Managing a classroom requires an extensive set of skills and knowledge about the context of the individual learners, the larger arenas in which the school is operating, and a theoretical and practical understanding of how learners are motivated, develop, encode, and decode information. Teachers and preservice teachers must understand concepts of educational psychology as groundwork to developing their philosophy and practical implementation of their instructional and management strategies. An Educational Psychology of Classroom Management: Best Practices in the Multicultural Classroom attempts to merge the concepts and offer a
level of multicultural consideration. This is not a book I would use in my Classroom Management or Educational Psychology courses, nor would I recommend it to others without further revision and deeper analysis.

This book is divided into four parts, each containing three chapters: Part 1: The Teaching Profession Domain; Part 2: The Classroom Management and Discipline Domain; Part 3: The Multicultural Strategies Management Domain; and, Part IV: The Best Professional Practices Domain. Dr. Gregory S. Goodman provided a forward praising Vang for his contribution and understanding of issues that teacher education students encounter in the field. In the preface, Vang acknowledges that “educational psychology is the basis for helping classroom teachers and prospective educators” (p. xvii) understand how to manage a classroom. He paints a fairly bleak picture of the future of education, saying that future teachers will encounter large numbers of students as teacher shortages continue, and their classrooms will be “unmanageable, and perhaps untenable” (p. xix), and later wrote that this would cause “instructional practices [to be] improvised and impoverished” (p. 17). He also indicated that new teachers are frightened of assessment and are often taught to teach in only direct and scripted ways. This is not true of most of the students I teach, nor the departments I have worked with in the Midwest. However, I applaud him for understanding the challenges of the students he works with, and feel that new teachers would benefit from a frank analysis of the field.

In Part 1 (Chapters 1-3), Vang describes teaching challenges and practical issues in education, such as teaching contracts and licensure. He introduces student diversity with a graphic, but it is not complete, nor does he address the complexities and interactions of individual and group diversities. He really makes a case for identifying the difficulties of the career, almost to the point of sounding defensive. Most of the included tables use California statistics, and his discussion of licensure and internships are based on California laws and customs. This information benefits those in California, but its usefulness outside the state are unclear. I appreciated that he included difficulties students faced during student teaching and offered tips for overcoming them. This realistic view of field experience is needed in
educational texts. Once again, however, nearly all of the information he provides, self-admittedly, is California-centric, including California teaching objectives and credential obtainment, and may be inappropriate to transfer to other states,

Chapter 3 offered some brief dialogue of educational philosophies and theories. Unfortunately, this chapter could have used a bit more editing, as two paragraphs were repeated verbatim, tables ran over pages and cut information in awkward spots, and a graphic on p. 47 is so blurry it is very difficult to read. Theories are presented in tables and rarely discussed in the text, nor is a reason presented why only certain theories or theorists are included in the tables. I took issue with some of the content that was presented; he wrote that collective bargaining and teacher unions protect teachers, which is not necessarily true in all states or districts. Additionally, he wrote, “Prayer is not allowed in school” (p. 53), which is untrue, of course. In most public schools, students may pray, but it is not endorsed or led by school officials or teachers. Vang recommended teachers not touch their students, including hugging. I would not disagree with that, but in subsequent chapters, he wrote about shaking hands and offering a high five to students at the door (p. 76). That is fine, but contradictions like these are not uncommon in this text.

In Part 2, Vang examined issues of classroom management and discipline. I was very disappointed, and enthusiastically disagree with Vang, when I read that he continuously used the word “train” when referring to adapting students’ behaviors, and wrote, “Maintaining order means eliciting compliance, respect, and subordination from students” (p. 64). I agree with none of that. I feel our goal should be to create engaged students, who are democratically involved in creating classroom rules and procedures, know how to follow them and consequences that accompany correct and incorrect behaviors, and feel a part of a caring classroom where their voices are valued. There are practical issues in these chapters, such as spelling errors in graphics, tables and graphics that are never discussed in the text, and graphics that genuinely do not make logical sense. In one table, Vang wrote that Alfie Kohn is a proponent of “rewards, punishments, consequences” (p. 70). This is clearly the
antithesis of Kohn’s beliefs, as he believes rewards undermine intrinsic motivation.

