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Beginning Teachers as Effective Classroom Managers:

How are they? . . .Managing?

Abstract

The results of a survey of the self-reported classroom management practices of 151 beginning teachers confirmed what previous research has repeatedly reported: (a) that classroom management is vitally connected to effective teaching/learning; (b) that novice teachers often find management to be challenging and/or difficult; and (c) that they could have been better prepared to meet this challenge had the typical "theory-practice" gap between their preservice practicum and their first-year(s) teaching been reduced. The author suggests ways to improve this link "between practicum and practice," by means of a supervisory framework emphasizing the contextual and developmental nature of effective teaching/learning.

Résumé

Les résultats d'une enquête sur les pratiques de gestion de classe rapportées par 151 enseignants débutants confirment les résultats des recherches antérieures: a) la gestion de classe est étroitement liée à l'efficacité des enseignements/apprentissages; b) les enseignants néophytes considèrent souvent la gestion de classe comme un défi et(ou) une difficulté et c) la préparation à relever ce défi aurait été meilleure si le fossé typique "théorie-pratique" entre leur stage et leurs premières années d'enseignement avait été réduit. L'auteur propose des moyens pour améliorer le rapport entre la théorie et la pratique, notamment un cadre directeur axé sur la nature contextuelle et développementale des enseignements/apprentissages efficaces.

A crucial challenge often reported by beginning teachers entering the profession relates to classroom management. Pressure is mounting on teacher educators and/or administrators, who work with these beginners, to reduce the proverbial “theory-practice gap” between preservice preparation for effective classroom management and its actual implementation in real school situations.

In the light of this expectation for teacher developers, the present study was designed to achieve three objectives. One was to investigate the extent that a sample of first-year(s) teachers in one western Canadian province applied in their teaching the knowledge/skills of classroom management presented to them during their preservice extended-practicum. A second purpose was to compare these results to some of the current research findings from the reform literature in teacher-education – as conceptualized in a supervisory model called Contextual Teaching/Learning (CTL) (Ralph & Yang, 1993). Third, based on this comparison, inferences were drawn and implications for the educators involved were discussed in helping beginners to develop their classroom management skills during this transition-initiative period. Although the purpose of this article is not to present a prescriptive list of management techniques for teachers to follow, a few will be mentioned in the course of the description of the supervisory process.

The Background

Two observations can be made from a review of the current literature related to beginning teachers and classroom management. One is that the key research results have been consistent over time; and a second is that many of the interpretations of and/or explanations for the findings, however, seem incomplete or flawed.

For instance, one of the common findings confirmed by several studies is that teachers in general – and beginners in particular – identify classroom management and discipline as “one of the most complex and demanding challenges facing all teachers at all levels” (Jacobsen, Eggen, & Kauchak, 1993, p. 262). These findings have been consistent over time; however, there is a possibility that a deficiency in many of these reports lies in their misinterpretation of findings, their incomplete explanations, or their faulty inferences.

To illustrate, some of the following inferences and/or conclusions have been derived from this type of research, but they do not tell the full story. One of these inferences is that novice teachers’ management problems are somehow due to teacher educators’ failure to free student teachers from the traditional “technical/prescriptive” orientation to class-

room management. Another troublesome inference, which may arise from some of the literature, is that it is “unhealthy” for beginning teachers to be preoccupied with seeking practical solutions to classroom control problems. A third flawed intimation is that beginning teachers’ concerns for survival should (and would) be eliminated, if their supervisors would just begin to implement specific, current practices or approaches, such as school-university partnerships, collaborative decision-making, cooperative group-learning authentic assessment, reflective teaching, or transformational leadership. The flaw, here, is often in an elitist/exclusionist tone that seems to deprecate traditional approaches. Furthermore, these intimations, in attempting to account for the theory-practice gap in teacher education, tend to suggest, erroneously, that the historical tasks accomplished in teacher-education have unfortunately been of inferior quality. A further assumption appears to be that if (and when) educational planners would eradicate the “old, therefore questionable” approaches, in favor of the reform-based ideas, then successful teaching/learning would finally occur, and pupils would be ready for the 21st century.

