Using Asynchronous Discussions to Teach Classroom Management Skills in Online Teacher Preparation Courses

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ABSTRACT

Classroom management is a vital skill for all teachers. Special education teacher educators are tasked with ensuring that teacher candidates are prepared to implement evidence-based practices for the prevention and intervention of challenging behaviors. Many teacher candidates are taking their coursework in an asynchronous online format, which likely includes the use of discussion boards. In this article, we offer suggestions for using four discussion board formats to support teacher candidates in learning classroom management skills. These effective discussion board formats are (a) sharing products that students have created, (b) video-based discussions, (c) jigsaw discussions, and (d) debates. When high quality discussion boards are integrated into asynchronous online courses, student learning and engagement will increase, therefore, creating higher quality preparation programs.

KEYWORDS

Asynchronous discussions, classroom management, online learning, teacher preparation education

Dr. Ramirez has received feedback from her recent special education teacher preparation program graduates that they feel unprepared for classroom management skills and addressing challenging student behaviors in their classrooms. Many former students report wishing their coursework included more instruction and practice on these topics. Dr. Ramirez runs a fully online teacher certification program and is looking to expand the way she uses asynchronous discussions in order to better enhance student learning. She is preparing to teach a course on positive behavior intervention supports (PBIS) next semester and aims to use the course discussion boards in an intentional manner that will better prepare students for classroom management.

Like Dr. Ramirez's students, many special education teachers are unprepared for behavior challenges in their classrooms and the lack of preparedness for managing challenging behaviors has been reported by both general and special education teacher candidates. In fact, only about 20% of all classroom teachers, including special educators, feel prepared for addressing challenging behaviors (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016). Research indicates that many teacher preparation programs do not adequately prepare candidates for addressing behavior challenges (Freeman et al., 2014) and that this skill deficit may contribute to high teacher turnover rates (Myers et al., 2017).

In addition to teacher turnover, behavior challenges in the class-

room have several other negative impacts. First, challenging student behaviors may disrupt the learning environment and reduce the access to education for all students in the classroom (Epstein et al., 2008). Challenging behaviors in the school setting are correlated with mental health concerns (Suldo et al., 2014) and criminality in adulthood (Bradley et al., 2008). Additionally, the academic success and future behaviors of other students in the classroom are negatively impacted by students' challenging behaviors (Chaffee et al., 2020). Finally, children who exhibit challenging behaviors may be removed from inclusive classrooms (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016), thus reducing the student's access to learning. Due to these outcomes, it is vital that teachers are prepared to address challenging behaviors in their classrooms.

ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE LEARNING

Almost 40% of learners opt to take at least some of their university coursework online (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Due to the COVID pandemic, this number has increased and almost two-thirds of college students are taking some (or all) classes virtually (Lederman, 2021). Some online courses are offered in a synchronous format, indicating that the professor and students are in a remote classroom at the same time, interacting with one another in real-time (Ward et al., 2010). Other courses are offered asynchronously, meaning that students complete their work on their own time, but are still responsible for meeting assignment deadlines (Cho & Tobias, 2016). The asynchronous format meets the needs of a variety of students, including students in rural areas with limited internet access (Lohmann & Boothe, 2020; Fish & Gill, 2009) and for non-traditional students who may be balancing multiple responsibilities such as full-time jobs and families (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2017; Lohmann & Boothe, 2020).

Many asynchronous courses utilize course discussion boards, which allow students to learn from one another (Cho & Tobias, 2016) and build community among students, which can enhance student engagement and motivation for learning (Al Jeraisy et al., 2015). Well-designed asynchronous discussion boards have a positive impact on student retention and achievement in online courses and programs (Fear & Erikson-Brown, 2014). Although faculty use a variety of discussion board formats, the evidence suggests that not all discussion formats are equally effective (Lohmann & Boothe, 2020). Based on research and our own experiences as online faculty members, we recommend interactive discussion board formats to improve student learning, such as (a) sharing products that students have created, (b) jigsaw discussions, (c) video-based discussions, and (d) debates (Lohmann & Boothe, 2020). Online faculty must ensure they are designing asynchronous discussion boards that lead students to provide feedback to one another and offer students the opportunity to practice necessary skills for future career success (deLima et al., 2019).

