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Research In Classroom Management: Implications For Teachers

GOH SWEE CHIEW

Introduction

Making the teaching-learning process more effective and interesting has been a predominant preoccupation of educationists and researchers. The last twenty years have witnessed an increasing emphasis on the study of classroom practices and teacher-pupil behaviours, resulting in a wealth of literature regarding classroom management. These studies have revealed much of the nature and dynamics of classroom management.

To many, the term 'classroom management' is educational jargon for discipline. This should not be the case. Discipline is but only one aspect of classroom management as it implies the exercise of control by the teacher over the pupils' actions and behaviour to establish order in the classroom. However, classroom management is the teacher's ability to create that conducive, positive learning climate within the classroom so as to ensure that all pupils would be enthusiastically involved in learning and, consequently, there would be no place for any pupil misbehaviour.

This ability would include the teacher's skills in delivering interesting lessons, in organizing and managing smoothly learning activities for individual pupils, groups or the entire class, and in establishing close rapport and understanding with pupils. Classroom management provides the basis for creating this conducive learning atmosphere. To make the class 'tick' this way is no simple task owing to the number of individuals found within a classroom.

Basically, the role of a classroom teacher involves two major interdependent tasks: to establish order and to facilitate learning (Doyle, 1985). A teacher must not only be able to impart knowledge and facilitate learning, but he must be able to create or provide that

congenial environment for such learning to take effect. It is against this background that the current research into classroom practices and teacher behaviours arouses much enthusiasm and attracts financial support.

Approaches to the study of Classroom Management

The above mentioned research trend in classroom management has brought about the emergence of distinct and relatively independent approaches to the managerial function of a teacher. These are broadly labelled in research literature as counselling, behaviouristic and teacher effectiveness approaches.

The **counselling** approach has focussed on teacher understanding of pupil problems, assisting pupils to understand themselves better and to cooperatively work out solutions to problems. In the 1960's, one of the earliest and most widely utilized models was William Glasser's reality therapy. This was followed by Rudolf Dreikur's logical consequences and Tom Gordon's TET (teacher effectiveness training) in the 1970's.

However, beginning from the mid 1970's there was also research based on **behaviour modification** techniques and the much publicized Lee Canter's assertive discipline. The emphasis was on what teachers did in response to pupil misbehaviour.

Yet another emphasis in classroom management appeared in the 1970's. It has been described as **teacher effectiveness** research. Its focus is on how teachers prevented or contributed to pupil misbehaviour in the classroom. The spotlight is on teacher behaviour and activities in class which either create and enhance the favourable classroom learning situation or hinder it. This approach stresses the following 3 sets of teacher behaviours which strongly influenced pupil behaviour and performance (Jones, 1986):

1. teacher skills in organizing and managing classroom activities
2. teacher skills in presenting instructional material
3. teacher-pupil relationships

After careful analysis of his videotaped data, Kounin (1970) highlighted the importance of the organizational and management skills of a teacher in making him an effective teacher. Both the effective and ineffective teachers did not differ noticeably in how they responded to pupil misbehaviour. What did significantly differ was how the two types of teachers behaved prior to pupil misbehaviour. Effective teachers also employed a variety of teaching methods that engaged pupil interest and maximized learning. Ultimately, the pupils were preoccupied with learning and had no time to misbehave.

The results of the Texas Teacher Effectiveness study by Jere Brophy and Carolyn Evertson (1976) supported Kounin's findings. Further research by Emmer, Evertson and Anderson (1982) at the Research and Development Centre for Teacher Education at the University of Texas at Austin showed that effective planning and organization during the first few weeks of school resulted in well-managed classes for the rest of the school year. Other similar studies verified the importance of early planning and instruction in appropriate behaviour in ensuring a well-managed classroom.

The second area of teacher effectiveness research is related to the instructional skill of a teacher. Among the earliest was Madeline Hunter (1981) who stressed the importance of setting instructional objectives clearly, stating them to pupils, providing effective instruction and monitoring pupil progress. Jane Stallings (1983) further amplified Hunter's study. Studies have also been made on how pupils learn and how teachers can adjust teaching to match pupils' individual learning styles (Doyle, 1983).

The third area of study in teacher effectiveness research focusses on the effect of teacher-pupil interpersonal relationship on pupil learning and behaviour. This immediately brings to mind the self-fulfilling prophecies referred to in Rosenthal and Jacobson's research, documented in their book *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (1968). The issue is teacher expectations and their effect on pupil performance. Wittingly or unwittingly, teachers communicated high or low expectations to pupils. The type and amount of teacher interaction with pupils were also associated with marked differences in pupil performance. Brophy and Good had spent considerable time studying this and the research has been replicated and expanded in the early 1980's.

Implications for teachers

The wealth of literature on classroom management highlights the current importance attached to the managing skill of a teacher. The emphasis on teacher effectiveness is stronger than ever. Teacher effectiveness is not just planning a wonderful lesson on paper but delivering it in such an inspiring manner in the classroom that learning is maximized and leaves no room for any other distracting element. The managing role of a teacher is as crucial as is planning and instructing in the teaching-learning process. A teacher is no longer a mere presenter of knowledge.

The issue of the effect of teacher expectations on pupil achievement would also stimulate teachers to reflect on their actions and behaviour in the classrooms. Basically, a teacher must believe that he can bring about learning in his pupils, irrespective of class or level. Only in this way can pupils be encouraged to learn and the rapport between teacher and taught used to motivate learning.

From the perspective of classroom order, the first days or weeks of a new school year is of utmost significance. Emmer and associates (1984) formulated a 3-phase model for effective classroom management, as illustrated in Table 1. The first phase is prior to the beginning of the school year and includes the setting of rules, procedures and norms for the class. The second phase begins with the new school year and the teacher socializes pupils into the classroom system and establishes desirable behaviour. The third phase occurs throughout the year and is focussed on monitoring and maintaining the established system. However, these 3 phases are not necessarily distinct and do overlap in practice.

| Phase | Timing | Actions to be taken |
|-------|-------------------------------------|--|
| I | prior to beginning of school year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identify rules/procedures - set expectations of work and behaviour |
| II | first few days/weeks of school year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - establish rules/procedures - make known expectations - socialize pupils into class |
| III | throughout the year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monitor and maintain the established system - revise/modify when necessary |

Table 1. Summary of classroom management model by Emmer & Associates, 1984.

Teachers who encounter problems with managing a classroom effectively and efficiently would, perhaps, like to adapt or modify this 3-phase model for use. In fact, classroom observations of teacher behaviour and the experiences of effective classroom teachers attest to its practicality. A teacher must be able to set sensible and workable rules and gain pupil cooperation to enforce them. In this way, a conducive and cooperative classroom atmosphere will emerge and the pupils will be happy to learn. Teacher efforts and time can then be channelled to designing and managing interesting learning.

Conclusion

With the interest and research in classroom management in the last twenty years, there is obviously now a knowledge base to explore and develop even more concrete programmes to equip teachers with a repertoire of skills and strategies to cope more effectively with the complex and challenging task of teaching. Managing a class of thirty or forty individuals well does not come easily with every teacher. It is imperative that teachers recognize the need to be more aware of how to function or relate with pupils in specific classroom contexts. Teaching is not merely a matter of following inflexible rules. Rather, teaching necessitates constant adjustment to the demands of the complex classroom environment. One technique is not applicable to all pupils, neither does it suit all levels and classes. The crux of the situation is that effective classroom management is pivotal to the success of a teacher. An effective teacher is an effective manager.

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