Although he offered a section called “Multicultural Approach” (p. 78), I felt he never provided any deep or new insight for teachers unfamiliar with multiculturalism, nor did he propose a definition of what multiculturalism is. He did write, however, “Most minority students are well behaved because of the expectations of their culture and their parents” (p. 78). This generalization is not only unfounded and un-cited, but is not at all appropriate to offer as information for new teachers. I feel that other information is similarly inappropriate, such as a hypothetical situation he offered, when “a student pokes another with an object, teachers have to remove the object and restrain the abuser to protect the victim” (p. 81). This seems excessive, and should be handled contextually. Vang forgets to use people-first language (“autistic children” [p. 82]; “retarded” [p. 190] – which should not be a part of our vocabulary anymore), somehow believes that the media and gang-related activities are a “common cause of misbehaviors” (p. 83) in children, writes that “inattentiveness, having no supplies or books, and incomplete assignments” (p. 83) are misbehaviors, and mentions religious and cultural differences, but offers little insight into what those differences mean for students or teachers. In one table (p. 86), he felt that the following are types of student misconduct: lost, uncertain, amusement, excitement, ecstatic, waiting, sitting still, quiet. I am still not sure what he means by these, and feel that these are more indicative of characteristics that teachers should examine to reflect upon whether or not their teaching is engaging.

Additionally, he wrote that a good example of a logical consequence is for students to miss recess after their first warning (p. 88), a practice that, in some cases, often takes away the one outlet students have to release energy and frustration that may be a cause of their misbehaviors. On page 91, Vang wrote, “Learn to ignore insignificant behaviors,” then, a paragraph later, wrote, “Teachers must not ignore any behavior.” These types of inconsistencies made parts of the book very difficult to read. Two pages later, he wrote that physical punishments “are considered abusive” and are an “old concept” and “teachers are not permitted to use punishment in US schools” (p. 90).
Actually, there are presently 19 states that do allow it. If Vang is looking for readers outside of California to read his book, he must look at issues at a national level and should discuss the how context is reflected in state, district, and classroom policies.

Vang did offer preservice teachers advice to not get involved in school politics, such as disagreements among staff. However, I could not look past the inaccuracies in this section. Vang provided a table of Gardner’s eight multiple intelligences, incorrectly writing that they were offered by Gardner in his 1983 book (only seven originally were) and incorrectly writes “naturalist” as “natural” intelligence. He subsequently offered a very odd and generally incorrect definition of this multiple intelligence. Overall, Part 2 had a number of confusing and reused graphics, some incorrect information, contradictions, and almost no mention of multiculturalism. For three chapters of classroom management issues in an Educational Psychology book, there was almost no discussion of any basic principles of the field, such as behaviorism (including conditioning), cognitivism, development of any kind, or motivation.

Part 3 focused on multicultural strategies for classroom management. Vang examined the first day of school and school procedures, as well as daily schedules and discipline approaches and policies. His conversation about sharing personal contact information was good for students to read, since teachers are operating in a more complex social realm of digital connectedness. He also offered insight explaining religious rights in schools, but contradicts himself when he previously wrote that prayer was not allowed. I felt the most beneficial thing he offered in this book came when he wrote that “all Americans are part of cultural diversity” (p. 146). When I teach students in the Midwest, some have trouble understanding how student differences exist when so many areas are fairly homogeneous in terms of race, religion, and language.

Vang offered a bit more vision of multiculturalism as he told readers that teachers must maintain high expectations for all learners and offer all a quality education. I was looking for a more thorough discussion, though, as he seemed to breeze over conversation points. For instance,
he wrote that disabilities can have an impact on students in the psychomotor domain. He then wrote, “Teachers should take these factors into consideration while working in a multicultural and multilingual classroom” (p. 153). I feel like this is the same old story that teachers often get. Readers need more that “take into consideration” from a book like this; they need conversation about what it means for them and their students.

