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Classroom Management Training: Keeping New Teachers

Introduction

The effort of many education leaders and politicians over the last decade to attract people into the teaching profession encouraged many studies to determine the reasons for the staffing crisis faced by many school districts. Initial assumptions were that it was due to retirements of senior educators and low pay compared to other professions. Now that conventional wisdom is giving way to new thinking. The research has opened a discussion that indicated a dilemma in classroom and behavior management training for novice teachers.

Teacher Supply Problem

Reports such as Dr. Richard M. Ingersoll's, *Is There Really a Teacher Shortage?* (2003), give administrators, researchers, and the general public useful information. According to Ingersoll, many initiatives have been developed to entice new, qualified people into teaching: "Many states have instituted alternative certification programs, whereby college graduates can postpone formal education training and begin teaching immediately" (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 5) These programs are focusing on how to get new teachers, but what about training teacher candidates? First, the fact of the matter is that turnover in he professional teacher corps is due to dissatisfaction with their current conditions. Many people enter the field of teaching with a sense of idealism. They hope to make a difference. When these ideals meet reality, many choose to leave the field within the first five years. The beginning teacher attrition rate, with the cumulative percent leaving in the first five years, is 46% (Ingersoll, 2003, Page 14). See figure 1 below showing the cumulative effect of each of the first five years.

Figure 1. Cumulative Percentage of Leaving Teachers in the First Five Years of Teaching (Ingersoll, 2003).

Successive Years	Cumulative Percentage Leaving
First (1st)	14%
Second(2nd)	24%
Third (3rd)	33%
Fourth (4th)	40%
Fifth (5th)	46%

If what these numbers suggest is true, there is a problem with retaining novice educators in the profession. The question then becomes: how can we keep these new hires in the profession and thereby slow the high turnover? To determine how to reverse this trend, we need to define why new hires leave and work to address these concerns. Looking at the reasons listed by most teachers leaving the profession, researchers can find several areas of interest. Citing a report by Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., *Education Week* (2004) states that 600 interviewed principals reported 85% of new teachers claim high stress on the job with most reasons due to classroom management challenges and instructional skills. A small study in Northern Ireland found that the number one area of concern for new teachers in inclusion classrooms was behavior and classroom management skills (Winter, 2006). If we teach these management skills, is it possible to help novice educators actually reach their goal to become professional teachers?

In their report, *Preparation, recruitment, and retention of teachers*, Cooper and Alverado (2006) state, “the fact remains that somewhere between 30 and 50 percent of new teachers in the United States leave teaching within the first five years. Furthermore, the most academically able new teachers are most likely to leave” (p. 18). These numbers are more interesting when it is learned that most vacating educators report that working conditions, which for classroom

teachers include behavior management, have a large impact on their decision to leave. Ingersoll (2003) examined the reasons that beginning educators were leaving the field. Citing their departures in his research, he states that 25% or fully one-fourth of those who resigned listed dissatisfaction as the reason for leaving. He does note salary as the single highest category mentioned among exiting educators. However, the categories of poor administration support, student discipline problems, and poor student motivation combine to eclipse salary by 13%: 74 to 61 (Ingeroll, 2003, p. 17). Of all teachers classified as leavers, 44% listed student behavior problems as their reason to leave. The leading category, which came in at 60%, was not enough time for planning/preparation (NCES, 2005, Table 6). These pressures made non-teaching careers more attractive to these professionals. One research study bluntly stated, "Teacher dissatisfaction encourages teachers to pursue alternative careers" (Connors-Krikorian, 2004, p. 3). Addressing each dissatisfaction area within the context of better classroom management training could discourage new teachers from leaving.

Exploring Solutions

Retention is a key component in the current conventional wisdom of keeping and developing quality teachers. Many states are trying to address that issue by establishing induction and mentor programs to help novice teachers not feel so alone (Cookson, 2007). If salary questions can be fixed, some teachers will remain in the field. However, the fact that dissatisfaction percentages deal more with environment and working conditions offer an opportunity to solve many retention problems. In an *Education Week* (2004) article, 63% of principals stated that classroom and behavior management strategies need to be taught to new teachers. Teaching active novice educators effective classroom management procedures and how to plan for handling student inappropriate behavior will potentially keep them working. This on

the job training (OJT) and collaboration with other teachers regarding student behavior and instruction issues will help novice educators adapt to teaching. According to Ingersoll (2003), such actions increased the likelihood that beginning teachers would remain in the profession and even at the same school from the previous year.

