, the expert notices it, and provides resources, tools, and terminologies to solidify their ideas.

> Julia: I think we should develop a classroom management plan that is adapted to our students in the school. If we all work in the same way, then the students will be able to learn the rules and procedures better.

> Jody: …We have school-wide expectations and rules that the students help develop too and then we have another level for students who need more support and a third level for students who need individual behavior plans…

This discussion continued and followed the same pattern as the earlier discussion with Julia agreeing and wanting to have a consistent system and Lena talking about teaching as the work of developing plans, so deviating from the plan to teach social skills and build community would take time away from planned instruction. She

agreed that it would be useful, but not if it takes away from her prepared lesson. After hearing from Julia, Lena conceded that as long as the department and school community was teaching skills to help students deal with frustration and communicate better, it would be a good practice to integrate into lessons.

To summarize, I supported the discussion by building on preservice teachers' incomplete understanding to insert instruction and resources. Part of the role of a special educator is to lead collaborative teams, but the head of the school should have co-led the team with her leadership role. Sarah (head of the school) was mostly silent throughout the discussion. She might be unfamiliar with what someone in her role would say during a discussion about classroom management or she might have been more reserved and unsure how to join the conversation. Lena offered original ideas in response to the scenario and occupied her role as an English teacher in the school. Her comments reflect what novice teachers say about classroom management, similar to Lindsay from Case 1. She focused on planning lessons and delivering curriculum and suggested that we ignore misbehaviors. The research shows that planned ignoring can be effective in some cases, but should not be the only strategy in response to misbehavior (Gable et al., 2009). Preservice teachers should be prepared to understand behaviors as communications of unmet needs (Greene & Winkler, 2019) and analyze behaviors systematically by collecting data about antecedents and consequences (Anderson et al., 2015).

Finally, Julia emphasized working together to develop plans and consistent practices as a school. A school-wide approach to PBIS would allow for multiple layers of support for students, including intensive interventions that would support students who need individualized support to learn alternative ways of expressing their needs (Horner & Sugai, 2015). There is emerging evidence that restructuring schools to use restorative practices can disrupt a cycle of trauma and exclusion for students (Dutil, 2020; Ryan & Ruddy, 2015). This simulation allowed participants to grapple with these issues and use a problem-solving approach to consider ideas and make a plan for the fictional school.

13.7 Reflections as Teacher Educators

In participating in simulations, we (authors of this chapter) experienced how adaptive and malleable the preservice teachers' perceptions are in general, and what important roles teacher educators can play in simulations in forming new perspectives. We both felt, in our respective simulation teams, how the preservice teachers were eager to take on expert knowledge provided, make sense of the situation in relation to the new ideas, and quickly modify their statements to align with the new learning. We also often caught ourselves taking the role of teachers/professors unexpectedly when preservice teachers seemed uncertain about their ideas while playing the roles that demanded different expertise. For example, Case 2 demonstrated that participants bring in their own experiences outside of their assigned profile, so if the team had been different, a completely different discussion

and set of action steps could have arisen. Simulations, such as this one, depend on the commitment of each person to occupy their role and maintain a suspension of disbelief (Dieker et al., 2014). I (Jody) did not achieve this ideal because I deviated from my profile as a colleague to lead instruction about classroom management and school-wide approaches to behavioral intervention.

Although the profile of special educator would allow for some conversations about behavior and individualized approaches, I crossed into my actual role as an instructor to frame the discussion. As teacher educators, we privilege certain information and when participants talked about their expertise and experiences, I added special education instruction and resources, possibly beyond what the special education profile should have added, including giving feedback to the preservice teachers about their responses. When preservice teachers presented pieces of their understanding, the teacher educator connected the pieces into formal models and ideas.

We reflected on these experiences separately and together and agreed that it is one of the strengths of simulation practices when experts (teacher educators) could provide situation-based knowledge to novices (preservice teachers) when the novices were pressed to take a stand and express their ideas. Bransford et al. (2000) explain how novice and expert knowledge interact during instruction, with novices presenting incomplete, sometimes isolated knowledge and experts making connections to a system of knowledge. Being assigned an unfamiliar role in simulation, the novice must quickly form their opinions by gathering information and knowledge that they have immediate access to. In the process, they become aware of what they do not know and what they are uncertain about. In this vulnerable space, they are more ready to hear experts' ideas and can integrate the new knowledge into their understanding because they are aware of what they do not know. The experts can often systematically present how an issue is surrounded by and connected to other factors in a situation, and make clear connections among the factors, so that the novice can begin to understand how the issue does not exist alone in the setting but can be understood and solved by attending to many related factors in the system.

13.8 Summary

Having grounded classroom experiences will help preservice teachers come to solutions beyond the superficial and simplistic when faced with a problem. While they bring their own knowledge of classrooms (mainly as students), being a teacher requires a whole new set of skills and thinking. Becoming an effective teacher usually takes years of classroom experiences and working in teams to solve problems. Using simulations is a potential way to help preservice teachers gain experiences in various classroom-based and collaborative scenarios, helping them imagine their roles as teachers and develop a new understanding of the profession before taking responsibility for classrooms. The presence of experts in the simulation groups is also critical in shifting preservice teachers' perspectives and beliefs,

as the preservice teachers are keenly aware of what they do not understand about the issue at hand while preparing to play an assigned role, and thus are ready to integrate new information and knowledge into their thinking.

Using simulations to navigate detailed scenarios with experts will help prepare teachers to fill these roles in their future schools. Preservice teachers actively imagine various scenarios from different perspectives before they experience them, so playing different profiles becomes possible. Multiple perspectives shared in a collaborative analysis of scenarios can help participants learn about what other members of school teams might think and how they might approach the same situation. Including various scenarios also allows participants to share their differing expertise and experience. Thus, they can situate themselves as learners in other scenario discussions. The next step for participants is to reflect about their experiences and what they learned from occupying different profiles in the collaborative discussions.

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