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ABSTRACT

Research was conducted to acquire an understanding of curriculum theory and practice as viewed in the field and to determine whether espoused theory was truly practiced. A second-year male science teacher and a 19-year veteran female language arts teacher participated in the study. Both taught on the same eighth grade middle school team. Data collection processes included surveys, interviews, observations, and a review of documents. Findings indicate that the science teacher practiced his espoused theory, but the language arts teacher espoused and practiced theories that conflicted. Implications for improving teaching practices through examining theory and practice are discussed. An appendix describes a sample observation and interview. (Author/SLD)

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Matching Actions to Words: Espoused Curriculum Theories

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Abstract

Matching Action to Words: Espoused Curriculum Theories

Research was conducted to acquire an understanding of curriculum theory and practice as viewed in the field and to determine whether espoused theory was truly practiced. A second-year male science teacher and a 19-year veteran female language arts teacher participated in the study. Both taught on the same eighth grade middle school team. Data collection processes included surveys, interviews, observations and a review of documents. Findings indicated that the science teacher practiced his espoused theory but the language arts teacher espoused and practiced theories conflicted. Implications for improving teaching practices through examining theory and practice are discussed.

Matching Actions to Words: Espoused Curriculum Theories

Introduction

This research study was conducted to acquire an understanding of curriculum theory and practice as they were viewed and implemented by practitioners. The goal was to determine whether the curriculum theory espoused by the teachers was truly what they practiced

The theoretical framework of this study was built around Habermas' (1971) "world-views" as interpreted by Grundy (1987). A world view is a framework of "loosely connected set of ideas, values, and rules that governs the conduct of inquiry, the ways in which data are interpreted, and the way the world may be viewed" (Schubert, 1986, p.170). This study examined practitioner's theory and practice in terms of three worldviews -- technical, practical, and emancipatory. These world views were first espoused as cognitive interests by Habermas (1971). Grundy (1987) related these views to curriculum theory and teaching and learning as she states:

> His *(Habermas)* theoretical explorations into the nature of human knowledge and theory/practice relationship were not written within a context of educational theory .... They do, however, have implications for educational theory and for understanding educational practices. (p. 8)

These interests are fundamental orientations which are rooted in knowledge and human action. They shape and determine what constitutes knowledge and the organization of that knowledge (Grundy, 1987). Each view has its own distinctive characteristics.

The technical view is characterized by the desire for control and empirical results. It objectifies knowledge and seeks efficiency. Social reality is not questioned. The practical view has an emphasis on understanding. Human beings seek to find meaning under everyday life. Social reality is an interaction between historical, political and social context. The emancipatory

view expresses a need to bring ideology and action together. It seeks to contrast oppression and domination and disassemble unjust values (Schubert, 1986). With the great diversity in these views, it would not be difficult to imagine how they would affect a teacher's interaction with his or her students.

Methodology

Setting

The two teachers involved in this study teach in a Title I middle school in an urban Georgia community. Because the school had 64% participation in the free and/or reduced program, it was designated as a Title I school. The program qualification have been used as a surrogate for family income thus the school was considered to have a low socioeconomic status. This middle school houses seventh and eighth grade students. Most of the students come from either single parent homes or homes of blended families. In most homes, the adult or adults work leaving the middle school student at home after school with the responsibility to care for younger siblings.

Research Participants

Two teachers participated in the research study. They were members of the same eighth grade team. One of the two teachers observed was a male science teacher in his second year of teaching. He had a variety of work experiences before entering the world of teaching. Over the years, he had been in the military, held construction jobs, been in management and been self-employed. He owns snakes and uses them in his class. His youngest child is 7 years old. He has entered education as a second career.

The other teacher observed was a female language arts teacher with 19 years of experience in education. She was the language arts department head and a member of the

school's leadership team. This teacher entered education at the age of 40 after her children were in school.