Teacher preparation programs that prepare candidates for classroom management include practicing implementation of teaching practices in their coursework (Paramita et al., 2020). With this in mind, it is vital that special education teacher educators use practical assignments and assessments in their courses in order to prepare teacher candidates for implementing evidence-based practices in classroom management. For teacher preparation programs that offer online instruction, best practices in remote learning must be utilized. This includes the use of high-quality asynchronous discussion boards. When designing discussion boards for their own courses, the authors often incorporate both text-based and visual instructions.

Dr. Ramirez has identified a variety of classroom management skills that her students must master in order to be successful in their classrooms. She plans to use various methods to teach these skills and has identified five specific areas that she wants to target through asynchronous discussions in the course: (a) developing class wide expectations, (b) collecting baseline data, (c) locating behavior resources, (d) evidence-based behavior interventions, and (e) understanding controversial topics in classroom management.

Sharing Products

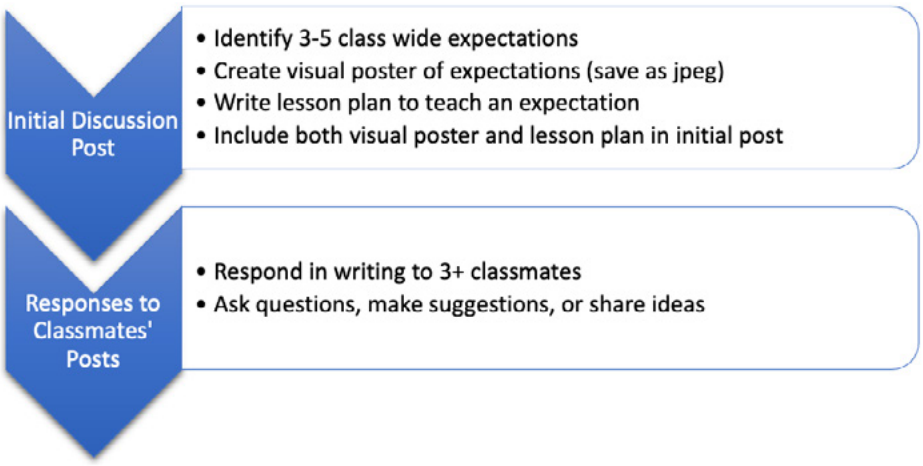
One asynchronous discussion method that can be effective in

FIGURE 1: Shared Product Discussion

INITIAL DISCUSSION POST EXPECTATIONS:

As you learned this week, Tier 1 PBIS includes having 3-5 positively stated classroom expectations that are explicitly taught to students. For this week's discussion, create the expectations for your current (or future) classroom and a visual poster that can be used to display the expectations. In addition, write a lesson plan for a lesson you will teach for instructing your students on one or more of the expectations. Attach your poster as a JPEG image in your initial discussion post and include your lesson plan as an attachment in the post. Your initial discussion post is due on Thursday at 11:59 pm.

The flowchart below outlines the steps you need to take to participate in this discussion.



RESPONSE EXPECTATIONS:

After posting your initial discussion, respond to a minimum of 3 classmates with text-based responses that demonstrate critical thinking on the topic. Potential ideas for responses include questions about their expectations or lesson plans, suggestions for improving classmates' work, or sharing your ideas for other ways to teach the expectations. Your responses are due on Sunday at 11:59 pm.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS:

- Ensure your writing is clear and concise.
- Follow APA 7th ed, when needed, and adhere to all grammar/spelling mechanics.
- Remember: Initial posts are due on Thursdays and response to classmates due on Sundays.
- Review the rubric in Blackboard for further grading criteria.

teacher education courses is having students create and share products that could be used in their own classrooms (Lohmann & Boothe, 2020). This discussion format increases student and faculty engagement, as well as student mastery of course content (Mathew & Alidmat, 2013). In teacher preparation courses, this discussion format may be used for students to receive peer feedback on materials such as visual schedules, lesson plans, and other classroom materials (Lohmann & Boothe, 2020).

Dr. Ramirez wants to ensure that her students have the opportunity to practice creating materials they can use in their future classrooms, and she believes their learning will be enhanced if they get feedback from one another on the materials they are creating. Because she knows that every classroom needs a clear set of expectations that are taught to all learners, she decides to have students practice creating their classroom rules and share them with one another through a discussion.