Although each of these above intimations may have a degree of validity, they are essentially deficient in adequately explaining the research findings. There are at least two reasons for this shortcoming. Primarily, these insufficient explanations tend to frame the issue of the theory-practice conflict into a bipolar controversy. On the one extreme are the “pure traditionalists” who are presumed to be fixated by the technical/rational paradigm of education (based on a quarter century of so-called narrow teacher-effectiveness research). They, in turn, are pitted against the contemporary reform-oriented innovators who advocate the interpretive/integrative approach. However, to create such a strict polarization between these camps is fundamentally untenable, because current educational research, as well as individuals’ own schooling experience both indicate that rarely, if ever, do educators conduct their practice uniformly, according to either of these paradigms. To emphasize this dichotomy is unsound, too, because many proponents of a particular reform approach seem to become just as rigid in promoting their position, as they accuse their opponents of being.

Therefore, rather than conceptualizing teacher education by means of this divisive framework, whereby novices are supposed to “. . . progress away from bad old practices to desirable new ones” (Heaton & Lampert, 1993, p. 76), one could conceive that teacher developers would gain greater benefit by viewing teacher development as a more holistic entity that would not only accommodate the above two positions – but others as well. In fact, recent research by Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1985) and, more recently, by Onslow, Beynon, and Geddis (1992) shows that

successful educators in all fields tend to adopt an eclectic approach in selecting their strategies for practice from a wide repertoire of teaching/management approaches and philosophies.

A second reason for challenging this conceptual dichotomy – which both Gage (1989) and Oberle (1991) have termed “the paradigm wars” – is that this dualism tends to de-emphasize or ignore the fundamental principle undergirding cognitive developmental psychology. This constructivist principle is that all learners pass through a series of developmental stages, as they encounter new experiences, and as they integrate them into their prior understanding. Thus, in applying this principle to teacher education, beginning teachers, who may know little or nothing about classroom management strategies, would require precise guidance and direction to help them function at the basic survival stage. In fact, all professional educators – at every level of the hierarchy, and in every field of the enterprise – may be unskilled in and/or uncertain about performing certain instructional and/or management tasks. By contrast, each individual also has areas of professional competence. In other words, teachers and administrators are also learners; and learners learn effectively by teaching or “experiencing” the subject-matter in real contexts. Therefore, any learner who is at a low developmental level for a particular skill must not be rushed, pushed, intimidated, discredited, or considered abnormal; but rather, they are to be viewed as team members progressing through normal developmental steps.

A Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework used to guide this present study is a developmental model called Contextual Teaching/Learning (CTL) (Ralph & Yang, 1993). A fundamental strength of the CTL model is that it resolves the difficulties embedded in the faulty inferences described above. Moreover, CTL permits the teacher (or the “supervisor” in a supervisory situation) to accommodate all levels of learner (or supervisee) development, by means of providing the unique blend of supervisory direction and support needed by individual supervisees.

In the present article the major features of the model are first highlighted by illustrating how supervisors (i.e., the professional in the “teacher” role) may apply CTL in facilitating the “learner’s” professional growth in managing classrooms. Second, the CTL conceptual framework is used as a criterion reference against which to assess the findings of a recent survey on novice teachers’ management skills. Then, for the consideration of other educators interested in this area, implications are drawn for enhancing beginning teachers’ management competencies.

Using CTL to Help Neophytes Develop Their Skills

In applying the CTL model, the person in the supervisory role (which may be either a permanent or a temporary position) – who might be a classroom cooperating teacher, college practicum-supervisor, school-based administrator, school district supervisor, mentor, or peer-consultant – concentrates essentially on adjusting her/his supervisory style to provide the needed resources to raise the developmental level of supervisees in effectively performing a specific task.

As indicated by the outer border in Figure 1, educators seeking to apply CTL in their supervisory practice would need to recognize that the unique contexts, reflecting the varying psychological, social, cultural, and organizational characteristics specific to each situation, would influence in complex ways each supervisory scenario (Ralph & Yang, 1993). Although using the CTL approach helps participants to identify these situational factors, the model was not designed for critiquing or attempting to alter these variables, many of which may not be changeable, anyway. The primary goal of CTL is to promote learner development.

