



2012 HAWAII UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES
EDUCATION, MATH & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY
JULY 31ST TO AUGUST 2ND
WAIKIKI BEACH MARRIOTT RESORT & SPA
HONOLULU, HAWAII

MANAGING THE 3-RING CIRCUS: A STUDY OF STUDENT TEACHERS' DEVELOPMENT OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT DECISION- MAKING SKILLS

ALLISON H. CASSADY, PH.D.
OKLAHOMA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
ALLISON.CASSADY@OC.EDU

Abstract

Teacher candidates upon entering the field are challenged to master the task of managing a classroom by observing their cooperating teacher and attending their teacher preparation's classroom management methods course. However, the ability to think and make decisions as a teacher and manager of a classroom is one that often presents major challenges. In this qualitative case study five student teachers offer insight into the ways they understand and interpret decisions made regarding classroom management. Findings of this study reveal the need for improved dialog and instruction regarding decision making skills to be offered in both the coursework and field observation opportunities in an effort to advance educational policy for teacher preparation.

Purpose

Learning to manage a classroom is of absolute importance to those entering the field as student teachers (Brophy, 1982; Burnstein, 2009; Korthagen, 2007; Meuwissen, 2005). Among the many challenges facing pre-service teachers the skills of juggling classroom management, lesson planning, grading, teaching, and assessment are priorities. "Like circus performers who keep plates spinning on top of sticks, teachers must not only establish a management system that works but keep it working by monitoring events continually and responding quickly when breakdowns threaten" (Brophy, 1987, p. 5). University preparation programs with a generous amount of time in the field promote successful preparation. However, when entering the field, students cite classroom management as their primary point of concern (Daniels, 2009; Bromfield, 2006; Duck, 2007; Butchart, 1994). The concept of making decisions related to classroom

management is a daunting task to those who are entering the field. By encouraging students to discuss this aspect of classroom management with cooperating teachers and university faculty student teachers will be more prepared to approach management tasks (McCann & Johannessen, p. 145). The overall purpose of this research is to address the management challenges facing student teachers as they are stepping into the classroom and to recognize the need to understand these decision-making skills that are so vital to the success of a classroom. The following research questions guided this study: How do pre-service teachers recognize the classroom management decisions and actions made by their cooperating in-service teachers? In what ways do pre-service teachers reflect on management in their classrooms during apprentice teaching?

Theoretical Framework

This research, founded on Jere Brophy's classroom management theories, John Dewey's notions of learning from experiences, and Nel Noddings' idea of caring allows the researcher to recognize the whole conception of a student teacher. In an effort to establish how pre-service teachers learn to manage classrooms it is necessary to begin not only with what they are taught, but how they are taught, what is modeled, the experiences they have, and the understandings they glean. Jere Brophy offers a unique look into the realm of educating teachers to manage classrooms (1982, 1987, 2001). He defines the well organized classroom by calling upon group dynamics, behavior modification, individualized counseling, and contextual situations in the classroom (1982). While he determines no single approach to be best he illustrates the need for a comprehensive approach to classroom management and organization. Further Brophy (1987) discusses

the tools young educators need in order to successfully run a classroom. He writes, “The goal would be to train teachers to adopt classroom management strategies consciously and monitor their effectiveness of the classroom management strategies” (1987, p. 8-9). This conscious adoption of management strategies by pre-service teachers is precisely the focus of this research.

To improve the learning and understanding of the management and pedagogical skills needed to successfully teach, it is imperative that one recognize the way this learning best develops in pre-service teachers. Dewey’s notion of experiential education is most often seen played out in early childhood settings; however, it is the experience of learning by doing accompanied with instruction that promotes the greatest success in teacher preparation. This combination of instruction and experience is one that allows student teachers to apply their learning in a dynamic setting, thus increasing its’ meaningfulness. Dewey writes “Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into” (1938, p. 38). For the purpose of teacher education, this “moving force” to which Dewey refers is the students’ time spent in the field. (1938, p. 27). Furthermore, essential to the success of young educators is to have “quality” experiences to help them better prepare for the teaching opportunities awaiting them in their future classrooms (1938). With proper instruction, provided by Brophy, and quality experiences in the field, guided by Dewey, a pre-service teacher is well equipped with the technical tools needed to be an effective teacher.