The use of class wide PBIS is a proactive approach to classroom management that has proven to be effective for reducing challenging behavior in K-12 classrooms (Simonsen & Myers, 2015). When using class wide PBIS, teachers must explicitly teach their classroom expectations (Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, 2022). When children know what teachers expect, they are more likely to meet those expectations (Myers et al., 2017). It is best practice for teachers to identify three to five overarching, positively stated classroom expectations (Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, 2022). Figure 1 offers an example of an asynchronous discussion for designing classroom expectations that teacher candidates may use in their future classrooms.

TABLE 1: Shared Products Discussion Rubric

	PROFICIENT	DEVELOPING	LIMITED
Initial Post Quality (15 points)	Student provided a well-developed and visually appealing poster that demonstrated an understanding of how to create appropriate classroom expectations. AND included a creatively and expertly demonstrated an appropriate lesson plan using the university lesson plan template that taught the expectations noted in the visual poster.	Student provided a visual poster that demonstrated a basic understanding of how to create appropriate classroom expectations. AND the lesson plan demonstrated a basic lesson plan on the expectations noted in the visual poster.	Student's visual poster did not demonstrate an understanding of how to create appropriate classroom expectations. AND/OR the lesson plan was not based on the expectations noted in the visual poster.
Response Posts (15 points)	Student responded to 3 or more classmates AND demonstrated in-depth analysis of other's posts that add substantively to the discussion by building on previous posts. Responses are academic and respectful. Responses are backed-up with appropriate citations/ references.	Student responded to at least 2 classmates AND demonstrated little analysis of other's posts. Responses are shallow and may not enrich the discussion. Responses are backed-up with appropriate citations/references.	Response posts do not meet minimum requirements and / or responses are off-topic or inappropriate. Responses are not backed-up with appropriate citations/responses.
Mechanics & Writing Quality (10 points)	Contributes to discussion with clear, concise posts formatted in an easy-to-read style that uses accurate grammar and spelling. No more than 2 grammatical or APA errors are present in the discussion posts.	Contributes to discussion with posts that contain multiple clarity issues, and/or grammar and spelling errors.	Contributes to discussion with posts that contain major clarity and organizational issues, and/or grammar and spelling errors.
Discussion Expectations (10 points)	All requirements (e.g., visual poster, lesson plan) were completed in a clear manner and expertly demonstrated student understanding of the topic.	All requirements (e.g., visual poster, lesson plan) were completed and demonstrated a basic understanding of the topic.	Not all requirements (e.g., visual poster, lesson plan) were completed and/or the student did not demonstrate understanding of the topic.

When grading asynchronous discussions, regardless of the discussion format, the authors suggest a focus on following basic assignment directions while also grading discussion content. Rubrics should remain fairly consistent across discussion formats with necessary adjustments depending on specific needs. For the discussion example above, the general grading information focuses on discussion expectations, writing mechanics, and meeting deadlines. Changes in grading expectations occur between the initial and response posts. For shared product discussions, the rubric should focus on the quality and accuracy of the information provided. Table 1 provides a sample rubric that can be used for general shared product discussions such as the discussion in Figure 1.

Jigsaw Discussions

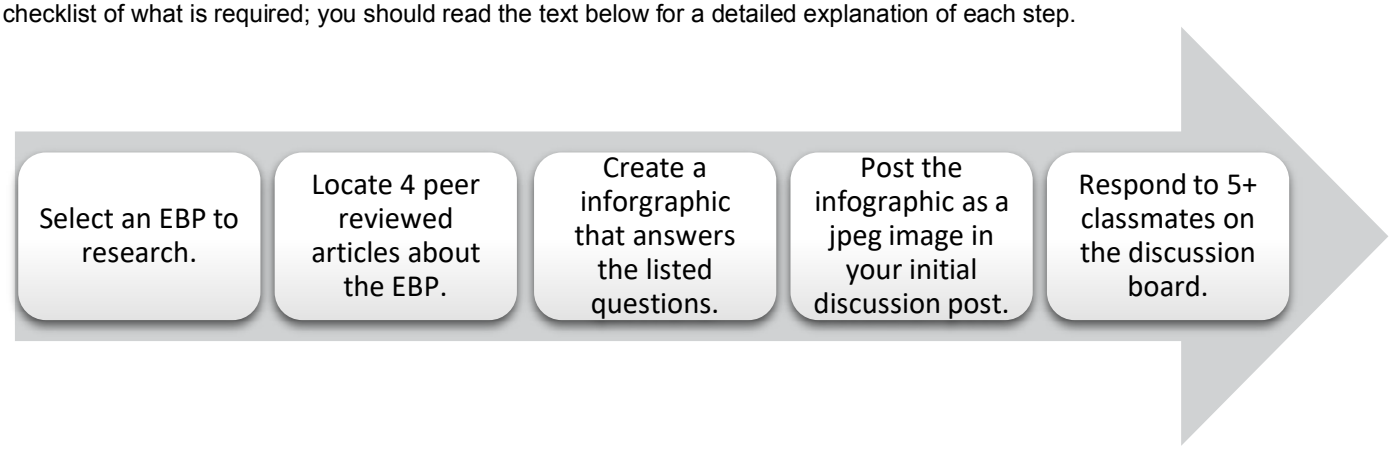
The jigsaw method, which is commonly used for in-person courses, can be adapted for use in asynchronous online discussions. In this method, students are responsible for teaching one another aspects of the course content (Amador & Mederer, 2013; Aronson & Patnoe, 2011; Lohmann & Boothe, 2020). In addition, the jigsaw method supports online teacher candidates in improving their communication and collaboration skills (Halimah & Sukmayadi, 2019). When using this method, we recommend clear guidelines for students and an expectation that students interact with each classmate's discussion to ensure they are exposed to all learning content.