As depicted in the upper portion of Figure 1, the teacher or supervisor applies the CTL model in three general phases. Related to the area of classroom management, the first phase is for a supervisor to ascertain a beginning teacher's stage or level of development in performing a particular management skill or task. The supervisor would determine this learner "readiness-level" by observing supervisees in classroom situations, and by conferencing with them (and with others who work with them), in both formal and informal dialogue. The learner's developmental stage is a product of two readiness dimensions: the supervisee's level of competence (skill, expertise, or ability) and level of confidence (assurance, comfort, or security) in performing the management skill being practiced. The four "D" quadrants in Figure 1 represent approximate and varying combinations of the two aspects of skill development. Development level 1 (D1) is characterized by a novice teacher who has moderate to low competence, but moderate to high confidence, in performing the task. D2 represents a supervisee who ranks moderate to low in both competence and confidence to perform the skill. D3 reflects a learner's developmental position that is moderate to high in competence, but moderate to low in confidence; and a D4 level indicates a supervisee who rates high in both skill level and psychological security.

The second phase in applying the CTL model, as shown in Figure 1, is for supervisors to recognize that their leadership style is adjustable and not static. Supervisory or teaching style consists of varying combi-

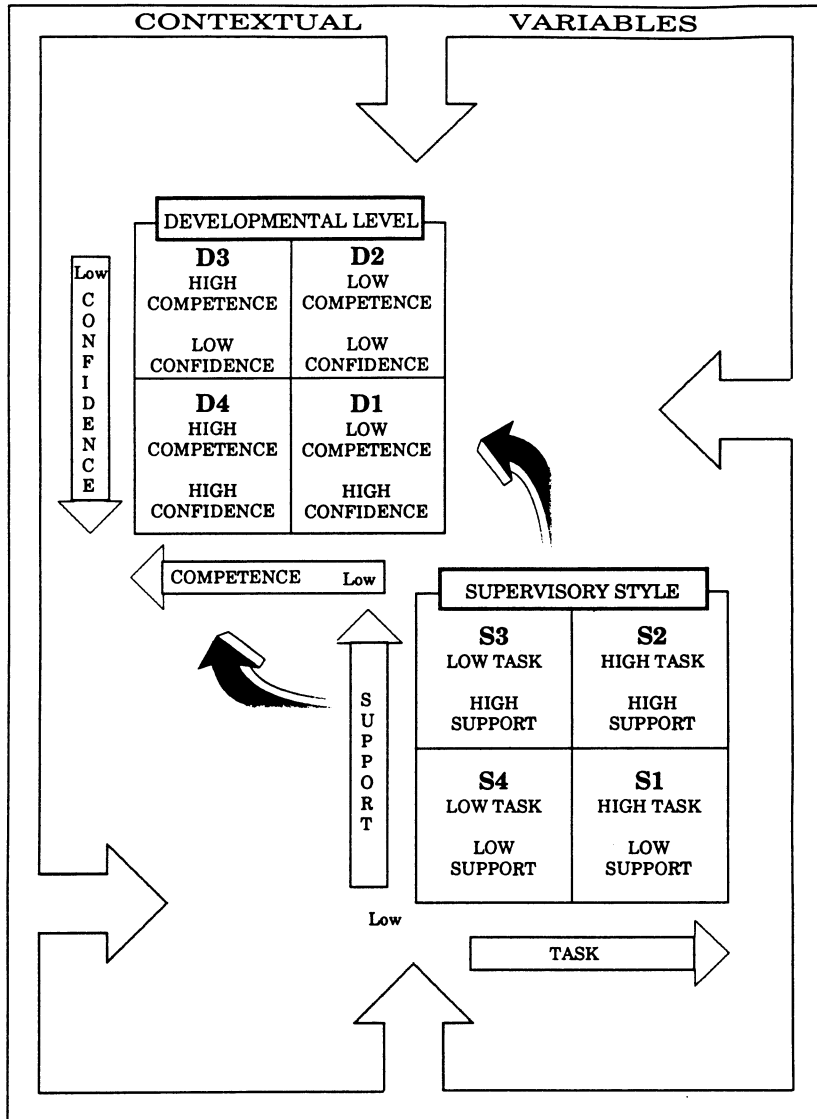


Figure 1
The Contextual Teaching/Learning Model
 Adapted from Ralph (1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1992-3, 1993b, 1993c) and Ralph & Yang (1993)

