

New Teachers' Challenges

How Culturally Responsive Teaching, Classroom Management, & Assessment Literacy Are Intertwined

Moi Mooi Lew & Regena Fails Nelson

Introduction

In the past decade, educational environments have drastically changed over time and have become more diverse and complex. The rapid influx of pluralistic populations from a variety of different societies contribute to the diverse student population. Student diversity creates challenges to new teachers if they are not familiar with culturally responsive teaching (CRT) (Gay, 2002).

In addition, studies also show that new teachers face challenges in dealing with classroom management, curriculum planning and implementation, conducting assessments, and workload issues. The result is that many leave the profession after only a few years (Grossman & Thompson, 2008; Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007; Roehrig, Pressley, & Talotta, 2002; Scherff, 2008).

Hence, knowing that culturally responsive teaching, classroom management, and classroom assessment are some persistent issues that new teachers face in their own classroom, this project is designed to investigate the preparedness of a cohort of new teachers in dealing with those challenges through their teacher education programs and professional development provided by their school districts.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

The influx of pluralistic populations and urbanization has rapidly increased the diversity of our nation. These pluralistic populations have retained their own

unique cultures, traditions, and languages, which can impose anxieties, prejudices, and racial tensions among others. For this reason, multicultural education seeks to develop instructional curricula and practices in school communities that meet the needs of diverse student populations (Gay, 2002). The key instructional strategy suggested for use in multicultural education is culturally responsive teaching.

Gay (2002, p. 106) saw CRT as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively." Gay (2010) further defined CRT as "teaching that builds on students' personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and prior accomplishments" (p. 26). She noted,

Students of color come to school having already mastered many cultural skills and ways of knowing. To the extent that teaching builds on these capabilities, academic success will result. (p. 213)

Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1994) asserted that CRT is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. She further proposed three dimensions of culturally relevant pedagogy: holding high academic expectations and offering appropriate support such as scaffolding, acting on cultural competence by reshaping curriculum, and building on students' knowledge, and establishing relationships with students and their homes (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In summary, cultural responsiveness implies that teachers should be responsive to their students using instructional activities that build on students' cultural strength and abilities to promote student learning. Responsive teachers do not use the same teaching methods and materials for all students. Instead, these teachers modify their knowledge and training, paying attention to classroom contexts and to individual student needs and experiences

(Gay, 2002; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

As the number of culturally diverse students increase, it becomes more important that all educators, including new teachers, become deeply attentive to ways to adapt their practice to meet all students' needs. To accomplish this task, first and foremost, CRT should not be understood in a simplistic and trivial way (Sleeter, 2012). Past research showed that oversimplified and distorted conceptions of CRT among teachers led them to reject this concept and consequently student learning did not improve (Fitchett, Starker, & Salyers, 2012; Sleeter, 2012; Young, 2010).

For example, Young (2010) studied seven teachers' conceptual understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy. The findings showed that all seven teachers valued student culture, but none of them linked it directly with improving students' academic learning.

Given this understanding of CRT, one of the critical issue that new teachers encounter is lack of familiarity with diverse students' cultures, causing the teachers to often overreact to students' nonverbal cultural manifestations by imposing rules and regulations (Irvine & Armento, 2001). For example, some students avoid making eye contact because the gesture is considered rude in their cultures. Thus teachers must be aware that if they fail to get students' attention by making eye contact, they should attempt other alternative ways to get students' attention.

Hence, in light of cultural differences, individual cultures must be considered when planning classroom management strategies. To ensure that the classroom is effectively managed, new teachers must be confident that the classroom management techniques they employ are appropriate for use with diverse student populations (Goddard 2000; McCormick & Shi, 1999).

Besides being closely related to classroom

Moi Mooi Lew is a faculty specialist in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Educational Studies and Regena Fails Nelson is a professor and chair of the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Educational Studies, both in the College of Education and Human Development at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

management, culturally responsive practices also play a role in determining the way teachers assess students' learning (Irvine & Armento, 2001). A culturally responsive teacher should understand the practices, purposes, usage of various assessments, and the importance of a balanced classroom assessment system to gauge diverse student learning (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2006).

