

Profile

Using Videodiscs in Teacher Education: Preparing Effective Classroom Managers

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Abstract: Although a key ingredient of teacher education is exposure to a variety of flexible management models, a common feature of teacher education programs is isolation from real classrooms except in carefully controlled, limited circumstances. During a typical four-year degree program, students might have occasion to work with fewer than four practising teachers, each of which will likely model one preferred management style. An ongoing concern of teacher educators has been the limited opportunity for their students to develop a personal repertoire of flexible strategies. Existing instructional materials do little to alleviate this problem. The Department of Secondary Education, at the University of Alberta, became interested in the capability of interactive videodisc to provide an atmosphere suitable for prospective teachers to explore rather than simply study management strategies. Videodisc technology was chosen because it offers the advantage of a non-threatening, "real" interaction with classroom situations. One of the resulting instructional videodiscs, *Classroom Management: A Case Study Approach*, is described in this article.

Creating and maintaining an orderly, stimulating, and productive classroom environment has always been considered an essential element of effective teaching. A research base was established during the seventies that clearly correlated variables of classroom management with pupil achievement (Evertson, 1985). However, while classroom management has always been assigned to the teacher, few tools have been provided that integrate research and theory into a well-conceptualized, practical approach to classroom management (Jones, 1982).

THE STATE OF TEACHER EDUCATION

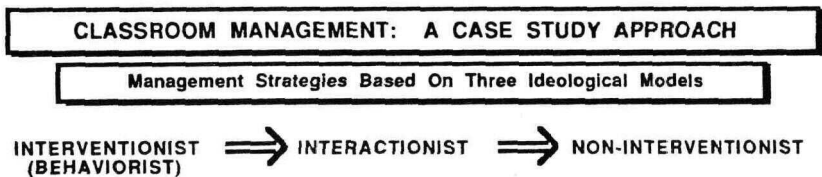
Preparing prospective teachers to step into the classroom means providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to develop a philosophy of management. In most cases, beginning teachers have few if any guiding principles or strategies upon which to build their own management techniques.

Pre-practicum methods courses are generally designed to heighten an awareness of presentation or communication techniques, with lesson-oriented planning and execution as the main thrusts of the preparation. Most of these courses include some advice regarding potential difficulties in the classroom, but seldom do these methods allow the pre-service teacher to formulate or explore management strategies beyond the "fire-fighting" stage. This lack of opportunity to establish any confidence in their ability to manage the classroom, for example by creating an orderly and stimulating environment, carries over into the real classroom where the trial and error approach dominates during the practicum experience and very often well into a teaching career.

Classroom management has a direct influence on two key aspects of the profession: 1) the degree to which students develop personal and cognitive skills; and 2) the extent to which teachers enjoy their jobs and remain committed to the profession (Jones, 1982). Teacher frustration concerning classroom management problems is widespread. In a poll conducted by the National Teacher Association in 1979, 74% of the teachers responding said that discipline problems impaired their teaching effectiveness. Similarly, studies of first year teachers reveal that discipline and classroom management are the most difficult and problematic dimensions of effective teaching (Lasley, 1987). It is evident that many practising teachers regard their pre-service exposure to these issues as inadequate.

Existing management practices, in many cases, seem to reflect a simplistic approach that expects all school personnel to implement a single reactive model chosen from a very narrow range of approved models. Models have generally fallen along a continuum (see Figure 1) that includes interventionist strategies at one end and non-interventionist strategies at the other (Glickman & Wolfgang, 1979).

Figure 1.
Continuum of Classroom Management Practices.



An obvious problem arises, however, when a teacher is required to rely on a strategy that does not match her/his own personal style or range of skills. As well, expecting one model to be effective with all children contradicts the evident truth that each child is an individual with unique needs (Long, 1987). A third problem arises when teacher-education programs focus on classroom

management within the context of instructional or communication methods, leaving the impression that a carefully constructed lesson will forestall any student disruptions. This approach discounts the few students in every class who will fail, initially, to respond to even the most stimulating lessons (Jones, 1982).

Jones (1982) suggests that student behavior and school discipline are best viewed as management issues correspondingly influenced by a wide range of factors. Teachers should therefore be provided with an understanding of the factors that influence individual and group behavior, with methods for diagnosing the classroom environment for potential problems, and with a range of options for influencing student behavior. Similarly, Lasley (1987) offers the presentation of an eclectic view that involves a variety of theories which the pre-service student synthesizes, finally developing a personalized approach. He also acknowledges the value of the more traditional approaches of providing prescriptions for effective classroom teaching based on inquiry, and of viewing an array of problems from one management perspective.

Although a combination of these approaches would be ideal, the reality is that teacher educators must rely on approaches that can be handled in one or two class periods within a curriculum context. In the standard route in our teacher education program, classroom management is presented within this descriptive context, although pre-service teachers become involved in several peer teaching sessions during which they have an opportunity to role play various classroom management scenarios. While experiences of this sort encourage the personal reflection essential to effective teaching, they fall short of exposure to and practice in real classrooms.

