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Pedagogical Reform and Classroom Reality: How Teachers View Teaching and Discipline

Barry A. Fields

**Faculty of Education
University of Southern Queensland**

Abstract

Over the past decade Queensland schools and school curriculum have been the subject of considerable policy development and reform. The most notable of these has been the adoption and widespread acceptance of the Productive Pedagogies (Gore, Griffiths & Ladwig, 2001), teaching principles and practices which are used to guide curriculum design and classroom teaching. The Productive Pedagogies draw teachers and students into a new relationship of shared participation in the teaching-learning process. This relationship has implications for how teachers interact with students in other ways, including the day-to-day task of behaviour management. The research reported in this paper looks at the dual teacher responsibilities of teaching and discipline with the focus on the extent to which the two are aligned in primary school classrooms. The research reported here extends an earlier exploratory study of the alignment of teachers and student teachers views on teaching and behaviour management (Fields, 2003).

Queensland's School Reform Longitudinal Study (SRLS) (Lingard & Ladwig, 2001), its associated New Basics Project (Education Queensland, 2001) and the notion of Productive Pedagogies (Hayes, Lingard & Mills, 2000) have captured the attention and have engaged the thinking of policy makers, curriculum developers and educators at all levels of the profession right across Australia. Perhaps, more than ever before, because of these and other reform and policy movements, there is now an emerging clarity of thinking and consensus of thought about the nature of teaching and learning and the function and purpose of schools in this country.

The Productive Pedagogies construct has been particularly powerful and influential. Here is encapsulated a view of teaching and learning that is broad based and multi-dimensional. It is a view of teaching that builds on the very best of existing practice. It is a view the teaching-learning process that recognises the importance of the role of the teacher, but which at the same time sees student learning as paramount in what schools should be aiming to achieve.

At this point in time the Productive Pedagogies schema is undergoing trials in Queensland and New South Wales (N.S.W. Department of Education & Training, 2002) and in other states and territories in various forms e.g. 'authentic teaching' (Newman et al. 1996). There is already a strong indication that it will be adopted as a framework for school curriculum broadly within Australia.

Pedagogy and Discipline

Because of its all encompassing nature, the Productive Pedagogies impact on aspects of teaching that have traditionally been regarded as discrete entities. This is particularly the case with school discipline policy and practice and is evidenced in the findings of the SRLS. A key finding of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study was that many teachers saw behaviour management as a policy issue and one that had priority over considerations of classroom practices (Lingard & Ladwig, 2001). In other words, matters of discipline were so important that they superseded educational developments that might conflict with them.

While the reciprocal relationship between teaching and behaviour management has long been recognised in the research literature, the knowledge base for behaviour management, along with many of the widely employed models of discipline have been promoted and disseminated with little reference to the broader curriculum context. Given the findings of the SRLS it might not be unreasonable to suggest that many teachers likewise develop their approach to discipline with a similar disregard for curriculum and pedagogy. William Glasser's Choice Theory and his notion of Quality Schools is a notable exception to the pedagogy-discipline separation, in that Glasser sees considerations of what and how one teaches as critical to successful behaviour management (Glasser & Dotson, 1998).

Certainly, the Productive Pedagogies framework would not seem to support the separation of teaching and behaviour management. Indeed, a close analysis of the Productive Pedagogies documentation indicates that the framework provides clear advice about how behaviour management should be approached by teachers.

How Productive Pedagogies Inform Behaviour Management

Two of the four dimensions of Productive Pedagogies have direct implications for how teachers should approach the task of managing student behaviour. These dimensions are the 'Supportive Classroom Environment' and the 'Recognition of Difference'. Within the first, teachers are expected to foster an environment where students are self-regulating and able to influence classroom activities and how these activities are implemented. Supportive classrooms are characterised by student engagement on academic tasks and respect for the contributions of all students irrespective of their ability. From a traditional perspective, supportive classrooms are well managed and are distinguishable by how little time is devoted to disciplining students. By contrast, classrooms that are less supportive are characterised by constant teacher verbal reprimands and desists and where students it seems need to be constantly coerced into engaging with the curriculum. What is important here is that discipline in supportive classrooms is achieved as much by the nature of teaching in those classrooms as it is by discipline specific strategies.

The 'recognition of difference' dimension encompasses inclusivity of non-dominant groups. In classrooms that recognise difference there is a genuine acceptance and tolerance of diversity. Indeed, diversity is considered a positive element within the classroom. It is celebrated and used as a focal point for the curriculum. While the emphasis here is on cultural differences and disability, implicit in statements about what constitutes non-dominant groups and students with 'different backgrounds' is the view that students who find it difficult to adjust to and meet the expectations of schools in terms of appropriate behaviour, are, or at least should be likewise accommodated and supported.