Additionally, culturally responsive teachers should be able to design meaningful assessments and rubrics that can accurately measure quality. It is equally important that they be able use assessment data to support individual student learning.

Classroom Management

Classroom management issues are a leading cause of job dissatisfaction and work against retention among teachers (Liu & Meyer, 2005), particularly among new teachers (Reupert & Woodcock, 2010). These issues are also of great concern to parents, administrators, policy makers, and academics in the education field as they can impact student learning (Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008).

To promote student engagement and learning through effective classroom management, all educators should examine their beliefs and practices and review research and theories about classroom management. This examination should start long before an educator meets students on the first day of school and teachers should continue to refine their strategies throughout their professional career (Manning & Bucher, 2007).

Generally, classroom management describes teachers' efforts to oversee a multitude of activities in the classroom, including learning, social interaction, and students' behaviors (Bosch, 2006; Martin, Yin, & Baldwin, 1998). Classroom management is the combination of approaches and processes that teachers use to achieve and maintain a classroom environment in which they can teach and instruct, using tools and techniques to produce behavioral change as needed (Bosch, 2006; Goddard 2000; McCormick & Shi, 1999).

To ensure the classroom is effectively managed, teachers must be confident of their ability to set clear expectations and goals, model positive behaviors, and enforce consequences when needed. In this case, the goal of classroom management is to build a respectful learning community where children can feel safe to learn, ex-

plore, share, and express their views and feelings in positive ways.

Inevitably, classroom management is closely linked to instruction (Manning & Bucher, 2007). An educator who does not have good management skills will have a difficult time instructing students. For example, a teacher who keeps learners on task (e.g., correct developmental level, proper instructional pace, physical and psychological safety, appropriate curricular content, etc.) will be less likely to have students who misbehave. Conversely, teachers who are unprepared and disorganized will most likely encounter behavior problems (Manning & Bucher, 2007).

Along the same line, Bosch (2006) maintains that classroom management is a skill that must be learned, practiced, evaluated, and modified to fit the changing situation of contemporary classrooms. Too often, new teachers try one management strategy and become discouraged if it does not produce the desired effects immediately. Thus, Bosch (2006) suggested that new teachers must identify their own personal and professional strengths and weaknesses and examine their instructional practices. Then they should develop a management plan, implement it, and, finally, evaluate and revise that plan (Bosch, 2006).

Thus, in developing classroom management and instructional strategies, educators need to examine their personal beliefs about classroom management. For example, teachers have to decide whether they think discipline should be taught or imposed, whether teachers should be democratic or autocratic, and whether punishment works to improve or hinder student behavior. As little research has been done to understand new teachers' classroom management practices, this study is important in filling the gap with data on new teachers' beliefs and practices in the area of classroom management.

Assessment Literacy

In professional education literature, assessment literacy has been defined as an understanding of the principles of sound assessment, including terminology and the development and the use of assessment methodologies and techniques (Popham, 2004; Stiggins, 2002). An assessment-literate teacher can identify the strengths and weaknesses of each type of assessment and is able to engage students in the assessment process (Stiggins et al., 2006).

Such teachers understand the practices, purposes of various assessments, and the

importance of a balanced classroom assessment system to gauge student learning. In summary, assessment-literate teachers are able to design meaningful assessment rubrics and use assessment data to support student learning.

Nonetheless, it seems that competency in assessment has been overlooked by teachers. Black and William (1998) found that there is a "poverty of practice" among teachers, in which only a few teachers have fully understood how to implement classroom formative assessment.