nations of two essential leadership elements: leaders' task (directive or "telling") behavior and their supportive (interactive or encouraging) responses. The four "S" quadrants in Figure 1 represent varying combi-

nations of these supervisory dimensions. Supervisory style 1 (S1), for instance, is characterized by a combination of a leader's moderate to high task and moderate to low supportive behaviors; S2 represents a mix of moderate to high task and moderate to high encouraging behaviors; S3 consists of low task and high support; and the S4 stage is low in both task and support (such as is demonstrated by a supervisor who tends to delegate tasks to learners, or who emphasizes their independent study). In implementing CTL, participants recognize that these supervisory quadrants represent four in a range of general leadership techniques or overall orientations. Participants also realize that these grid-positions serve as conceptual lenses for educators to use in both understanding their own supervisory behavior and in guiding their supervisory practice.

The third phase in implementing CTL in practice, as indicated in Figure 1, is for supervisors to synchronize the appropriate leadership style with the task-specific developmental level of the supervisee with whom they are working. Thus, S1 would match D1, S2 would match D2, and so on.

For example, if a beginning teacher was at a D2 stage in applying management skill 4 (in Table 1), "using firm, consistent management statements as required," s/he would be low in both the technique and the psychological security to vocalize effectively (and when needed) the "I mean it" tone of voice – an ability typically characterizing expert teachers. According to CTL, to assist the learner to improve in this skill the supervisor would apply the S2 style, by matching simultaneously, and in inverse proportions, a high task orientation (to build up the supervisee's low competence level), and high supportive encouragement (to bolster the learner's low assurance level).

The key in applying the CTL approach in practice, then, is that supervisors simultaneously provide reciprocal amounts of (a) supervisory direction to help raise the existing level of supervisee competence to the standard set for effective management; and (b) supervisory support to do the same for supervisees' level of confidence. Thus, with CTL, high leader task-orientation is required to meet low learner-competence levels, but low direction is needed if the learner is already highly competent. Similarly, high degrees of supervisory encouragement and interaction are required to meet supervisees' low confidence levels, while a low level of teacher support is appropriate if the learner is highly confident.

A Survey of Novice Teachers' Management Skills

In this section of the report the CTL model is used as a criterion standard against which to compare the findings from a survey of begin-

Table 1

Mean rankings by beginning teachers of their “doing” and “valuing” of the 14 classroom management skills initially presented during the extended-practicum (n=151)

Classroom management skill	“Do”		“Value”	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Gained attention of all students before beginning to teach.	4.55	.661	4.83	.407
2. Kept students on task.	4.26	.637	4.72	.481
3. Maintained classroom control without interrupting instruction.	4.12	.739	4.60	.633
4. Maintained classroom control by using firm, consistent management statements.	4.25	.708	4.65	.579
5. Maintained class routines and expectations.	4.41	.646	4.61	.633
6. Demonstrated a friendly, business-like manner.	4.57	.606	4.60	.740
7. Created a positive group feeling and a sense of belonging within the class.	4.43	.745	4.74	.550
8. Demonstrated self-confidence and “withitness” during teaching.	4.57	.583	4.74	.538
9. Demonstrated effective instructional time management.	4.18	.666	4.52	.632
10. Changed instructional procedures and physical arrangements to eliminate behavioral problems.	4.27	.791	4.62	.609
11. Identified behavioral problems accurately and carried out effective corrective measures.	4.11	.679	4.76	.476
12. Refrained from using sarcasm and other types of belittling procedures.	4.28	.759	4.68	.582
13. Demonstrated maturity and calmness in reacting to unexpected student behavior.	4.34	.588	4.74	.483
14. Maintained a safe physical environment.	4.74	.512	4.80	.505

Note: Means are based on ordinal scales ranging from 1= lowest to 5=highest.

ning teachers. This survey sought to answer the question: To what extent do novice teachers transfer into their first year(s) of teaching the classroom management skills presented to them during their extended-practicum experience?