Reading the literature on the Productive Pedagogies through the lens of behaviour management, terms such as 'collaboration', 'choice', 'self-regulation' and 'student-control' stand out whether the context is teaching or behaviour management. In effect, they set the parameters for decisions about discipline in the classroom, and teachers are left in no doubt about how they should frame their approach to behaviour management.

Best Practice in Behaviour Management

The linkage of teaching and behaviour management in the Productive Pedagogies and the extent to which the Productive Pedagogies evaluative criteria (Hayes, Lingard & Mills, 2000) specify what are exemplary practices in teacher-student relations, raises the question –

What constitutes best practice in behaviour management? And, it might also be useful to ask – To what extent is there consensus about how best to manage student behaviour?

Prior to school-base management initiatives, research on school effectiveness and school-wide approaches to issues such as discipline, teachers exercised considerable autonomy in their choice of behaviour management strategies. Discipline was something that individual teachers dealt with as the need arose. Approaches were invariably unsystematic, highly personalised and frequently idiosyncratic collections of practitioner wisdom. Today, schools are expected to have a whole school behaviour management plan along with structures that support teachers in their efforts to manage student behaviour. They are also expected to provide assistance to students who find it difficult to meet the school's standards for behaviour. Even with whole school behaviour management plans, teachers are still relatively free to adopt whatever approach to discipline they wish, so long as it is broadly compatible with their school's guidelines.

Over the past two to three decades a plethora of behaviour management models and programs have emerged (Charles, 2002; Edwards, 2000)). Many have been promoted vigorously and numbers have attracted large groups of devotees among teachers and school administrators. In Australia, models such as Choice Theory, Assertive Discipline, Responsible Thinking and the work of Bill Rogers have been widely adopted as the umbrella approach to discipline in many schools. Several of the models complement one another, but others such as Choice Theory and Assertive Discipline are difficult to reconcile, coming from very different ends of the teacher control – student control continuum.

Within the field of behaviour management itself, there is considerable disagreement about how best to gain and maintain student cooperation and engagement in academic tasks and activities. There exists a significant divergence of opinion about how children learn behaviour and what should be the role and function of the teacher in the process of discipline. For some, behaviour management is about achieving compliance, as in Lee Canter's Assertive Discipline and Frederick Jones' Positive Classroom Discipline models (Charles, 2002; Edwards, 2000). For others it is about fostering self-control and helping students make appropriate decisions about their actions, as in William Glasser's Choice Theory and Linda Albert's Cooperative Discipline (Charles, 2002; Edwards, 2000). All the evidence suggests that we are some way away from achieving common ground let alone consensus on both the theory and practice of behaviour management in schools.

The study reported here aimed to explore some of the issues raised in this introductory discussion by examining what teachers consider is important in pedagogy and how these views align with their view on behaviour management. The preceding discussion suggests that the

two may not be well aligned and much more work needs to be done with teachers if they are to keep pace with developments in the profession like the Productive Pedagogies.

The Study

Sample

The sample for this study comprised 61 Year 4 – 7 teachers from the Toowoomba, Queensland, school district. The teachers voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and all had expressed an awareness of the Productive Pedagogies and some were actively engaged in implementing components of the scheme into their approach to teaching.

Procedure

The teachers were given a 40-item questionnaire based, in part, on the classroom observation instrument used in the SRLS, an instrument designed to measure the use of productive pedagogies across the four dimensions of the scheme (see Table 1). The SRLS items were reworded in order to ascertain the importance the teachers attached to the various productive pedagogies e.g. “Lesson tasks should, where possible, relate to the background experiences of the students,” “ There should be frequent opportunities for students to engage in higher order thinking and critical analysis”. Items were rated on a six point Likert-type scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. There were twenty items covering the productive pedagogies. The remaining items focused on the importance attached to various statements about the management of student behaviour in the classroom. Ten of these items reflected a teacher-directed managerial orientation e.g. “The teacher should formulate his/her expectations for student behaviour and clearly communicate these to students”, “The teacher should identify consequences for inappropriate behaviour and apply these consistently when necessary”. The remaining ten items focussed on approaches to discipline that incorporated student input into and/or control over their design or implementation e.g. “Students should be actively involved in the development of the classroom Code of Conduct”, “Regular meetings should be scheduled where the teacher and students discuss curriculum and/or behavioural problems that the class is experiencing”.