After a decade, Siegel and Wissehr (2011) report almost similar findings in their research. They used a content analysis method to explore novice teachers' knowledge of assessment based on the assessment pieces that are mentioned in their reflective journals, teaching philosophies and lesson plans. Analysis of these documents indicated that novice teachers recognize the need to align assessments with learning goals and instructional strategies. It also revealed that they are using a variety of assessments. However, the assessments contained within the science units lesson plans did not fully align with the views of assessment the novice teachers presented in their teaching philosophies or journals. The findings implied that novice teachers have not applied their assessment knowledge into practice, which was reflected in their lesson plans.

More positive findings indicate that assessment literacy can be fostered through professional development activities (Stewart & Houchens, 2014). Studies have found that teachers who were involved in ongoing, sustained professional development have gained a better understanding of assessing student learning, thereby enhancing their instructional performance (Stewart & Houchens, 2014). In addition, their findings showed that teachers who have participated in professional development workshops on classroom assessment experienced a growth in their capacity to use and teach others various formative assessment strategies.

As such, assessment and its accountability should be an important component in the professional competencies for all teachers including new teachers. Accordingly, teacher education programs need to place more emphasis on developing pre-service teachers' assessment literacy so that they are better prepared to select and implement a variety of appropriate assessments to foster student learning when they become new teachers in schools (Siegel & Wissehr, 2011; Yost, 2014).

Aims of the Study

To reiterate, the challenges that new teachers encounter in the schools are intertwined. If a new teacher is unable to perform CRT, often she will face challenges in handling students' behavior and will also be prone to inaccurately interpret students' learning too (Irvine & Armento, 2001).

For example, a student misbehaved because he was insulted by teacher's communication skills (verbal and non-verbal). A teacher who does not understand the learning difficulties of non-English speaking students can wrongly interpret their learning abilities. As such, it is imperative to investigate these three domains together in this study to better assist new teachers' in countering those critical challenges holistically.

Three research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What is the conceptual understanding of culturally responsive teaching among new teachers and how well are they prepared to use this pedagogy?
2. What classroom management practices do new teachers adopt and how well are they prepared to manage their classroom effectively?
3. How do new teachers conceptualize classroom assessment and how well are they prepared to assess student learning?

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design to investigate in-depth these salient issues face by new teachers.

Participants

There were 16 new teachers who graduated from the teacher education program in the last two years. They were referred to as 'new teachers' considering that they have started the teaching profession within the past one to two years. The recruitment procedure started in April after we obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The recruitment process began by sending out invitation emails to all 16 of them. At the end of the recruitment process, we managed to collect twelve 'agree to participate' reply emails. Among the twelve new teachers, there were 10 females and two males below 30 years old, teaching in elementary schools (8 teachers), middle schools (2 teachers), and high schools (2 teachers) in the same district. A majority of them (83%) are Caucasian or White.

Data Collection

The participants were recruited through email communication and a thorough consent seeking procedure. After that, some face-to-face interviews were conducted. The interviews took place at the school buildings where the teachers were employed. During these 30-minute interviews, participants were asked to self-assess their level of effectiveness in the areas of CRT, classroom management, and classroom assessment. They were asked how well did the teacher education program prepare them in these three areas and what types of professional development did they receive from their school district in those areas.

Data Analysis

We adapted Bogdan and Biklen's (1998) approach for transcribing and analyzing the interview data for emerging themes. We reviewed the responses and generated coding categories independently based on the theoretical meaning behind each response. After that, we negotiated the coded categories in order to develop core themes from the data.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, we used theoretical memos throughout the data analysis process. Theoretical memos showed ideas about the coding categories, relationships between categories, and directions for further analysis. We sorted memos in order to present the emerging themes that link the categories.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To ensure validity of the data, four aspects of trustworthiness—i.e., credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability—were addressed through various measures in this study. For example, to ensure the credibility of the data and to minimize researcher bias, member checking and seeking participants' clarification on the derived categories were conducted throughout the data analysis process (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Also, to address the matter of transferability, the research design, the context of the study, the data collection method, and the data analysis procedure were explicitly explained to ensure replication could be done in other new teacher populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.296).