He spent well over a page describing right- and left-brain learners and how teachers can use this in their classroom. Personally, I feel this has little place in current educational psychology textbooks as it has very mixed empirical research behind it (and I personally feel is more of a cultural misunderstanding of how the brain truly operates). He even admitted its debate, which should have given him the indication to leave it out, or only touch on it, and discuss other issues deeper. Later, though, he offered some good teacher advice for multicultural approaches (citing himself from a previous book publication).

The last chapter of Part 3 described management principles and strategies. The reoccurring theme, though, is that very little is discussed in practical or theoretical detail. One example is in a table of classroom interventions, he wrote, “Use problem solving strategies” (p. 189). Maybe that would work, but what does it mean? Readers of this text would yearn for ideas and theories from which to work. This chapter had so many tables and charts that it was almost fatiguing to try to follow. It was the most relevant nod to multiculturalism yet in the book. Part 4 detailed best practices in teaching, but began by saying that teaching is the “transference of knowledge and skills from teachers to students in a formalized setting” (p. 195). As a constructivist educator who studies engaged learning, that part of his definition is a very traditional description of teaching that should no longer be the way we think of how meaningful, authentic learning occurs. More information about Educational Psychology principles of learning (models of memory, concept attainment, and so on) would have brought that to light. Vang does offer a useful section in which he tells young teachers to be confident and ask for help if they need it. This would have been a good area to bring up teaching efficacy and its impact on how students learn, but it never happened, unfortunately.
By the point I reached Part 4, I was starting to become weary of the graphics, and figure 10.1 (p. 201) listed factors influencing learning. “Not sure” was included in the pie chart, and I am not sure what that meant. He also listed “achievement testing” as being 14% of the total contribution to student learning, which I wholeheartedly disagree with. His definition of pedagogy is incorrect (p. 206) and he had an unwieldy number of tables toward the end of the book (many of which were already used once or twice in previous chapters), but his section on becoming a reflective educator was worth a read. He offered helpful advice for young teachers on practical ways they can reflect on their actions (such as sharing ideas with colleagues, identifying what is not working, and using notes and journals to track their teaching progress). I have found that many new and preservice teachers are unaware of the benefits of reflective practice, and have only a surface understanding of its application.

From pages 220-236, Vang offered common areas of classroom management concerns, possible solutions, and goals. These were cited from several authors, and I believe they may be beneficial to new teachers. Although I did not agree with them all (such as a goal being to make students “obey authority” [p. 221]), and one found itself on the list twice (truancy), it might be helpful to new teachers. I rarely agree with “tips and tricks” for teachers’ classroom instruction and management, though, since everything depends on the context of the state, city, neighborhood, school, classroom, and individuals in the classroom.

The final chapter was a culmination of other concepts already introduced in the book and offered some tips for new teachers. It is good for them to read about the phases of the first year teaching experience, from anticipation to reflection, but was unaware why he found that from September to October, first-year teachers are in survival mode, and from October to December, they are disillusioned (p. 248). This seems like a drab outlook for first year teachers, and is obviously not true of all. There are graphics I did not understand. For instance, there is a table called “Meanings of the Word Diversity” (p. 258) that lists 10 different acrostics using the letters of
diversity. It made no sense to me why Vang devoted almost an entire page to this.

Vang ended the book as he began: discussing the national crises facing future educators and discussing education in California.

I would not use this book in any of my classes, nor would I recommend it to academics without revision. It was largely un-cited, graphics and tables were sometimes incoherent or discussed in the text, and almost no real, researched principles or theories of Educational Psychology were even mentioned. I would have liked to see a more meaningful discussion of multiculturalism, and it was so California-focused that its policy discussions and statistics on teacher and student diversity in the state do little good to those outside of the state. One example of this is a graphic he created with eight common classroom health and safety concerns (p. 131). Earthquakes are on that list (as are first aid kits, animals, fire, and burning). I wanted to like this book, since it had the potential to take a vital Educational Psychology perspective of how people operate and what makes them different, but it never achieved this for me. I would look forward to reading a second edition, though, as an edited version that includes: more national attention; a greater conversation about multiculturalism; cited theories of Educational Psychology; current research on development, learning, and motivation; updated graphics; and fewer tables. Until then, there are better texts available.

About the Reviewer

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