Leaders can have professional development lessons before and during the school year for those teachers who desire classroom management help. This can be a requirement for beginning educators and be included as a part of a mentor program. Another type of support can include training these leaders to be more aware of the needs of new teachers. Expert teachers from the district can be the instructors and provide good awareness of specific school environments for the new hires. The rate of predicted probability of turnover after the first year of teaching shows a dramatic decline in attrition with induction and mentoring programs (Smith, Ingersoll, 2004), falling from 20% to 9%. Simply by implementing an agenda of intervention that includes collaboration with in-field mentors drops the percentage of leavers to 12% (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Still, why not give pre-service hires the training necessary before they start teaching?

Many states are using programs to fill positions with degree-holding individuals who have little or no educational methods courses. The alternate route to becoming a teacher involves school districts hiring individuals with content area degrees, but no training in curriculum or learning strategy education. However, this approach to teaching creates some real concerns about new teachers entering the profession with little or no training. Several licensure programs allow these individuals to begin teaching immediately with some type of mentoring system. The number of programs requiring at least this form of assistance amounts to 83% (NCEI, 2005). Most of these include support in their school of record and through a training plan with an education entity. For approximately 53% of incoming teachers, their initial learning happens

with a summer course prior to teaching. Before these new educators begin their courses, they report a competency rating far below their percentages after completing the program (NCEI, 2005). The numbers come from the National Center for Education Information's findings (2005). In the following areas, the respondents gave the percentages as in figure 2.

Figure 2. Percentage of Teachers Feeling Competent to Deal with Issues Relating to Dissatisfaction Areas of NCES Table 12 (2005).

Dissatisfaction Area	Before Training	After Training
Student Discipline Problems	22%	63%
Poor Student Motivation	31%	66%
Classroom Management	22%	66%

With this special training that includes extensive classroom management skills, 62% of respondents to the National Center for Education Information survey (2005) say they expect to remain in the profession over the next five years. Additionally, when asked to explain how long they would continue teaching, respondents said, "as long as I am able" 73 % of the time (NCEI, 2005). In an interview with Bonnie Hanna (March 25, 2008), a first-year teacher, the author found that the experience of working as an assistant teacher for a year aided her in devising her own classroom management plan and gave her the confidence necessary to be successful. A second-year teacher who reflected on his first year as an alternate route teacher in Mississippi, James Gable (March 25, 2008), credits his induction program training, along with the existing mentor program to help him continue in teaching. Both of these novice teachers expect to stay in teaching.

The next step is to ensure that incoming teachers will have the necessary skills not only to survive their first five years, but to prevail. If we use the information concerning job

dissatisfaction from departing educators and couple it with the fact that most schools of education and alternate teaching route programs give little training in classroom management, we see where we can begin to make changes. The three areas of dissatisfaction that relate specifically to classroom management are student discipline problems, poor student motivation to learn, and lack of teacher control over the classroom (NCES, 2005). Each of these concerns should be a part of university or alternate route training programs.

Currently, The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) includes classroom management skills under their *Standard 3.4 Active engagement in learning* (2006). If they would make classroom management a separate standard or include it in the explanation of the standard they could emphasize the necessity for classroom management education. As it is now, this subject is only mentioned in the *Supporting explanation* (NCATE, 2006).

A good place to look to decide if further research should be conducted is university course catalogs. They list the required and elective classes that prospective graduates must complete to be certified to teach elementary and secondary education. The required courses usually include such areas as culture and diversity in schools today. However, classroom management is not a top priority. A survey of nine southern colleges displays degree program requirements that minimize or fail to address classroom management as a separate discipline of teacher preparation. The following schools and the amount of required, distinct emphasis on classroom management for a Bachelor's Degree in Education are in figure 3.

Figure 3. Required Classroom management courses (Retrieved from 2007 Course Catalogs)

University of Alabama …….	3 hour course credit in lecture method
Delta State University, Cleveland, MS ….....	3 hour course credit in lecture method

Liberty University…….	2 hour course credit in seminar method
Mississippi State University ……	3 hour course credit in lecture method
Mississippi University for Women …….	3 hour course credit in lecture method
University of Memphis ……. …….	None
University of Mississippi …….	3 hour course credit in lecture method
University of Southern Mississippi …….	None
University of Tennessee ……	2 hour course credit in lecture method

Discussion

These schools expect that the single 2- to 3-hour course coupled with one semester of student teaching will provide the pre-service teacher the necessary skills to become a professional. However, many of these class internships occur in the spring or second semester. As such, the classroom environment has already been established by the master or host teacher. Because of this error, student teachers miss a fundamental opportunity to see the development of the learning environment. It is the establishment of this classroom community that is most important to student teaching (Wong, 2005). How the teacher develops behavior management is key and it is important that it begin on the first day of school. The effective teacher will establish the characteristics that will govern the learning process in their classroom during the first few days of the school year.