Third, to ensure the findings are consistent and could be repeated, a colleague served as an external inquiry auditor to examine the research process and the product of the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose was to evaluate

the accuracy and whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data.

Finally, to ensure confirmability, a reflexive journal was developed where we made regular entries during the research process. In these entries, we recorded methodological decisions and the reasons for them, the logistics of the study, and reflected on what was happening in terms of our own values and interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results and Discussion

The findings are discussed in the following three categories.

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Culturally and Developmentally Appropriate Instruction

It is obvious from the data that some new teachers understood CRT in a simplistic way. There was a tendency to view CRT as cultural celebrations that are disconnected from academic learning (Sleeter, 2012). It seems that participants' understanding about CRT was focused on learning about other cultural traditions instead of pedagogy that can help student learning.

For example, P6¹ stated that "...I took time outside my classroom to learn about their culture... their festival... help other kids to understand their culture too." It is hoped that learning "about" culture was not substituted for learning to teach challenging academic knowledge and skills that use cultural processes and knowledge as theoretical frameworks.

Besides, some participants mentioned that CRT is a pedagogy that incorporated cultural elements in the lessons but failed to elaborate on how learning can build on cultural strength. Thus, CRT was understood as some trivial teaching method to follow rather than understanding it as a paradigm for teaching and learning (Sleeter, 2012).

For example, P1 said that "CRT is incorporating different multicultural items throughout the classroom." Similarly, P8 mentioned that "...she used books related to different cultures."

It was encouraging to hear some participants mention that CRT is pedagogy that takes into consideration individual differences and builds on student's background in their instructional practices. For example, P5 stated that "...teacher should address a student's background to help them understand... when teaching

Chemistry...I try to use something they are familiar with...using the context, relate to them, real world examples." The conception of CRT that it pays attention to classroom contexts and to individual student needs and experiences is congruent with the definitions of CRT (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

When asked to reflect on how well the teacher education program has prepared students to do CRT in the classroom, about half of the participants felt that the preparation was modest. Generally, some participants felt that the internship and field trips were helpful in learning the pedagogy (e.g., P1). There were some courses that had included content on culture or social context but not specifically focused on CRT (e.g., P2). The curriculum reviews of the current teacher education program showed that cultural diversity was mentioned in the syllabi of some courses such as ES3950 School and Society, ED4010 Teaching Elementary School Science and ED 4070 Elementary Social Studies.

In ES3950 School and Society the course is concerned with the nature and direction of American education in its changing social context and the course focuses on major issues affecting the advancement of education in a culturally diverse, democratic society. In one of the weekly discussion topics, "The Issue of Race," students are encouraged to discuss modern segregation, the achievement gap, and privileges of different races.

As this is not a methods or pedagogy class, it seems that the course content does not expose students to ways to integrate CRT into the classroom nor does it conceptualize what CRT is in the syllabus. Similarly, in ED4010 Teaching Elementary School Science cultural diversity is emphasized in the university and college's diversity statement. However, it is obvious that limited input is related to CRT in the course syllabus.

CRT is one of the general course outcomes in ED 4070 Elementary Social Studies in which students are expected to create cooperative learning communities within classrooms and demonstrate culturally responsive practice. One of the major topics in this course is "Culture, Cultural Diversity & Multicultural Education." Thus, this course gives more exposure on CRT to prospective teachers compared to ES3950 and ED 4010.

With respect to the professional development support that the new teachers received from the school districts, some participants mentioned that they had

one professional development program on CRT in which an invited speaker talked about African American culture only (e.g., P1, P2 and P4). In another professional development program a speaker talked about cultural awareness, how to teach in diverse environment, and how to deal with LGBT issues (e.g., P11).

Some participants mentioned that a general-topic professional development workshop was organized for new teachers. The workshop, entitled "Capturing Kids' Hearts," provided information about students' background and how to handle diverse student populations (e.g., P1, P3 and P10). Nonetheless, some participants commented that there was no specific professional development workshop on CRT (e.g., P5, P6, P8 and P9) and also that this topic was not actively discussed in mentor meetings nor staff meetings (e.g., P5 and P7). Overall, it is clear that the professional development support provided to the new teachers was basically generic. The new teachers were not actually well supported to adapt CRT in the classroom.