Nel Noddings brought to research and education a notion of caring which, when combined with quality experience and a solid educational foundation creates a highly

efficient and effective classroom teacher and manager. This thought – caring – is one commonly believed inherent to teachers; however, it is necessary to make the role of a caring educator one that is explicitly taught and modeled for young educators (Noddings, 2001, 2005, & 2006). Elementary students must know they are cared for by their teacher in order to be active, contributing members of the classroom society. Caring for one’s students is an effective tool in teaching them to care for themselves, others, and their education. “To have as our educational goal the production of caring, competent, loving, lovable people is not anti-intellectual; it demonstrates respect for the full range of human talents” (Noddings, 1995). When establishing the foundation for preparing future teachers, it is essential to explicitly model and teach the elements of showing students that they are cared for through the ways they are taught and managed. By joining the frameworks offered by Brophy, Dewey, and Noddings a well founded base of teacher education is established.

Research Methods, Data Sources, and Analysis

“In qualitative research, a single case or small nonrandom sample is selected precisely *because* the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of many” (Merriam, 2008, 1998). Thus, Merriam sums the goal of this research which was to provide rich, thick descriptions of the learning practices taking place as student teachers learn to manage a classroom.

One semi-structured (Merriam, 1998), focused (Yin, 2009) interview was held with each participant to focus on the pre-service teacher’s prior assumptions and understandings of classroom management. A second interview was conducted which

addressed perceived classroom management skills and growth. Finally, each participant was asked to complete an activity using case studies (Hewitt, 2003; Bauml, 2010) in which they gave their reaction to classroom management scenarios and were asked to share their thoughts and reactions. Further, they were asked to self-associate and react to quotes by John Dewey, Jere Brophy, and Nel Noddings. Three observations of the pre-service teacher were conducted during the semester while she taught and managed the classroom. During each observation, field notes (Stake, 1995) were taken concerning the pre-service teacher's classroom management actions and interactions with her students. Afterward participants were asked to reflect upon the field notes paying special attention to explaining why they took various actions and made certain choices. Artifacts were collected through weekly written reflections, projects, papers, and presentations shared by the participant and collected through their classroom management methods course and during their apprentice teaching semester. These reflective practices allowed a unique insight into the learning of the young educator as it developed over time.

The informants for this multiple case-study (Merriam, 1998) were purposefully chosen from a pool of teacher candidates at a major urban university in the south-western United States who were earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Education and seeking Early-childhood through fourth grade state certification. Each informant was placed in or around a major urban city district serving large ethnically and economically diverse populations. In their fifteen week placements the pre-service teachers were exposed to a wide variety of teaching and management strategies in multicultural settings as well as multiple modality learning in Kindergarten, first, or fourth grade classrooms. Four participants experienced both their second internship and student teaching semesters

within a single classroom. The sites and cooperating teachers involved in this research were all considered outstanding and recommended, per their school principals, and played integral roles in the preparation of their student teachers.

“The process of data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic” (Merriam, 1998). As Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest data analysis “as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: (1) Data reduction, (2) Data display, and (3) Conclusion drawing/verification” (p. 10). As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984), the interview transcripts were coded and analyzed noting patterns and themes to speak to the concepts of the case study thus reducing the data to meaningful chunks contributing to the development of the themes in the data. Employing Merriam’s (1998) notion of Narrative Analysis “first-person accounts of experience” of the student teachers’ field placements were analyzed. Finally, cross-case analysis was used to compare the data of each participant.

Findings

As student teachers venture their way into their awaiting careers it is imperative that they are adequately equipped with appropriate pedagogical skills, content knowledge, and classroom management skills necessary for their assigned grade level. In addition, they must have a solid understanding and foundation of classroom management practices and the decision making skills required to be a successful leader in their classroom. Through the data gleaned in this case study five points of discussion were revealed:

Teacher candidates recognize the classroom management actions taken by their cooperating teachers in response to student behaviors yet have little understanding of the decision making process taking place. It is imperative for student teachers and cooperating teachers to have regular and directed conversations concerning this skill development.