Data Collected

Data collected included interviews, surveys, classroom observations, and documents. A number of steps were taken in order to collect the data needed to evaluate the teachers' espoused curriculum theory and determine if it matched their classroom practice. The steps taken were:

1. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both teachers individually. Neither teacher had difficulty talking about what they did in their class or about what they believed. They were both honest and open. Sometimes the language arts teacher did not understand the terminology used in the interview but had no problems answering a question after a particular term was explained. Notes were taken during the interviews but they were not tape recorded. Questions covered topics on the teacher's educational background, beliefs on student learning, use of textbooks, lesson plans and student motivation.
2. Butler's Cognitive Interest Inventory (1997) was given and scored for each teacher. The inventory has 45 questions with 15 question covering various aspects of each interest or worldview. The respondent uses a Likert scale of 1 to 5 to mark responses. Using an alpha coefficient test of reliability, the inventory had a reliability of .8187 for the technical interest, of .7538 for the practical interest, and of .8358 for the emancipatory interest (Butler, 1997). The result of the inventory places the respondent in one of three worldviews: technical, practical, or emancipatory.
3. The curriculum guides, textbooks, and lesson plans for both subjects were reviewed. In reviewing the guides, the textbooks, and the lesson plans, the researcher looked at

overall structure, whether objectives were stated, how prescriptive they were, and if a timeline was present.

4. Three observations were completed for each teacher.
5. The final step was to conduct a data analysis to determine if the espoused theories of the teachers matched the materials used and the teaching methods practiced.

Data Analysis and Findings on the Teachers' Curriculum Theories

Science Teacher

Interview. Students' success was focus. The teacher said that he modifies the work to address individual needs and gives many hands-on activities. The teacher liked to use a variety of teaching methods (lecture, question and answer, lab, video, essay test, construction). Relating the curriculum to current everyday life of the students and to the larger world was important to the teacher. He wanted them prepared for life their formal schooling was over.

Butler's Cognitive Interest Inventory. The science teacher scored as having a practical worldview with technical worldview scoring two point less that the practical.

Documents. The science book was nonlinear with 6 units coming separately bound from the publisher. This was the second year of using the integrated science book and curriculum guide. The science teacher did not like the book because it lacks in-depth information on topics and there was not enough foundational material for the students to make deductions, as the integrated science curriculum requires. Thus, he supplemented the text with other materials. The county curriculum guide consisted of 8 pages giving concepts to cover and alignment with state objectives, benchmarks, and Iowa tests of basic skills test (ITBS). The teacher would have to match the concept references to each section in the new integrated science text. The teacher had

brief lesson plans written in one corner of the marker board at the front of his classroom. There were no objectives or alignment with the curriculum guide.

Observations. One student had brought in an immature bird with a broken wing. The teacher used it to illustrate life cycles and energy allocation. He felt that the students were just trying to survive and had other things to do after school so he kept homework to a minimal. The science teacher's classroom was a mess. He had fossils, skeletons, shells, books, and projects all over the place. One day he had his snakes hanging on a special pole suspended over his desk. The student desks were arranged in groups of four. The science teacher was always trying to draw out the knowledge that the students had learned in previous units. Based on the cognitive inventory, things he said during his interview and his classroom practice; the teacher has a practical worldview.

Language Arts Teacher

Interview. The teacher was concerns that the students were prepared for life. She wanted them to be successful. She thought that this age group was struggling to find themselves in a very tough environment. Because of these beliefs, she gave little homework and individualized as much as possible. The students had limited experience outside their own neighborhood and she attempted to bring to the students' awareness a larger world. She attempted to bring relevance to the new curriculum by relating the stories in the literature book to every day life. Because the textbook and curriculum guide was new, she followed them more closely than she had in the past.

Butler's Cognitive Interest Inventory. The language arts teacher score as having a technical outlook with practical scoring just two point less that thetechnical.

Documents. The language arts teacher had new textbooks with all the support materials that the publisher had created. The curriculum guide was also new. The language arts teacher sat on the textbook adoption committee and helped rewrite the curriculum guide. The literature book was linear and sequential. The language arts teacher did use the book and guide. The curriculum guide almost locksteped the teacher into following the book page for page. The teacher's use of the provided classroom materials made her technical in her teaching methodology.