Hence, some concerns arose. Based on the self-assessment results, almost all the new teachers rated themselves 'effective' in performing CRT. However, they commented that the teacher education program had only prepared them modestly to use CRT in their own classroom and the professional development support provided by school districts had not met their needs as well.

In sum, the teachers felt effective when they were able to develop and implement a plan for a child based on the child's individual needs rather than the child's race or culture. However, upon reflecting on the professional development they received they were able to see the benefits of how cultural knowledge and information can improve instruction for all children.

Classroom Management: Internal and External Locus of Control

The data analysis revealed that this group of new teachers used a variety of classroom management strategies in their classrooms. The participants' beliefs and practices were somewhat congruent with classroom management principles that are proposed by scholars in the field, such as Bosch (2006), Martin, Yin and Baldwin (1998), and Manning and Bucher (2007). Their practices can be categorized into two domains in general—classroom organization and behavioral management.

For classroom organization, they emphasize daily schedules (e.g., P1, P4, P6

& P8), in which classroom settings and materials should be well organized and handled systematically (e.g., P4, P9 & P11). Specifically, P8 agreed with Manning and Bucher (2007) that classroom management is closely linked to instruction and that it is important to always keep students' on tasks. P8 said "The more managed my classroom is, the more time I have for instruction."

In terms of behavioral management, the participants believed that it is important to adopt strategies such as redirecting (P2), relationship building (P5), setting behavioral expectations and boundaries (P3 & P10), individual conversations (P6), having a flexible management plan (P7), student engagement (P8), and using a positive behavior management system (P6, P10 & P12). Understandably, they seek help from the behavioral specialist, experienced teachers, and mentors to resolve persistent student behavior problems.

It is encouraging to see that many new teachers show positive attributes in the process of becoming an effective teacher. For instance, P1 said "I'm still learning, will be learning for a long time the best practices." Also, P4 confided "I'm still learning how to figure out the best way to function well with myself and my students."

Moreover, the participants' beliefs about classroom management practices were consistent with Bosch's (2006) assertions that classroom management is a skill that must be learned, practiced, and modified to fit the changing situation of contemporary classrooms. P3 said "I'm learning new ideas, applying different strategies and always changing throughout the year." Also, P7 reflected "Each individual student responds in a different way so I have to be flexible." Thus, new teachers were advised on how the theory can be applied to students at specific grade levels and classrooms settings (Manning & Bucher, 2007).

The majority of the participants mentioned that the preparation program taught them some classroom management knowledge and behavioral management strategies. For instance, P3 stated "They have prepared me with the knowledge before going to the real classroom. So I can try different things." P4 felt that the biggest learning issue was how to apply different kinds of classroom management plans in the classroom. Nevertheless, many participants suggested that they need more opportunities to practice the skills. According to them, "we have not been given opportunities to practice the skills during

the class or the internship” (P2) and “It is very difficult to visualize it when you are not in the actual classroom” (P6).

Curriculum reviews of the current teacher education program showed that classroom management was taught in some courses such as ED3690 Classroom Organization and Management for early childhood education, and ED 3710 Classroom Organization & Management, ED 4500 Elementary Education Practicum, and ED 4085 Organizing Learning Environments for secondary education.

In ED3690, students examine and apply recent research on effective classroom management with a concentration on variables such as time on task, appropriate choice of group structures, direct instruction, and the management of time, space, and materials, as well as the analysis of classroom interactions. Pre-interns have various hands-on opportunities to prepare a classroom management plan, conduct classroom observations, micro-teach, and teach a few lessons to students.

Likewise, in ED3710 and ED 4500, the pre-interns learn how to design, teach, and evaluate nine lessons using classroom management principles to minimize “discipline problems.” These hands-on learning experiences are needed to help internalize many classroom management strategies.