FIGURE 2: Jigsaw Discussion on EBPs for Tiers 2 and 3 PBIS

Background Information

As we have discussed in this course, it is imperative that you use evidence-based classroom management practices. As noted in the course textbook, there are a variety of interventions that are supported by research for use in Tiers 2 and 3 of PBIS. Go to the Google Doc to select an intervention to research. You will then teach your classmates in-depth information about one of the evidence-based practices that is discussed in the textbook.

The image below offers a visual representation of the expectations for this discussion. Remember that this image is just a quick checklist of what is required; you should read the text below for a detailed explanation of each step.



Initial Response Expectations

After selecting your EBP, locate a minimum of 4 peer reviewed articles that describe the intervention and its use for students with disabilities. In addition, look at the resources about your selected intervention from the Center on PBIS. Once you have completed your research, create an infographic for your classmates that answers the following questions:

1. How do teachers implement the intervention?
2. What is the research supporting its use?
3. For what grade levels/disability categories has the intervention proven to be effective?
4. What challenges might teachers have in implementing the intervention?
5. What must teachers consider when deciding to use the intervention?
6. What resources do you suggest for learning more about the intervention?

Your initial discussion post is due on Thursday at 11:59 pm.

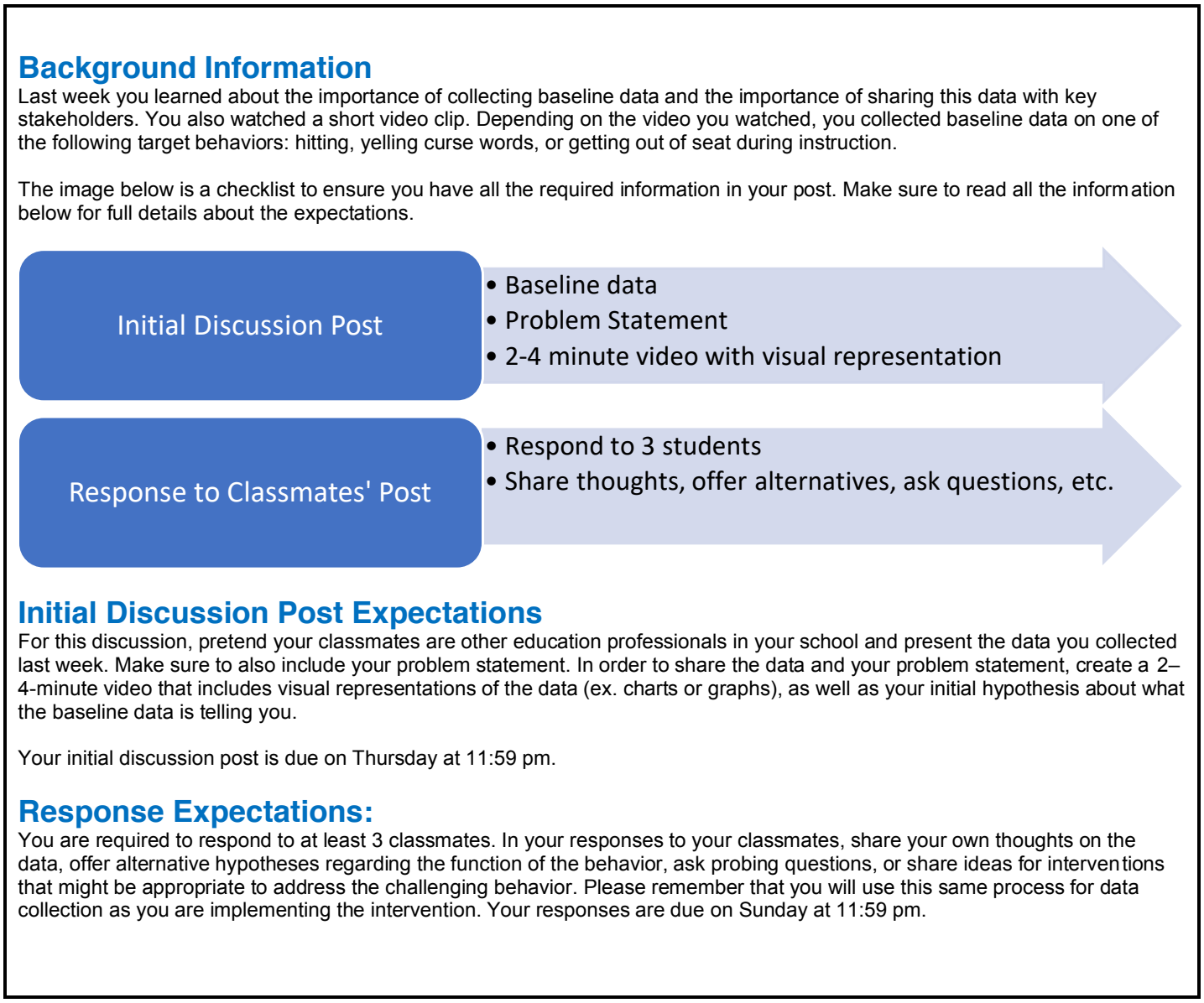
Response Expectations

When this discussion is over, you are responsible for knowing about each of the interventions presented, so be sure to look at the infographics posted by all your classmates. You must respond to at least 5 classmates with posts that further the discussion by asking questions, sharing related resources, or providing examples of how you have seen that intervention used in classrooms. Your responses are due on Sunday at 11:59 pm.