THE CHOICE OF VIDEODISC AS INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIUM

Interactive videodiscs provide an opportunity not previously available with instructional media—realistic conversations between videodisc teacher and pupil and between videodisc coach and player (Clark, 1984).

Clark characterizes good conversation as including responses that are appropriate and quick and as having the property of shared responsibility for direction, content, pace and intensity. Interactive videodisc allows this quality of interaction by encouraging conscious involvement on the part of the learner. Simply put, the videodisc experience is related directly to learner input. The program simply will not advance until the learner communicates a decision via the remote control keypad. Program branching in this experience is determined by either the intentional choice of the learner or by the program, and is based on built-in measures of performance and understanding.

For the environment described in this article, that of instructing in the difficult area of classroom management, videodisc technology enjoys a number of additional advantages over traditional media. While slides have high visual quality and are relatively inexpensive to produce, they impose a linear

structure on presentation and do not permit rapid access of dynamic information. Film is expensive and prohibits immediate visual response to student questions and concerns. In both these cases, the student fails to be an active participant. Videotape, while easy to use and edit, has a slower response time and poorer quality visual images than videodisc, especially in freeze frame. None of these instructional mediums are intrinsically capable of providing immediate feedback to the learner - in most cases, a human tutor will be present to make decisions about the next instructional step.

This Faculty has been interested in the use of simulation materials for teacher education since the mid-seventies. Early work on The Simulated Classroom (SIMCLASS) had gone on for several years using interactive videotape before the first videodisc, *A Touch of Midas*, was produced in 1982. As a result of that experience, and in reaction to a perceived need for improved methods of teaching the complex human interaction skills necessary for effective teaching, a second videodisc, *Classroom Discipline: A Simulation Approach* was developed (1984). The expanded SIMCLASS team, Dr. Douglas V. Parker, David A. Mappin, and Katy Campbell-Bonarj based the design of this Level II disc on the work of David Kolb in explicating an experiential learning system. That is, the use of videodisc technology permitted a "controlled setting where simulations of reality (replaced) actual experience in the cycle of work, personal development, and education" (Mappin & Parker, 1985) and helped the students integrate classroom discussions and readings and actual practicum experiences in a way that would provide a wider range of management styles with which to experiment.

This disc was used in 12 sections of Ed. CI 352, the course for which it was designed, in both the Fall and Winter terms of 1984/85; as well as in several courses in Educational Psychology and Educational Foundations. Based on the Faculty's acceptance of this approach, another videodisc project was undertaken.

PROGRAM DESIGN

In order for instructors to take advantage of several approaches while maintaining the momentum necessary in a short university session, a third videodisc was designed to provide an in depth "real" experience in classroom management at the secondary level. Second in the series developed for Ed. CI 352 (a third is now in development), *Classroom Management: A Case Study Approach* utilizes Level II technology in a way that approaches the provision of all of Lasley's perspectives in one resource. Level II technology, in which the program logic is self-contained, was chosen because of its portability (one player, one monitor), low cost of design and production in comparison to other interactive formats, and ease of utilization.

One of the instructional goals in designing this disc was to encourage beginning teachers to take a problem-solving approach to understanding a

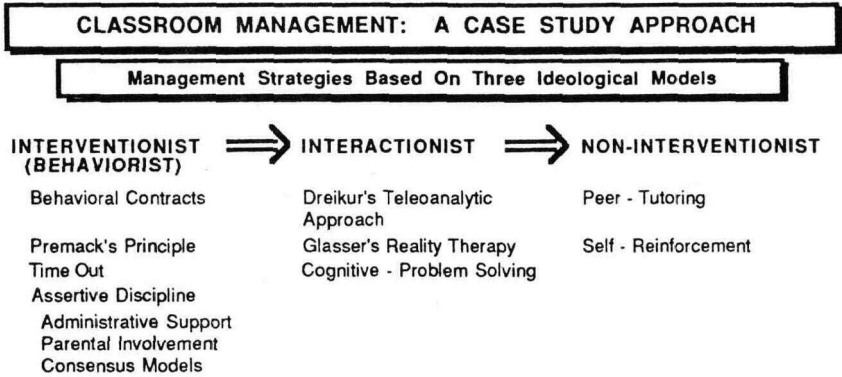
pupil's personal experiences and motivations and their effect on classroom and social behavior. Accordingly, the simulation was designed as a case study of how one pupil's difficulties in adjusting to changing family circumstances affects not only her home life but her performance and behavior in the classroom. The participant immediately assumes the role of the classroom teacher and continues in this role throughout the simulation which culminates in the application of a management strategy.

Initially, the case study guides the participant through an information-gathering stage, during which factors external to the school situation are explored. At this time the participant-as-teacher is introduced to the Vice-Principal of the disc "school", who thereafter acts as a facilitator and focal point to which the teacher can return again and again for advice. The character of "Vice-Principal" was chosen for this role for several reasons: 1) in reality, this individual is often responsible for school-based teacher evaluation; 2) the Edmonton Public School Board often takes on this additional task of staff development; and 3) including this character permitted the designers a means with which to provide continuity and feedback to the learner in a relatively non-threatening manner. As an aside the "actor" for this role, who within the year accepted an administrative position in an elementary/junior high school, was instrumental in organizing a workshop for her colleagues in Edmonton Public Schools' Consulting Services, at which Faculty members highlighted the use of interactive technologies for teacher education and inservice. This meeting led eventually to the undertaking of a collaborative project to develop the aforementioned third videodisc in this series.