For secondary school option interns, classroom management is taught in ED4085. The main objective of this course is that interns will learn practical classroom management strategies that improve the learning environment. To achieve this objective, students have to participate in a field-based pre-internship (ED 4086) as a component of this course.

Parallel to ED3690, interns will be provided various hands-on opportunities to learn the skills such as developing classroom management plans and doing micro-teaching. Particularly, they are required to describe, analyze, and discuss the 17 core concepts of organizing positive learning environments and describe, analyze, and use at least 50 specific classroom management techniques that improve classroom management for effective learning environments.

These two major assignments will definitely prepare interns well in the area of classroom management. Thus, the interns should have substantial theoretical knowledge of classroom management before teaching in their own classroom. Some concern arose when many participants expressed frustration that they received less preparation in this area than they

expected to have from the teacher preparation program.

In relation to professional development support by school districts, some participants mentioned that they received some training on managing classrooms through workshops such as Pre-school Program Quality Assessment (PQA), Plan-Do-Review, John Collins Writing Program, and Differential Instruction. P2 said she had a workshop on Plan-Do-Review that gave them more specific ways to run the class smoothly with some suggested classroom routines. Surprisingly, Plan-Do-Review, is a thinking routine which is supported by past research findings that state that classroom management must facilitate thinking as well (Williams, 2009).

P7 also commented that they have participated in workshops on differential instruction to help engage students in learning. Nonetheless, a few participants opined that the professional development training has not met their needs in this area. The new teachers were exposed to two different approaches to classroom management. One approach uses principles and strategies to build a community of learners who intrinsically respect each other and the classroom environment. The second approach uses external cues and systems to manage behaviors. The new teachers are still trying to figure out how to use both approaches effectively. Therefore, more support and guidance is needed to help the new teachers implement both approaches to meet the needs of all children in their classrooms.

Assessment Literacy: Formal and Informal Assessments

The data analysis led us to three preliminary findings that need to be further verified as the study moves forward. First, the initial analysis of conceptual understanding of assessment data suggest that each participant seems to develop their own unique conceptual understanding of assessment despite the fact that they have received the same pedagogical training and professional development support from the same school district.

The majority of the beginning teachers perceived that they have competency in conducting assessment. The results demonstrated that all of the beginning teachers perceived assessment as a way to monitor and support student learning and illustrated a broader knowledge of assessment including knowledge of purposes and ways to use assessment results to monitor their students’ learning progress.

Based on these conceptual understanding about assessment, according to Popham (2004) and Stiggins (2002), this cohort of the new teachers are somewhat assessment-literate.

In addition, the study showed that the participants valued the formative function of assessment because they understood assessment as a tool that monitors students’ learning outcomes and teachers’ teaching effectiveness. They recognized both summative and formative use of assessment results to support learning and instruction.

For instance, P5 noted her use of formative assessment,

I regularly assess whether students have problem, I also do quizzes and Q & A, and the data is informing me whether I have to reteach or move to another topic.

P6 also explained the benefits of assessment for her as,

I will use the assessment data to make decisions about whether I need to move on or reteach, whether I should plan remedial activities or to reteach the concepts for some kids.

An ‘assessment-literate’ teacher should be competent in linking theory into practice, thus further study needs to be conducted to examine how well beginning teachers apply their assessment knowledge into instruction and the process of becoming assessment-literate (Popham, 2004; Siegel & Wissehr, 2011; Stiggins, 2002).

Second, more than one third (67%) of the beginning teachers commented that they had some preparation in this area from their teacher education program. It is noted that the program had incorporated assessment knowledge and skills in some courses. For instance, P2 said that all of the classes were focused on assessment pieces and they had learned to prepare different assessment pieces for different subjects and for different grade levels when they designed some lesson plans.

