



Classroom Management Strategies of Student Teachers on Their Teaching Practice: Effect of their Cognitive Closure

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Contribution

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Objective

The aim of the paper is to describe classroom management strategies of student teachers on the level of lower secondary schools (ISCED 2A).

Research question

How do student teachers' classroom management strategies during their teaching practice differ according to their need for cognitive closure?

Theoretical Framework

Classroom management (CM) can be viewed as a system of strategies employed by a teacher to influence the physical and social space of the classroom to foster an environment where *learning* can occur (Christofferson, Sullivan, & Bradley, 2015). *Classroom management skills* are crucial for teachers to create classroom settings where students can learn as effective CM leads to student high *achievement* (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011) and contributes to teacher remaining in the profession. The first years of teaching are reported to be the most challenging and numbers of beginning teachers leave their profession

during the first three years (Taylor & Dale, 1971; Veenman, 1984, Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). One of the biggest challenges faced by both *student teachers* and beginning teachers is struggling with CM and discipline (Bromfield, 2006; Dickson et al., 2014). The main reason is found to be the disconnection between what student teachers know about teaching from their teacher education and what they experience in their classrooms (Stoughton et al., 2007).

One of the key personal characteristics influencing teacher's choice and use of classroom management strategies can be their *need for cognitive closure* (NFC) which can be defined as individual's motivation in relation to information processing and judgement, respective as a desire for an answer in order to end further information processing and judgment, even if that answer is not the correct or best answer (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). NFC represents a relatively stable dispositional characteristics of a person but it can be temporarily increased by situational determinants (time pressure, stress) or decreased (fear from mistakes based on fast judgement).

Although the importance of effective CM is repeatedly emphasised, there is only little research on CM *strategies* of student teachers or beginning teachers. Contemporary research shows that teachers use reactive strategies more often than proactive ones at the beginning of their careers (Reupert & Woodcock, 2010), and that student teachers also apply strategies of giving punishment for misbehaviour and giving rewards to positive behaviour more often than experienced teachers (Sueb, 2013). Experienced teachers exert less control over classroom activities and student behaviour than beginning teachers (Ritter & Hancock, 2007). Research on need of cognitive closure in relation to classroom management strategies of student teachers is a new research perspective.

Method

Aim

The aim of the research is to describe in detail the relation of need for cognitive closure of student teachers (pre-service teachers) and their classroom management strategies used on their long term teaching practice in lower secondary classes in the Czech Republic.

Methods

The research is based on an integrated mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The main, qualitative part is designed as field research based on ethnographic research design. Its aim is to describe conceptions (via interviews and reflective teaching diaries) and use (via observation with video recordings and its transcription) of CMS of student teachers.

The quantitative part of the research includes (a) examination of quantitative parameters gathered via video recordings of lessons such as the types of CMS, behaviour alteration messages and techniques, discipline mechanisms, instructional techniques, student negotiation techniques and (b) statistical analyses of survey data regarding CMS and individual characteristics of student teachers such as a the need for (cognitive) closure. CMS were measured by adapted Behavior and Instructional Management Scale - BIMS (Martin & Sass, 2010) and need for cognitive closure by adapted Need for (Cognitive) Closure Scale - NFCS (Roets & Van Hiel, 2011; Czech version Širůček, 2014). NFCS consists of 15 items with 6-point Likert type ratings measuring 5 sub-scales: desire for predictability, preference of order and structure, discomfort with ambiguity, decisiveness, and close-mindedness.

Sample

The qualitative video-research sample consisted of 6 student teachers on their long term practice in 6 lower secondary comprehensive classes from 6 schools (ISCED 2A) in the Czech Republic. From each student teacher we videotaped (teacher camera, students' camera) 6 lessons taught in Czech language or History in 1 class and conducted an interview and questionnaire (BIMS, NFCS) and reflective diaries data collection. The quantitative on-line research sample consisted of 141 student teachers of the first year master study of teacher education at the Masaryk university (scales BIMS, NFCS).

Expected Outcomes

Findings

Need for cognitive closure (NFC) affects the use of classroom management strategies (CMS) of student teachers. Student teachers with higher NFC use more CMS oriented at rules and leading the classroom ($R = .28, p < .05$). The higher the NFC is the more the student teachers prefer teaching in frontal settings, deviate less from their lesson plan; require the student's discipline more strictly, and insists on student's following the rules. The students orientation on rules and directing the classroom is higher with larger classrooms ($R = .25, p < .05$). There is no statistically significant gender effect on CMS of student teachers. There are no significant differences in CMS regarding different school subject (languages, social sciences, and natural sciences) as well as in the NFC.

Qualitative data deepen typology of student teachers classroom management strategies. We describe in detail CMS, its characteristics and effects in the classroom. This theory could be beneficial in preservice teacher training in European

countries, because novice teachers share resembling situation within this context.

Significance

This research project has potentially strong research policy nexus. It can contribute to educational policy (enriching Teachers profession quality standard) and curricula development (future teacher's education). Research outcomes will contribute to understanding student teachers deal with the classroom settings.

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