Student teachers develop a more solid classroom management skill set through focused instruction by the cooperating teacher as well as the teacher preparation faculty in how to respond, react, and decide upon various classroom management actions. Reflecting upon these practices also allows the further development of said skills.

Fundamental differences in style, opinion, preference, and methods of approach to managing a classroom between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher make it necessary for the novice to choose most often to yield to her cooperating teacher's prevailing management approaches.

Student teachers may choose to be subversive in their management behavior and decision making when they disagree with the approaches made by their cooperating teachers.

Perceived authority in the classroom as bestowed by the cooperating teacher and reinforced with the students gives pre-service teachers confidence in their management decision making.

Scholarly Significance

The significance of this research lies in its purpose to inform teacher education in methods which will best support the building of a classroom management foundation in future educators. On a broad scale this work might be seen as significant through the improvement of teacher candidates management skills as the results of teacher attrition would improve as well as more job satisfaction by new teachers. On the practitioner level, having a more sound understanding of the classroom management skill development of student teachers allows for university personnel to provide better instruction and guidance for both the student teacher and his or her cooperating teacher(s). By understanding the questions one needs to ask in order to best converse about the decision making aspect of managing a classroom will allow for a deeper learning for student teachers. Overall, the research presented here simply leads to a greater need for more understanding and development of university classroom management courses and the improved conversation between student teacher and cooperating teacher in order to be of the utmost effective for future educators. Providing this level of communication and subsequent understanding will support the development of future teachers and potentially ease anxiety caused by their uncertainty in their knowledge and ability to manage a classroom successfully and “keep plates spinning on top of sticks” (Brophy, 1987, p. 5).

References

Bauml, M. (2010). *Toward the Wisdom of Practice: Curricular Decision Making among Novice Elementary Teachers in a Standards-Based Environment*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin.

- Bromfield, C. (2006). PGCE Secondary Trainee Teachers & Effective Behaviour Management: an evaluation and commentary. *Support for Learning*, 21(4), 188-193.
- Brophy, J. (1982). Classroom Organization and Management. *Institute for Research on Teaching*.
- Brophy, J., & Michigan State Univ, E. L. I. f. R. o. T. (1987). *Educating Teachers about Managing Classrooms and Students. Occasional Paper No. 115*.
- Brophy, J. (2001). Classroom Management as Instruction: Socializing Self-Guidance in Students. *Theory Into Practice*. 233-240.
- Burstein, J. H. (2009). Do as I Say "and" Do as I Do: Using the Professor-in-Residence Model in Teaching Social Studies Methods. *Social Studies*, 100(3), 121-127.
- Butchart, R. E. (1995). Discipline, Dignity, and Democracy: Reflections on the History of Classroom Management (AESA Presidential Address- 1994). *Educational Studies*, 26(3), 165-184.
- Daniels, M. L. (2009). The Three Fs of Classroom Management. *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice*, 6(3), 18-24.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Touchstone.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. Henry Holt and Company, Inc; 1st ed.
- Duck L. (2007). Using Sounder Foundations to Help Avoid the “Why New Teachers Cry” Phenomenon. *The Clearing House*, September/October 2007.
- Hewitt, J., Pedretti, E., Bencze, L., Vaillancourt, B. D., & Yoon, S. (2003). New Applications for Multimedia Cases: Promoting Reflective Practice in Preservice

- Teacher Education. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 11(4), 483-500.
- Korthagen, F. A. J. (2007). The Gap between Research and Practice Revisited. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 13(3), 303-310.
- McCann, T., and L. Johannessen. 2004. Why do new teachers cry? *The Clearing House* 77 (4): 138-45.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (Revised ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publications.
- Meuwissen, K. W. (2005). Maybe Someday the Twain Shall Meet: Exploring Disconnections between Methods Instruction and "Life in the Classroom". *Social Studies*, 96, 253-258.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Stake, R.E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.