Dr. Ramirez wants her students to be familiar with evidence-based practices (EBPs) for meeting the needs of students in Tiers 2 and 3 of the PBIS framework. There are a variety of EBPs that she wants her students know about. She also wants to ensure active student engagement in learning about these interventions. With this in mind, she decides to design a jigsaw discussion and have the students teach one another about various EBPs.

A solid Tier 1 system is vital for ensuring that all students in the classroom understand classroom expectations and for the prevention of many challenging behaviors.

FIGURE 3: Video Based Discussion



However, some students will need additional supports to be successful, so teacher candidates must also be familiar with Tier 2 and 3 interventions. Tier 2 of the PBIS system is designed to support children who currently exhibit challenging behaviors and are at-risk for escalating behavior challenges (Mitchell et al., 2011). Children who need individualized supports as determined through a functional behavioral analysis (FBA) receive supports in Tier 3 of PBIS (Pinkelman & Horner, 2016). Figure 2 offers an example of a discussion for having students teach one another the evidence supporting various behavior interventions.

When grading this discussion format, the authors recommend putting the most focus on the initial discussion post. Because these posts are meant to be used to teach course concepts to classmates, the posts must be thorough and accurately present the selected topic. In addition, we suggest that students be required to respond to more (or all) classmates in jigsaw discussions as this helps to ensure that they have viewed all of the content being taught by their peers. Finally, this discussion format requires significant professor interaction to ensure that the initial posts are accurately and completely teaching concepts. The rubric provided for shared products (Table 1) is the