Observations. The teacher greeted the students at the door and got them on task as they entered the classroom. Students started working before the tardy bell rang The classroom of the language arts teacher was very orderly. The bulletin board was on the unit the students were studying. Desks were in rows of two or three facing an identical set on the other side of a center isle. The beginning class prompt was always up when students entered the classroom. The class was very task orientated and was extremely structured. Rules were on the board. The class hour sectioned into phases (prompt, lecture, independent work). The routine was same on each observation. The teacher had a purpose for everything that was done. She even altered the unit plan when it appeared that she would not finish the unit in the allotted time frame. Although the interview indicated the language arts teacher was practical, she was technical on the cognitive inventory; and technical in her classroom practice.

Discussion

Science teacher's espoused and practiced theories were consistent but the language arts teacher's espoused and practiced theories were inconsistent. What is the impact of socialization/culture and mandated materials and content? Content within science courses is by nature technical but the learning of that content has become very practical and hands-on. Whereas, language arts courses by nature have been technical in both the content and the

learning of that content. In this research study, the curriculum guides illustrate this point. The language arts guide was very prescriptive leaving the teacher little room for a more practical approach to teaching. The science curriculum was conceptual in nature leaving the teacher with an infinite number of ways to guide the students into learning. The number of years of experience that each teacher also contributed to his or her technical or practical worldview. The language arts teacher was originally trained as a secondary English teacher. She had also worked with a number of curriculum guides, which were prescriptive in nature. The science teacher was trained in the middle school concepts with an emphasis on science. The science teacher had only seen one curriculum guide and it was practical in nature.

Conclusions

Although the science teacher was practical in his worldview and the language arts teacher was technical in her worldview, both had some common feelings about teachings. Both believed that the students were in a survival mode. They tried to limit external pressures like homework because the students had other things on their minds. Although they had different teaching styles, they individualized in grading; giving additional time for a task, and allowing students to redo failed work. Some students did not have much encouragement for home. Both thought that students had limited experience outside their own neighborhood and attempted to bring to the students' awareness a larger world. They liked their students and enjoyed teaching. It showed in the way they interacted with the students and in the enthusiasm in their teaching. What conclusions can be drawn from this study? In this particular school setting, worldview is not a limiting factor for successful teaching. Each teacher created an open, workable atmosphere for his or her students.

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Appendix

Observations

Science Teacher. Greeted students at door. Requested them to have a seat and prepare for class. Most were in seats before the bell rang. Review for test was participatory in nature. Prompted students with voice and hand gestures. Praise was ample, admonishments loving

2nd observation: Baby mocking bird/snakes. Energy unit started with reading aloud by students and explanation by teacher. Teacher was not prepared.

3rd observation: Gave essay test on energy unit, talked while students answered questions

Language Arts Teacher. Greeted students at door. Grammar prompt was on the overhead, lights were out. Students entered classroom, sat down and started on prompt. All students were in desks when bell rang. Teacher checked roll as students finished roll. Asked student to volunteer to go to board to correct prompt. After student did all he or she could, teacher as others to help. The classroom lights went on Instruction for vocabulary and following assignment was given, students worked on it individually As students finished they quietly put dictionary on shelf and got the next assignment Instruction for third assignment was given, as students finished the second assignment they quietly turned it in, got a lit book off the shelf and read for the remaining of the hour

2nd observation: prompt and video.

3rd observation: Vocabulary work after prompt

Interview

The following questions were asked. Give me some background information as to how you entered education? How do you view students and learning? Do you use just the textbook?

How do you motivate students? How do determine what you will teach each day? How do you develop your lesson plans? What do you do to modify your lessons for different students? What considerations did you have in determining the arrangement of your room? What kind of instructional methods do you use? How do you grade?

Other questions were asked as the interview developed. The interview was not recorded. Noted were taken on the teacher's responses.

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