Likewise, P10 mentioned that they did a lot of reading assessment and also have learned some assessment terms and tools such as checklists. Nonetheless, some participants’ felt that the program has some limitations (e.g., P1, P6, P9, P11 & P12). For example, P6 claimed that they were not exposed to any actual assessment pieces that were used in the schools and there were no specific classes that taught assessment.

To verify the claims, some teacher education courses’ syllabi were reviewed. These curriculum reviews showed that the assessment component was incorporated in the

syllabi of courses such as ED4010 Teaching Elementary School Science and ED 4070 Elementary Social Studies. In ED4010, assessment knowledge is emphasized in the course objectives which stated that, "Learn how to use a variety of strategies for assessing student knowledge, skill development, and attitudes toward science."

However, the review did not reveal what types of assessment strategies and how the assessment skills will be developed through the course. The interns are expected to develop assessment pieces to be used in the science lessons. Unfortunately, it is clear that the course syllabus did not describe any hands-on activities to help interns develop quality assessment pieces that can capture evidences of student learning.

Similarly, assessment is also one of the course outcomes in ED 4070, in which students are expected to analyze, develop and utilize various assessment methods. To achieve this learning outcome, the interns have to prepare a detailed description of the assessment process and/or document as well as a copy of any written assessment materials that they intend to use in the lesson plans.

Obviously, this assignment seems to be a very good learning platform for interns to learn how to develop assessment pieces that align with the students' learning objectives (Siegel & Wissehr; 2011). However, many beginning teachers claimed that they were not well-prepared in this area. For the sake of program improvement, these claims warrant further investigation.

Third, in terms of professional development support related to assessment, the responses were varied. Some participants felt that they were expected to be self-taught in this area (e.g., P1, P4 & P11). Some reported that they had workshops that provided training in dealing with state-wide assessment such as NWEA or M-Step (e.g., P6, P7 & P8). They have learned how to read the test scores and use the scores to inform instruction. They were also provided professional development in language arts and writing such as the John Collins Writing Program (e.g., P11).

However, it is not clear how assessment knowledge was incorporated in these professional development training. Overall, it seems that the professional development support provided for the beginning teachers is generic in nature. The new teachers felt that they were not actually well supported to develop quality assessment pieces in their own classroom.

Past research implied that teachers who have participated in professional develop-

ment workshops on classroom assessment will experience a growth in their capacity to use various formative assessment strategies (Stewart & Houchens, 2014). Hence, if the claims are true enough, then the school district's professional development needs to expand to promote assessment literacy among new teachers.

In sum, the new teachers were learning how to use formal and informal assessments effectively to plan instruction and support individual needs. In this school district there was a heavy emphasis put on tracking student progress on formal assessments to use in school and teacher evaluation reports. These high stakes assessments may put pressure on teachers to teach to the test and move students through content faster than when they use informal assessments to plan and support children's learning at their level. Thus, new teachers are confused by the mixed messages and need more guidance to figure this out.

Conclusions

This study was conducted to investigate new teachers' challenges in a holistic manner. Three salient issues—culturally responsive teaching, classroom management, and assessment literacy—were investigated deeply so that the findings might advance teacher education practice to meet the contemporary needs of new teachers and their students at large.

The findings showed that some new teachers understood CRT in a simplistic way and view CRT as cultural celebrations that are disconnected from academic learning. Document reviews and participants' feedback revealed that they had not been well-prepared in this salient area.

In the area of classroom management, findings showed that participants use a variety of classroom management strategies in their classrooms. Almost all participants perceived that they are competent in managing the classroom even though they claimed that they had not been well-prepared in this area. Nonetheless, curriculum reviews revealed some disparity of the results that warrant further investigation.

Meanwhile, in the area of classroom assessment, the initial analysis suggests that each participant seems to develop their own unique conceptual understanding of assessment. Similarly, they also claim that they did not receive adequate preparation or support to develop quality assessment pieces in their own classrooms. Thus, these claims warrant further investigation, too.