TABLE 2: Video Based Discussion Rubric

	PROFICIENT	DEVELOPING	LIMITED
Initial Post Quality (10 points)	Student provided a well-developed video that demonstrated an understanding of how to create a quality problem statement AND how to appropriately represent data.	Student provided a video that demonstrated a basic understanding of how to create a problem statement AND how to visually represent data.	Student's video did not demonstrate an understanding of to create a problem statement AND how to appropriately represent data. OR did not complete this section.
Response Posts (10 points)	Student demonstrates in-depth analysis of other's posts that add substantively to the discussion by building on previous posts. Responses are academic and respectful. Responses demonstrate an understanding of data collection.	Student demonstrates basic analysis of other's posts. Responses are shallow and may not enrich the discussion. Responses demonstrate a basic understanding of data collection.	Student demonstrates little analysis of other's posts. Responses are off-topic or inappropriate. Responses demonstrate a little to no understanding of data collection.
Participation (10 points)	All posts were completed on time. Student responded to 3 or more classmates	All posts were completed on time. Student responded to at least 2 fellow classmates.	Posts were not made on time or were not made at all. Student responded to fewer than 2 classmates.
Video Quality (10 points)	Video includes both audio and video. Student speaks in a clear and concise manner and demonstrates an understanding of the content he/she is reviewing.	Video includes both audio and video. Student speaks in a clear and manner and demonstrates a basic understanding of the content he/she is reviewing.	Student did not complete a video OR the video did not include both audio and video nor did the student speak in a clear manner.

same rubric as the one used for jigsaw discussions. For the jigsaw rubric we would reword the section for discussion elements and initial post quality to match the directions for this specific discussion. We would also adjust the point levels for different aspects of the rubric. For example, since the main focus of the jigsaw discussion is the initial post, we would make that worth 20 points instead of 10 points. This provides flexibility when deciding on the important components of discussion.

Video Based Discussion

Another option for an asynchronous discussion to support teacher candidates in learning classroom management skills is the use of video-based discussions. With this format, students' sense of community and engagement can be increased (Swartzwelder et al., 2019). In order to ensure that online learners are successful with video-based discussions, teacher educators must be sure to provide step-by-step instructions on how to create and upload a video, as well as specific guidelines on the expectations, including video length and format (Lohmann & Boothe, 2020).

After Dr. Ramirez teaches her students about proactive classroom management through effective Tier 1 strategies, she begins providing instruction on identifying students' individual behavior needs through the use of data-based decision making. Dr. Ramirez wants to give her students opportunities to practice collecting and using data to make decisions to support student success.

Data collection, and the use of the collected data for making decisions to support student success, are vital practices in schools (Schildkamp et al., 2019) and teacher educators must provide students with opportunities to practice these processes. Figure 3 shows a sample discussion that can be used for sharing data and having students collaborate to practice selecting interventions based on that data.

The authors have found that grading video-based discussions can be time-consuming since you need to watch the entire video to determine

FIGURE 4: Debate on Applied Behavior Analysis

Background Information

One commonly used intervention for addressing challenging behaviors of students with autism is the use of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy. There is much controversy around the use of ABA in schools and this week you will be engaging in a debate about this topic.

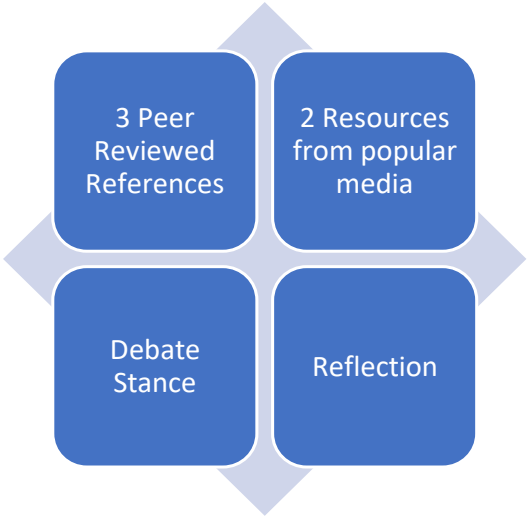
Initial Discussion Post Expectations

To better understand the ABA controversy, locate a minimum of 3 peer reviewed references on the topic, as well as at least two resources from popular media such as blogs or websites for members of the disability community. After learning about the topic, prepare an initial discussion post that firmly introduces your assigned stance on the topic.

Your initial discussion post is due on Thursday at 11:59 pm.

- Students with last names A-M will take the stance that ABA is an appropriate intervention for students with autism
- Students with last names N-Z will take the stance that ABA is NOT appropriate as an intervention for students with autism

The visual below provides you with a quick glance at what is required of this discussion. However, you must read the full directions for more specific information.



Response Expectations

Students must respond to at least 3 classmates. In your responses to classmates, continue the debate and keep supporting your side of the debate. At the end of the week, post a reflection on what you learned from the debate and share what you personally believe about the use of ABA therapy for students with autism.

Your responses are due on Sunday at 11:59 pm.

if students have met the grading objective(s). With this in mind, we highly recommend that you give a specific time limit on the videos. When deciding on the time limit think about the number of students in your course and an appropriate length of time needed to present the required information. The authors have found that short clips can provide valuable information and classmates are more likely to view videos that present information succinctly.