Results

The responses from the survey were analysed using the t Test for the difference of means of correlated groups. The results are summarised in Table 1. Using a .05 significance level and a non-directional test, no statistically significant differences were found between the ratings of teachers on Productive Pedagogies and teacher leadership management strategies and between Productive Pedagogies and teacher directed management strategies. The high level of relationship between teacher ratings on Productive Pedagogies and teacher leadership management and between Productive Pedagogies and teacher directed management indicate that while teachers register strong support of more innovative pedagogical practices they similarly see a place in their teaching for both forms of behaviour management.

Table 1
t-Test Comparisons Between Ratings on Productive Pedagogies, Leadership Management and Teacher Directed Management

Groups Compared	N	Mean	SD	df	t
Productive Pedagogies	61	5.08	0.47	60	0.009
Teacher Leadership Management	61	4.96	0.57		
Productive Pedagogies	61	5.08	0.47	60	0.061
Teacher Directed Management	61	4.94	4.94		

The above findings agree, in part, with an earlier exploratory study of 60 primary Year 1 – 7 teachers where the same survey instrument was employed (Fields, 2003). Ratings for both the productive pedagogies (4.93) and teacher leadership management (4.85) were high. However, unlike this study the mean ratings for teacher directed management were low (2.93). An explanation for this difference may lie in the fact that 20 percent of the teachers in the exploratory study were teachers of young children Years 1 – 3) and that all 60 teachers were engaged in postgraduate studies in special education and behaviour management and as such were aware of the trend away from teacher directed behaviour management approaches.

Discussion

In planning this study two major hypotheses were considered possible. First, was a shift in teacher support away from 'old' pedagogies towards the newer productive pedagogies. This might be associated with a concurrent shift in approaches to behaviour management away from teacher directed/controlling procedures towards more student-centred and leadership approaches. A more conservative hypothesis was that the teachers in the study would demonstrate agreement with the newer pedagogies but would remain more traditional in their approach to behaviour management. Support for both hypotheses was found. While the majority of teachers in the study showed evidence of a paradigm shift in both teaching and behaviour management, a significant number of teachers remained teacher directed and controlling in their perspective on behaviour management while at the same time indicating agreement for the productive pedagogies. For this latter group of teachers teaching and behaviour management appear not to be aligned.

The contradictory findings of this study may be indicative of a number of historical, social and systemic influences on behaviour management. Historically, behaviour management practices have centred on teacher directed models, with the teacher's role being that of 'boss'. In this role teachers have had sole power and control over both pedagogy and behaviour management in the classroom and often relied on punishment and coercion to influence students behaviour. Likewise, Australian society is entrenched with examples of the exertion of power and control, examples that date back to early settlement and our convict past. Similarly our justice system, despite efforts at reform from time to time is still based on retribution and punishment. In this regard, it could be viewed as no surprise if this ideology is reflected in schools and classrooms.

The results of this study suggest that teacher directed and leadership approaches to behaviour management coexist in classrooms and that teachers see a place for both approaches. While ideally, pedagogy and behaviour management should be aligned, the behaviour of many students is often independent of whatever approach is taken to curriculum and instruction. Students with special needs and chronically misbehaving and alienated students will often require direct forms of management. When teachers rate teacher directed behaviour management just as highly as more student-centred, choice oriented ways of relating to students they may well be reflecting the realities and the complexities of primary classrooms today and that their thinking reflects their best attempts to accommodate the many different expectations, demands and pressures they face on a daily basis.

Conclusion

Issues raised and debated by educators and academics tend to have a continuous life and often do not result in resolution. Governments and employing authorities have far less time and tolerance for open-ended debate and the failure to achieve closure. While policy makers are cognizant of diverging views and conflicting research, at the end of the day policies have to be developed, decisions have to be made and directions taken. In effect policy makers assume the role of arbitrators when they act to establish the shape and direction of school education in an environment of conflicting information and divergent viewpoints. Is this the case with Education Queensland's Productive Pedagogies?

For a number of years now behaviour management theory has been moving away from a teacher directed, teacher controlling orientation to discipline (Freiberg 1999). It is no coincidence that this movement has paralleled the paradigm shift from instrumentalist to constructivist views about how children learn and the belief that students can be self-regulatory and can be given much greater responsibility for their own learning and behaviour. As school curricula change to reflect the view that students need to have greater control over their learning experiences and that learning is facilitated when students are given the opportunity to reflect on and to construct their own understandings, so to behaviour management approaches have moved away from the stance that children need to be managed because they are not capable of

controlling their own behaviour. But this shift is gradual and ongoing. Not all teachers are convinced of the efficacy of so called 'leadership' approaches to discipline; many are unable, reluctant or unwilling to change from traditional controlling and managerial orientations to behaviour management.