Since the findings demonstrate that there is a significant gap between teacher education curriculum and the real fabric of schools in the area of culturally responsive teaching, classroom management, and assessment, some concerted measures should be planned to bridge the gap between theory and practice in those areas to assist new teachers in facing such challenges confidently. These efforts can also help to address factors contributing to new teacher turnover and retention issues.

Note

¹ Comments and references to participants in the study are indicated by the letter P and the number assigned to each participant, thus preserving the privacy of all participants.

References

- Black, P., & William, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy, & Practice*, 5, 7-74.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research in education: An introduction to theory and Methods* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bosch, K. A. (2006). *Planning classroom management: A five-step process to creating a positive learning environment* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fitchett, P. G., Starker, T. V., & Salyers, B. (2012). Examining culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy in a pre-service social studies education course. *Urban Education*, 47(3), 585-611.
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-116.
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Irvine, J. J., & Armento, B. J. (2001). *Culturally responsive teaching: Lesson planning for elementary & middle grades*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Goddard, J. T. (2000). Teaching in turbulent times: Teachers' perceptions of the effects of external factors on their professional lives. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 46(4), 293-310.
- Grossman, P., & Thompson, C. (2008). Learning from curriculum materials: Scaffolds for new teachers? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, 2014-2026.
- Kyriacou, C., & Kunc, R. (2007) Beginning teachers' expectations of teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(8), 1246-1257.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dream keepers: Successful teachers of African-American children*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of

- culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Liu, X., & Meyer, J. P. (2005). Teachers' perceptions of their jobs: A multi-level analysis of the teacher follow-up survey for 1994-5. *Teachers' College Record*, 107(5), 985-1003.
- Manning, M. L., & Bucher, K. T. (2007). *Classroom management: Models, applications and cases* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Designing qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Martin, N., Yin, Z., & Baldwin, B. (1998). *Class size and teacher graduate study: Do these variables impact teachers' beliefs regarding classroom management style?* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwest Educational Research Association. Houston, TX. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 4189390)
- McCormick, J., & Shi, G. (1999). Teachers' attributions of responsibility for their occupational stress in the People's Republic of China and Australia. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 69(3), 393-407.
- Popham, W. J. (2004). All about accountability/ why assessment illiteracy is professional suicide. *Educational Leadership*, 62(1), 82-83.
- Roehrig, A. D., Pressley, M., & Talotta, D. A. (2002). *Stories of beginning teachers: First year challenges and beyond*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Reupert, A., & Woodcock, S. (2010). Success and near misses: Pre-service teachers' use, confidence and success in various classroom management strategies. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(6), 1261-1268.
- Scherff, L. (2008). Disavowed: The stories of two novice teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, 1317-1332.
- Siegel, M. A., & Wissehr, C. (2011). Preparing for the plunge: Pre-service teachers' assessment literacy. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 22, 371-391.
- Simonsen, B., Fairbanks, S., Briesch, A., Myers, D., & Sugai, G. (2008). Evidence-based practices in classroom management: Considerations for research to practice. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 31, 351-380.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2012). Confronting the marginalization of culturally responsive pedagogy. *Urban Education*, 47(3), 562-584.
- Stewart, T. A., & Houchens, G. W. (2014). Deep impact: How a job-embedded formative assessment professional development model affected teacher practice. *Qualitative Research in Education*, 3(1), 51-82.
- Stiggins, R. J. (2002). Assessment crisis: The absence of assessment for learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83, 758-765.
- Stiggins, R. J., Arter, J., Chappuis, J., & Chappuis, S. (2006). *Classroom assessment for student learning: Doing it right, using it well*. Portland, OR: Educational Testing Service.
- Young, E. (2010). Challenges to conceptualizing and actualizing culturally relevant pedagogy: How viable is the theory in classroom practice? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(3), 248-260.
- Yost, B. L. (2014, April 6). *Novice teachers' perceptions of daily assessment and grading practices in first-year classrooms*. Paper presented at the 2014 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Retrieved June 15, 2015, from the AERA Online Paper Repository.