Table 2 provides a general rubric that is used to grade video-based discussions. Each of our video-based discussions will have some of the same elements, but the focus of the grading is likely on the content itself. However, because video-based discussions may be used in a variety of ways, this rubric should be customized

TABLE 3: Asynchronous Discussions Board Formats

Discussion Board Format	Key Information About This Format
Sharing Products	Increases student engagement Provides opportunity to practice creating materials for their own classrooms Students receive feedback from both peers and professor
Video-Based Discussions	Increases student engagement Provides opportunity for students to see one another Requires explicit instructions from professor, including directions on how to record video and guidelines on length and format
Jigsaw	Students teach one another Increases communication and collaboration skills Requires explicit instructions from professor
Debates	Ideal for controversial topics in the field of special education Help students understand both sides of an issue Increases communication and collaboration skills

to specific video-based discussion assignments.

Debates

A final format for asynchronous discussions is the use of debates, which can increase student engagement and motivation for learning the topic, as well as increase student understanding of both sides of a controversial topic in the field of education (Lohmann & Boothe, 2020). Debates can be designed to allow students the opportunity to collaborate in building a case for their assigned side of the debate; collaborative learning may improve student mastery of content (Wicks et al., 2015).

Some of the students in Dr. Ramirez's class want to become Board-Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) after gaining their initial special education teacher licensure. Dr. Ramirez wants to ensure that they have a full understanding of the controversy that surrounds the use of applied behavior analysis (ABA) so that they can respond appropriately to concerns from parents and other stakeholders.

The field of special education includes a variety of controversial topics that lend themselves to debates. One such topic is the use of applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy to address challenging behaviors. ABA is a research-supported intervention that systematically teaches behavior skills to students with autism (Gorycki et al., 2020). Some disability advocates believe that the use of ABA therapy is harmful to children (Sanvodal-Norton & Shkedy, 2019). This is partly because interventions that reward desired behavior are considered more acceptable by educators than those interventions that punish unwanted behaviors (Kelly & Barnes-Holmes, 2015). In addition, some opponents argue that ABA is unethical and focuses too much on compliance instead of learning, thus destroying children's internal motivation for learning and success (Sanvodal-Norton & Shkedy, 2019). With this in mind, it is important for teacher candidates to understand both sides of this issue so they can firmly support their stance in conversations with stakeholders in their future classrooms and schools. Figure 4 offers an example of how a debate on the use of ABA therapy can be used in an online asynchronous discussion board.

Debate-based discussions should be graded in a similar manner to other formats, such as the video-based discussion. When adapting the video-based discussion

rubric (see Table 2) you will want to ensure the initial post quality focuses on the stance being supported by research. You will also want to change the video quality component to a focus on writing mechanics and APA. In addition, the authors have noticed that students may need reminders to defend their assigned position in the debate, even if they do not agree with that position. It can be beneficial for professors to participate in the discussion as well by selecting the side that students are least likely to agree with and modeling how to defend it. As with the other rubrics, the authors recommend altering the point value to focus on the area(s) that are most important to you and your grading requirements. For example, you may choose to make the participation and writing mechanics of this rubric higher than in the past, because you know that students may struggle with taking a stance on ideas they do not agree with.

CONCLUSION

Special education teacher educators are tasked with ensuring that pre-service and in-service teachers are prepared for using evidence-based classroom management practices. As higher education faculty, we are tasked with creating quality learning opportunities and keeping our students engaged. In this article, we provided examples of four effective discussion formats and how they can be used to support instruction on effective classroom management (see Table 3). Through the use of (a) sharing products that students have created, (b) video-based discussions, (c) jigsaw discussions, and (d) debates, teacher educators can support the learning of their students in the online classroom and prepare them for the classroom.

We know that getting and keeping college students engaged in online learning can be difficult. In addition, asynchronous course students may not feel as though they get to know their classmates and instructors. By varying discussion board formats, student response quality and engagement may improve. Instructors can build a sense of community in their asynchronous classrooms by creating discussions that allow students to provide feedback to classmates, brainstorm for their own classrooms, use critical thinking skills, research EBPs, discuss data-based decision making, and foster peer-to-peer instruction. Asynchronous discussion boards provide many opportunities for students to learn, apply knowledge, and feel part of a student community.

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