Method

To answer this research question, a mail-survey of a random sample of former teacher-interns from one college's extended-practicum program, who were in their first year(s) of teaching, was conducted. The respondents indicated on their questionnaires (which were based on a 5-point Likert scale) the extent that they both "used" and "valued", in their actual teaching, the fourteen classroom management skills (see Table 1), which they were to have practiced during their 16-week extended-practicum. Provision was also made on the survey-forms for respondents to write additional comments if they desired. The Likert responses were analyzed quantitatively, using the SPSS, (1988) computer program. The written comments were analyzed qualitatively, using an analytic induction approach, in which the written data were systematically categorized and recategorized, with the objective of adding clarity to the statistical findings (Borg & Gall, 1989).

General findings and discussion

The quantitative analysis of the responses is summarized in Table 1. These classroom management data were extracted from a comprehensive survey that elicited similar responses for four additional areas of teaching effectiveness: structuring/presenting skills, questioning, responding, and using instructional media. A significant finding that emerged from this larger study was that respondents' mean scores for "using" and "valuing" the classroom management skills were the highest of all five broad teaching categories. This fact suggests that for the beginning practitioners in this study, classroom management seemed to be the most significant element of effective teaching. This finding is in accord with previous research that repeatedly demonstrates that novice teachers, on the whole, are concerned with classroom control and discipline (Good & Brophy, 1994; Ryan, 1992).

A second general finding observable in Table 1 is that in all cases the respondents ranked "valuing" of the skills higher than they did their "doing" of them. This suggests that beginning teachers have high expectations concerning their performance of management skills, toward which they strive; that is, for them, the "ideal" exceeds the "real". The data suggest that beginners do not see themselves as having mastered the management techniques initially introduced and practiced during the

internship. An implication for teacher developers, here, is that they need to continue to strive to reduce the proverbial “theory-practice” gap between teachers’ campus-based and school-based experiences. By applying the CTL model, supervisors would assist beginning practitioners to experience, in actual situations, how classroom management practice and theory could inform one other. It has also been found in the application of the CS model in practicum supervision that typical barriers such as participants’ hierarchical status, turf-protection, and personal ego protection begin to diminish during the process; and that the potential for individual improvement, team work, and group cohesion tends to increase (Ralph, 1993c).

A third general finding closely associated with the one just mentioned, but not displayed in tabular form because of space limitations, was a high correlation between respondents’ “doing” and “valuing” rankings for each of the fourteen skills. This correlation, not surprisingly, reveals that respondents both practiced frequently the management skills they considered valuable, and/or valued highly those skills in which they most often engaged. An implication related to this finding is for those in the cooperating teacher or supervisor role to promote learners’ maximum development in all of the management and instructional areas. Supervising so that “learning to manage” is based on “managing in order to learn” will help novice teachers grow in these skills.

By employing the CTL approach to pursue this goal, teacher developers are empowered to use an eclectic blend of supervisory techniques. This eclecticism is more than a range along a continuum between the technical-rational and interpretist-phenomenological positions. Rather it represents a conceptual mosaic in which the “either/or” view is replaced by a “both/and” perspective, applied according to the context of each supervisory situation (Onslow, Beynon, & Geddis, 1992). Applying this mosaic principle in the supervision process will help novices in their quest to reduce the “ideal/real” gap in their early teaching careers.

Fourth, the results of the analysis show that beginning teachers both “use” and “value” each of the management competencies to different degrees than they do the others. The statistical mean for each of the twenty-eight responses was above the “4” level; yet, individuals (and thus the entire group) varied as to the ranking they placed on each item. Although supervisors are committed to have all supervisees master all the skills, they also need to accept that differences exist among supervisees. However, the benefit of using the CTL approach is that it centers the supervisory process on enhancing an individual’s skill-specific development in a unique context.