Education Queensland, through its school reform initiatives is seeking to give its school system direction for the first decade of this century and to take a lead role in shaping the curriculum of schools and the nature of pedagogy in those schools. Is it though too far ahead of the views of its teachers? Is it, in the process of reforming schooling, seeking closure on issues that are still debated in the education community?

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Classroom Practices Survey

Item	Rating					
	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
1. There should be frequent opportunities for students to engage in higher order thinking and critical analysis	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. The teacher should formulate his/her expectations for student behaviour and clearly communicate these to students	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. The work and responses of students should provide evidence of deep understanding of concepts and ideas	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Encouragement, not praise, is the best tool teachers have to influence students	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Verbal exchanges in the classroom should show evidence of sustained dialogue rather than just question-answer-response patterns	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. The teacher should identify consequences for misbehaviour and apply these consistently when necessary	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Students should be encouraged to critique and second guess texts and other sources of information	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Classroom meetings are effective vehicles for addressing matters of class rules, behaviour and consequences	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. The teacher should aim to encourage depth of knowledge and understanding of the curriculum	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. An understanding of how language in its various forms works should be a priority in the learning experiences of students	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Firm control of student behaviour, correctly applied, is humane and can result in the students feeling a greater sense of freedom	1	2	3	4	5	6

12. The students' background experiences should be utilised in the design of lesson tasks and activities	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. Teachers should strive to achieve a 'no-lose' resolution to conflicts they have with students	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. Lesson tasks and activities should integrate with and incorporate ideas from a variety of subject areas	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. Repeated infringements of the classroom's 'Code of Conduct' should result in increasing levels of punishment being applied as a consequence	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. When faced with students who are aggressive and/or defiant it is often best to try to 'defuse' the situation rather than to force compliance	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Students will be motivated to behave appropriately when discipline is based on mutual respect	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. Student work should be related to real-life situations	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. Rewards and other forms of incentives should be used to motivate students to learn	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. Classroom tasks and activities should be intellectually challenging and/or real world problems	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. Students should be actively involved in the development of their classroom's 'Code of Conduct'	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. Students should have a say in the pace, direction or outcomes of the lesson	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. The teacher should monitor student behaviour regularly and act immediately there is a problem	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. The teacher should aim to develop a socially supportive and positive classroom environment	1	2	3	4	5	6
25. Teachers should see themselves as guides and supporters who help students manage their own behaviour	1	2	3	4	5	6

26. Students should be engaged and on task for much of the lesson	1	2	3	4	5	6
27. Teachers should use body language (eye contact, physical proximity, body carriage, facial expressions, and gestures) to gain and maintain student attention to task	1	2	3	4	5	6
28. The criteria for judging student performance should be made explicit	1	2	3	4	5	6
29. Teachers need to encourage students to solve their own problems	1	2	3	4	5	6
30. Students should be provided opportunities to direct and self-regulate their own behaviour	1	2	3	4	5	6
31. Misbehaviour can be corrected by the use of consequences. Unpleasant consequences act to reduce the likely reoccurrence of inappropriate behaviour	1	2	3	4	5	6
32. The diversity of cultures within the classroom should be factored into curriculum planning and teaching	1	2	3	4	5	6
33. Consistently applied, logical consequences help students learn that they themselves have positive control over their own lives	1	2	3	4	5	6
34. All students should be encouraged to participate regardless of their backgrounds	1	2	3	4	5	6
35. Lesson content and activities should be structured and managed by the teacher to reduce time off task and to minimise inappropriate behaviour	1	2	3	4	5	6
36. Classroom experiences should provide ample opportunities for teachers and students to use personal accounts, experiences, biographies, etc within the curriculum	1	2	3	4	5	6
37. When faced with repeated defiance, it is best not to exert ones authority or power to coerce the student into complying	1	2	3	4	5	6
38. Teachers should help develop a group identity that recognises varying individual differences and group affiliations	1	2	3	4	5	6

39. Many students are unable or unwilling to regulate their own behaviour and will require direction from the teacher	1	2	3	4	5	6
40. Active citizenship, including an appreciation of the rights and responsibilities of groups and individuals in society should be promoted through classroom activities	1	2	3	4	5	6