If we know the three characteristics that effective teachers have, we know the importance of classroom management in maintaining a workplace for teachers that is acceptable. Those attributes are a positive expectation for student success, extremely good classroom management, and the ability to design lessons for student mastery (Wong, 2005). On a three-legged stool, one

of those legs is classroom management. How then is it that our institutions are sending new teachers into dynamic learning environments with only minimal or no training at all? One reason may be the belief that elementary and secondary school teaching requires less training than other professions (Ingersoll, 2005).

New teachers must be as prepared as master teachers on their first day of school. The system expects it. But most beginning teachers fail to devote time to planning for the prevention and subsequent response for inappropriate student behavior (Harlan & Rowland, 2002). The modification of the student teaching process to include participation in the first day of school could go a long way in motivating novice educators to stay. For new hires, a school district could establish a mentor training program that provides not only school mentors, but paid retired expert teachers to be mentor volunteers to observe classroom activities and provide advice or feedback concerning beginning teachers. Most expert teachers have classrooms that are organized, clean, and accessible. Their procedures are well defined, visible, and follow an established routine. The classroom and management structure provide an environment that is conducive to learning (Wong, 2005). These classroom environments are relaxed but work-oriented and time-managed, involve students, and have established expectations. These teachers have learned how to teach appropriate behavior and procedures and to be proactive. Students need to know how things are to be done and why. The teaching of this characteristic is important (Wong, 2005).

A third avenue to explore for ensuring adequate classroom management training for teachers is the state departments of education. This is where leadership can pay big dividends through policy making. Each state regulates the minimum requirements for teacher certification. By working with universities and state-sponsored alternate route programs, the state department can establish clear guidelines requiring additional training in classroom management. They can

present teacher retention surveys to understand the situation better and to give helpful information to school districts and colleges (Connors-Krikorian, 2004). With this information, the state education departments can help prepare incoming teachers for the first-year challenge. Additionally, they can help school districts keep the beginning teachers they have.

Teaching any subject begins with teaching classroom procedures and rules. The entire school year's success for all teachers and students depends on what happens in the first days and weeks of school. For this to happen, the teacher needs to begin with a plan that is on paper and ready to implement. With this plan in hand, the instructor has laid out the way the class is organized, the way students and adults will interact, and the procedures that will lead to academic success. Without this agenda in place, the year will be much more challenging.

The student teacher can learn from the recorded techniques of effective teachers. Effective teachers have positive expectations for their students; they do not have negative expectations (Harlan, Rowland, 2002). These teachers are enthusiastic and patient. They have an organized, inviting room, welcome students with a smile, and are dressed for success. Once the time for teaching begins, they are assertive, in control, and display calmness. A truism from Harry Wong's *The First Days of School* (2005) is that the "climate of work is what you want to establish during the first week of school" (p. 94). In other words, give a reason for the students to want to come to your class. Introduce yourself to each class and portray the professional that you are. Make sure that many of your first sentences begin with "you will…" (Wong, 2005, p. 111). This will establish control right from the start. The goal is to be an assertive teacher, not aggressive or passive. Let the students know that they are safe with you. This does not mean that every student will be treated exactly the same. You are fair and consistent and treat each person with respect.

Not only is it important to establish a relationship with your students, it is just as important to foster a relationship with the parents. Make your intentions known effectively from the start. Contact parents before the school year starts if you can, and if not then, during the first week of school. Let them know that you are available. Let them and the students know what you will do and what is expected of them. These are ideas that come from educators currently practicing and the sources referred to in this paper. The fact is that these methods have been used effectively and have studies to back their success.

Each area of dissatisfaction in the NCES survey (2005) can be dealt with if the training that new teachers receive is conducive to success. The ideas in this paper are here to help the reader realize that by keeping quality teachers, we can promote academic success. We all want our students to succeed in life. The foundation for that success is what they learn at school. If we can help teachers to be facilitators of their own classroom environments, then we increase the likelihood that the students will learn. The goal is to make teaching a joy, not a chore. If these new educators find the appropriate way to involve their students in the learning process and still have fun doing it, they too will enjoy the school day.

Conclusion

We have all had that special teacher or teachers that we remember with fondness. We enjoyed their class and wanted to please them. They were in charge, and that made us feel safe. They were interesting, and that made us want to learn. They were sometimes funny, and that made us at ease with school while we were in their class. Try to remember what it was that teacher did to make our education experience tolerable or even exciting. That is what we want from all teachers and it begins with classroom management. If we want to keep good teachers, we need to give them the tools for success—not only theirs, but our children's success, too.

Further study is needed in this discipline and, in the meantime, emphasis should be put on classroom management training for all teachers. If we are to be life long learners, we need to look to improve our own skills too. Classroom management training will help us keep future quality teachers.

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