A fifth general finding, which was derived from the group's additional written comments, served to corroborate the four above findings. Fifty-three percent of the respondents submitted these additional comments; and, of these, 46% expressed negative views concerning their belief that the monthly group seminars conducted by the college supervisors during the extended-practicum were too theoretical. Several respondents indicated that these sessions did not adequately prepare them to meet practical school realities. Within this group of 46%, 22% recommended specifically that preservice teachers should receive more specific direction, both on campus and during the practicum, for dealing with classroom management and discipline problems. A sample of these comments is presented below.

One high school teacher wrote:

. . . [we need] more emphasis on handling behavior problems. Problem students today are everywhere. Teachers of high school are verbally abused daily and need to be taught more stress management techniques.

A junior-high school teacher indicated:

In internship, classroom management is already set, but that's not the case when you're out on your own. In September I had to set it . . . the extras were not learned at university or in internship.

An elementary teacher elaborated:

University should give a mandatory course in counseling and discipline: how to deal with broken homes, drug-related problems, alcoholism. I had to learn it by trial and error and from experienced teachers. You don't prepare us for the real world of teaching. . . .

As has been argued above, a sensible means of helping beginning teachers to resolve this dilemma related to managing students during the internship and tenure period would be for teacher developers from the teacher-education institution and the schools to implement the CTL model in their supervisory practice.

Specific findings and discussion

In addition to the above five general findings extracted from the data, two specific findings are presented, which may also be observed from the data in Table 1. First, as a point of contrast, the highest and lowest ranked management skills are examined; and in the light of the

CTL framework, possible explanations for, and implications of, these differences are considered.

From the table one sees that respondents ranked as highest – for both “doing” and “valuing” – the two skills of 1 (gained attention of all students before beginning to teach) and 14 (maintained a safe physical environment). On the other hand, the two lowest ranked management behaviors were 9 (demonstrated effective instructional time management) and 3 (maintained classroom control without interrupting instruction). These data suggest that a factor leading to novice teachers’ management difficulties may well be their tendency to undervalue and underapply skills 9 and 3, relative to the other twelve skills. An implication, here, for supervisors – as articulated above for the general findings – is to facilitate the beginners’ development in these two skills via the CTL model. When supervisees encounter “live” management problems within their own classroom settings, they are clearly motivated to resolve them. The degree to which supervisees succeed in settling this cognitive conflict that arises as they seek to integrate management theory and practice will be dependent on the supervisor’s ability to meet their specific developmental needs.

A D2 example: Thus, in applying CTL to assist a beginning teacher who may be experiencing difficulties with skill 3 (maintaining classroom control without interrupting instruction), for example, the supervisor would first ascertain the supervisee’s development level. Through observation and discussion the supervisor would see that the supervisee is, for instance, at a low to moderate level in both competence and confidence in performing the skill consistently, effectively, and naturally (i.e., the D2 stage).

Consequently, to match this D2 level, the supervisor would apply an S2 supervisory style (i.e., moderate to high levels of both direction and encouragement). Specific techniques for the supervisor to use in this D2-S2 context would include: (a) providing a supportive, collaborative, and accepting working climate, (b) presenting a compelling rationale to support skill 3, (c) describing and demonstrating how the skill is performed, (d) having the supervisee practice the skill in “live” classroom situations with follow-up reflective discussion and/or feedback sessions, and (e) reducing the amount of supervisory directive behavior, while simultaneously increasing the degree of supportive or interactive response, as the beginner gains competence and confidence in effectively applying skill 3 (i.e., advances to D3 and D4 levels).

The second specific finding observable among the data in Table 1 relates to the distances between the “do” and “value” rankings for two

skills, namely: 6 (demonstrated a friendly and business-like manner) and 11 (identified behavioral problems accurately and carried out effective corrective measures). Respondents ranked skill 6 as second highest for “doing,” but in 12th position for “valuing.” By contrast, they rated skill 11 in last position for “doing,” but as their highest for “valuing.”