Following a review of this stage, the student is presented with a choice of three target behaviors for possible modification. Although experienced teachers might well choose a number of behaviors for simultaneous attention, this case study requires the participant to focus on one target behavior and related strategies at one sitting. Choosing to focus on underlying causes for behavior, for instance, will result in a further choice of three to four classroom management strategies from which the student is to choose one for implementation. These strategies range from Cantors' Assertive Discipline (1980), an interventionist strategy, to Glasser's Reality Therapy (1977), an interactionist strategy, to the non-interventionist Cognitive Problem-Solving approach described by D'Zurilla and Goldfield (1971), and others. The designers included seventeen management strategies in total, which encompass all of the continuum (see Figure 2 on following page) described by Glickman and Wolfgang (1979).

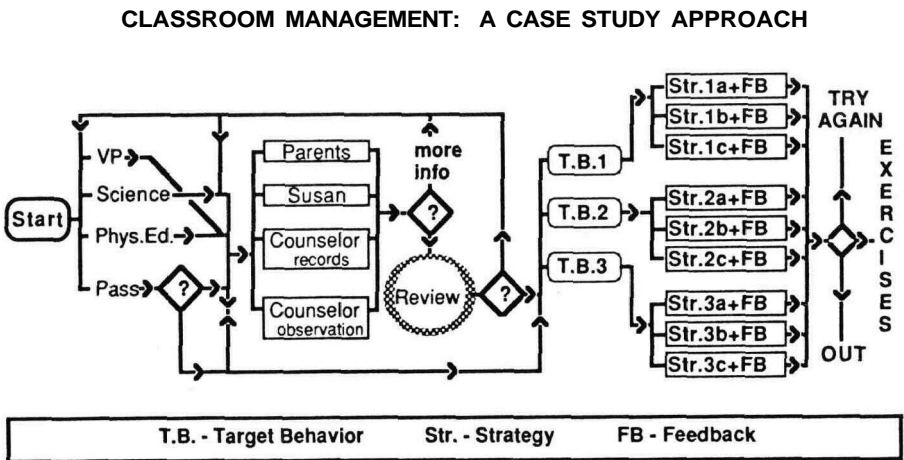
As the participant works through different paths on the disc she/he may be exposed to as few as two strategies or as many as are available. In this way the participant begins to articulate personal perceptions and goals related to effective classroom management. Naturally, the student's choice of strategies will be based on the information obtained by utilizing as many disc-based sources of information as possible. These sources, each providing a key to understanding the problem, include discourse with colleagues, consultations with the vice-principal and the school counsellor, telephone conversations with

Figure 2.
Management Strategies.



the parents and interviews with the problem pupil. The structure of this disc is represented in Figure 3.

Figure 3.
Structure of Videodisc.



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VIDEODISC IN THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

The flexibility of this medium affords an instructor in the Faculty of Education the opportunity to utilize the case study in a number of ways. An individualized approach is of the greatest value in assisting a beginning teacher to develop a personal philosophy of management. The adolescents appearing on the disc do not get tired nor do they refuse to respond to one more trial suggestion. An individual student working alone has the freedom to try different management approaches in an environment involving no personal risk. Small groups working with the case study have the added support of peers and the feedback analysis so valuable when working through new or unfamiliar territory. Larger groups (class size) may also benefit from working through a path, selecting a behavior to modify and a related management strategy. In the latter consensus model, an instructor has the option of highlighting various information sources (for example, the use of Cumulative Student Records) that may otherwise not be available to the student. In this way the videodisc functions as a database. A fourth possibility for use would be to assign the case study to individual students after a large or small group session. As instructors in this course have become more familiar with the available resources, other strategies have been employed. For example, one instructor in the Fall session, 1989, used *Classroom Management: A Case Study Approach* in small groups to study and practise communication styles.

By keeping track of the information gathered from a variety of sources and the decisions made at various points in the study (a log sheet is provided for this purpose), a student is able to compare approaches and finally confirm their own personal management style. Working knowledge of other management models is valuable as the student begins to expand his/her personal repertoire of strategies.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Mastering classroom management seems to be one of, if not the, major concern of beginning teachers. In developing *Classroom Management: A Case Study Approach*, the Faculty of Education attempted to provide a challenging new means by which pre-service teachers can acquire or confirm a personal management style. The flexibility of this Level II videodisc, makes the instructional resource a multifaceted tool by which instructors are able to bring one very realistic and complex situation into the classroom for analysis and evaluation. The case study, while useful in an individualized or group interaction mode, appears to be a most thorough learning experience when used in a combination of approaches.

Classroom management is a complex problem. If beginning teachers are to be effective in facing the challenges of the classroom in the 90's, they must be

encouraged to develop a repertoire of appropriate management models. We believe that the use of interactive materials, in combination with traditional classroom instruction, gives our beginning teachers an excellent opportunity of meeting these challenges.

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