A Content Analysis of Coaching Novice Teachers

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Abstract: *Coaching interactions among 13 new teachers and seven experienced teachers are analyzed to examine the support requested by novice teachers and the support they received from visits to their classrooms by experienced teachers. Comments from new teachers and coaches were organized into general themes and categories related to instruction and management identifying differences between the new teachers' and coaches' concerns.*

Key Words: Content Analysis, coaching, professional development

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The findings in this study emerged as part of a state funded grant titled A Collaborative Pyramid Supporting Professional Development, Teacher Leadership and Teacher Retention. The major goal of the grant was to provide collaborative, active, and personal professional development for new teachers through interactions with experienced mentors. All new teachers in the grant met during Saturday seminars, provided documentation of their practice and were led by experienced teachers to reflect on their teaching performance. Thirteen of the new teachers participating in the grant requested experienced teachers to visit their classrooms for additional support. The 13 teachers listed specific areas where they needed help.   These areas included lesson planning/implementation, self-motivation, classroom management, teaching strategies student involvement and curriculum materials. Seven experienced teachers serving as coaches were funded through the grant and made two to three visits to the classrooms of the 13 new teachers.

RELEVANT LITERATURE SUPPORTING THE STUDY

Competent and confident teachers are essential for bringing out the best in students. This makes retaining good teachers a top priority (Ladd, 2011). When teachers leave the profession schooling for all students is at risk.   The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) suggests that one way to keep teachers in their schools and the profession is through the support of mentoring and ongoing professional development by their teaching peers (2011). Features of quality and effective professional development have been identified by numerous authors and organizations (Darling-Hammond, et al.,2009; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017;

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Gulamhussein, 2013; Jensen, et.al., 2016), as collaborative, content-focused, focused on active learning, and intensive with support from mentors or coaches. The TeachingWorks Center at the University of Michigan contends that new teachers need at least two years of ongoing mentoring and coaching to become effective teachers. New teachers need to learn how to build their credibility with students and create a sense of trustworthiness in the classroom. (Teven, 2007). Such complex skills cannot be mastered in a college classroom but can be developed through practice, through interactions with their peers and with experienced mentors. Since there is no quick fix to learning to teach, first-year teachers need focused, ongoing professional development through a closely controlled process of practice, documented feedback, and reflection on their performance with the help of mentors or coaches. Ashkanasy (2011) found that teachers placed in schools with positive climates (e.g., strong professional collegial environments, supportive leadership) were more likely to decide to stay in teaching than those in challenging school contexts. All first- year teachers need support and guidance through small group interactions where opportunities for dialogue exist and where ideas and common goals can be processed through discussion.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the concerns of the thirteen new teachers and the specific type of help they hoped to receive from the coaches. Data were collected from the new teachers' and coaches' written comments following the coaches' visits. Three questions guided data collection: 1) What forms of help did the new teachers hope to receive? 2) What types of help did the coaches believe would be most beneficial to the new teachers? and 3) What were the outcomes of the visits as evidenced by the journal entries? The study also examined any differences between what type of help the new teachers wanted and the help that the coaches thought would be most beneficial to the new teachers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

Content analysis was used to uncover details and depth of the data collected from new teachers' and coaches' comments. These comments addressed 1) topics that were discussed during the visit, 2) what was learned, and 3) what was decided for next steps. Comments contained reflections on the visit from the coach and from the classroom teacher and were divided into three phases: "immersion, reduction, and interpretation" (Dorr Goold, S., Damschroder, L., and Baum, N., 2007). The systematic analysis of all comments made it possible to compare data across all entries, locate common words to identify themes, and then interpret the data for new knowledge. New teacher concerns evolved around surviving as a teacher, i.e., through learning more about classroom management, teaching strategies, creating and implementing lessons and understanding personal feelings and self-motivation.   Coaches commented on teacher impact, student involvement, classroom management and curriculum and resources.
Three examples of new teacher concerns are included below.

> How can I work on consistency and pacing? I'd also like more student involvement.
> I need help with attention getters, procedures and positive reinforcement. I want
> to gain insight in to things I can improve. I welcome new ideas that I can implement
> immediately to improve my management and instruction.

How do I continue to develop a set of "non-negotiable" classroom management expectations, especially for early interventions or off task behaviors? I wish to strengthen connections (avoiding teacher vs. student dynamics). I'd like to infuse American Sign Language for silent signals for quick interventions.

Comments from coaches included but were not limited to the following:

Consider setting expectations in reading instruction. All comments and questions will need to wait until the end of the reading. Only you should ask questions. After the book, ask if there are any clarifying questions, not stories or comments. Say all important details together, for example, "Dissect means take apart. Everyone, what does dissect mean? If I say take apart, you say dissect!"

How do you model politeness, patience and calm? What are the consequences? What motivates your students? There is an importance of proximity. What are the behaviors you want to ignore? Do all of your students have a proper placement? Prioritize goals!

CONCLUSIONS

The new teachers were concerned with creating and implementing lessons, their personal feelings about teaching, classroom management, and effective teaching strategies. During visits, teachers commonly asked about exploring new strategies, additional strategies, strategies for classroom management and strategies to raise reading levels or for test reviews. Since this was repeated frequently, it is evident that new teachers may need more assistance when preparing lessons. Although they are experiencing the daily routines of classrooms and students, they can see that there is more to instruction and would like additional help.

In addition, teachers frequently mentioned that they wanted help with daily procedures, offering consistency to students, attention getters, replacement behaviors, transitions, and keeping students on task. Classroom management came up several times. The implication is that teachers feel unprepared with classroom management. Students don't always follow rules or behave intrinsically. New teachers are seeing that due to so many diverse students, management can prove challenging. When coaches and the new teachers co-planned lessons, they were able to improve practice. Coaches helped new teachers layer learning so there was continuous growth toward higher levels of performance. Coaches helped teachers with new assessment strategies and helped them examine assessments to make data-driven plans. New teachers expressed confidence and appreciation for having the time to work with an experienced teacher and planned to use the new knowledge they had acquired through these visits.

DISCUSSION OF THE EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The data suggests that new teachers could benefit from learning about implementing procedures in their teacher education programs. Perhaps more classroom management strategies could be reviewed prior to entering the classroom. Many new teachers want more information about engagement strategies. More research could inform about this area of concern for preservice

teachers at all educational institutions. Many new teachers, may not know what they need to ask or how to ask, so more attention should be given to their educational programs. With the advent of alternative route to licensure programs that provide minimal preparation for the demands of teaching, new teachers are learning to teach on the job and need the support of more experienced colleagues. New teachers need to practice in action with support so that their mistakes or miscues are kept to a minimum and their success at improving student achievement increases. It is important that a sustainable culture of teachers supporting teachers be established to derail the revolving door of teacher turnover.

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The TeachingWorks Center at the University of Michigan http://www.teachingworks.org/,