A possible explanation for this divergence between the two ratings for skill 6 is that beginning teachers may consider “being friendly and business-like” to be an obvious and natural attribute of good teaching, since they did, in fact, rank it high in “doing.” However, in terms of prioritizing its value among the other thirteen variables, they may have felt that the other items “had an edge” over it, simply because of the taken-for-granted assumption that skill 6 is simply “automatic” in every teacher’s practice, perhaps almost as normal as breathing. Moreover, its “value” mean was actually higher than its “do” mean; but the relative order of the two means within each column varied. Furthermore, the fact that respondents reported practicing it frequently suggests by their actions that they did, in fact, value it.

An explanation for skill 11’s two divergent positions, on the other hand, may be that beginning teachers do not view it as a normal integral component of every practitioner’s repertoire, as they seemed to do with skill 6. They recognize 11 as an important “ideal,” but because they face a constant challenge to implement it consistently in their practice, they may rate it low in accomplishing the ideal. Thus, respondents may have tended to view it as a persistent, on-going dilemma for new teachers; and that only after they had accumulated several years’ experience would they gain skill in accurately identifying behavioral problems and effectively carrying out correctives. Indeed, recent research has repeatedly shown distinct differences between novice and expert teachers in performing these skills (Ralph, 1994b).

The implication of this second specific finding for teacher developers coincides with that raised for the preceding finding, with respect to adjusting supervisory task and support orientations, reciprocally, to meet supervisees’ respective competence and confidence levels.

A D3 example: With regard to supervisees who perform management skill 6 at a D3 level – having moderate to high competence but low to moderate confidence – supervisors would respond with an S3 style. They would provide minimal task structure on techniques to show both friendliness (e.g., using eye-contact, smiles, body language, reinforcement, greetings, and conversations) and business-like deportment (e.g., clear communication, pacing/momentum, planning/organization, monitoring/feedback, clear expectations, and administering consequences).

Such supervisory directives would be de-emphasized because the learner already would have developed these skills. However, supervisors would concentrate on **increasing** supportive responses at this stage to meet the supervisee's lagging confidence in demonstrating consistently a friendly yet business-like manner. These supportive techniques could take the form of: being an active listener; inviting and rewarding active participation; providing genuine praise, reinforcement, and recognition for past successes with using skill 6; being available/willing and able to offer assistance; and exuding an expectation and assurance for the novice teacher, that would signal, "I believe you can do it!"

Conclusion

Learning to apply classroom management skills is crucial for beginning teachers, during the two- to three-year transition period between their preservice extended practicum and their induction years en route to securing tenure. Teacher supervisors and developers working with these novices during this phase have a critical task of facilitating the newcomers' professional development in the skills of instructional and classroom management.

Based on the author's 40 years' experience in all facets of education – including teaching, counselling, administration, studying, and research – it appears that the CTL model is an effective supervisory tool for educators to use to help achieve this goal. Evidence in support of this claim has been provided by showing how CTL: (a) rejects the "either/or" dichotomy between traditional and reform-based positions, in providing for the application of a mosaic of supervisory practices to facilitate the learning of classroom management skills, according to unique contextual factors; (b) is based on adjusting supervisory style to meet individual supervisees' developmental needs in mastering these skills; (c) recognizes currently accepted principles of learning/teaching and supervising; (d) eases the supervisory task by assisting educators who are in supervisory or teaching roles to clarify their personal conceptualization of the entire leadership process and to guide, but not restrict, their supervisory practice in facilitating the professional growth of other educators in supervisee or learning roles; and (e) embraces the interdependence of the concepts of "management theory informing classroom practice" and "reflective practice informing personal theory."

The key reason for advocating the use of the CTL model as a proven supervisory guide with which to promote the development of classroom management skills, is that it agrees with what Sergiovanni (1992) emphasizes as the serving/ministering/stewardship role of leadership. That emphasis builds integrity and trust among the supervisory

team; which, in turn, fosters the growth of professional competence and confidence; and, these, after all, are the main elements in teachers' development.

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