



Beginning Teacher Quality in Special Education - Implications for Initial Preparation

CLD
Las Vegas, Nevada

October, 2004
www.copsse.org

Teacher Quality Research

Teacher quality is on the forefront of policymakers' minds:

- Research demonstrates that teachers can make a difference in student achievement growth
 - Value-added assessment studies (Ross, Stringfield, Sanders, & Wright, 2003)
 - Exemplary teacher studies (Pressley & Allington, 1998; Wenglinsky, 2002)
 - Policy studies employing teacher characteristics (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Rice, 2003)
 - Classroom observation research (Haager, Gersten, Baker, & Graves, 2003)

Teacher Quality Research in Special Education

What do we know?

- Early process-product research linking discrete teaching behaviors with student achievement gains (Sindelar, Smith, Harriman, Hale, & Wilson, 1986)
- SPeNSE and SEELS research linking aspects of teacher quality to student achievement

Teacher Quality Research in Special Education

What do we need?

- Studies describing practices of beginning special educators
- Studies linking the practices of beginning special educators to student outcomes

Teacher Quality Research in Special Education

Why is this important?

- In a policy context that emphasizes student outcomes and questions teacher preparation, we need to know:
 - Relationships between teacher preparation, teacher effectiveness, and student outcomes
 - But first, we need to establish what effective beginning teacher practice looks like

Beginning Teacher Quality Study

- Validate an observation instrument correlating student outcomes, knowledge and preparation
 - 38 reading teachers of 3rd-5th grades in 3 states with multiple settings, delivery models and curriculum
 - Collected quantitative and qualitative data

Teacher Quality Research in Special Education

Rationale for Study Highlighted today:

- We decided to examine what beginning teachers do to promote student engagement during instruction
 - We selected student engagement because of its strong link to academic achievement (Guthrie, 2000)

Struggles Beginning Teachers Encounter

Novice teachers may have difficulty promoting student engagement in reading curriculum

- Superficial understanding of how to address individual student needs within broader curriculum
- Demonstrate difficulties with student discipline
- Lack strategies to engage students in their work
- Content specific pedagogical understandings limited (Reynolds, 1995)

Teacher Quality Research in Special Education

Purpose of Highlighted Study:

- To identify moments of student engagement during reading instruction
- To examine practices of beginning special education teachers that result in student engagement
- Part of a larger COPSSE study linking beginning teacher practice and reading achievement

Methodology

Teacher Pool

- Nine teachers chosen from a sample of 38 teachers
- 1-3 teaching years in high poverty urban and rural schools
- Class size, delivery model, and teacher preparation vary
 - Preparation backgrounds varied considerably
 - Class size varied from 3 to 25 students
 - Half of the teachers used highly structured curriculum
 - In all but two cases, the sped teacher was responsible for total reading instruction for her children

Methodology

Data Collection

- Observations
 - 73 reading lessons observed
 - Three to five observations per teacher
 - 5 trained observers
 - Field notes
 - Observation tools rated (scale 1-4)
 - Interrater Reliability : average 74%(90-60%)

Multiple interviews about preparation, context, and practice

Methodology

Study Participant Selection Criteria

We considered the rates of the following items from the observation tool

- An overall teacher rating
- Items specifically related to student engagement
 - Organization of the lesson, allowing opportunities for most students to respond
 - Extent to which students are highly engaged
 - Fostering student motivation and engagement
 - Continuous and intensive instruction

Methodology

Study Participants

Based on the scores related to the selection criteria, study participants were selected

- High (above 3.5) : 3 teachers
- Moderate (3.5-3.0) : 2 teachers
- Low (below 2.0) : 4 teachers

- These were scores on engagement factors which correlated with their total teacher quality scores. And based on new student achievement data , student scores tend to correlate with observed quality and the knowledge teachers have about reading

Methodology

- Additional background information
 - Teachers who were highly engaging described having more access to meaningful preparation activities, both at preservice and inservice levels
 - Teachers who were not engaging described a mismatch between their preparation and first job, and less opportunities to practice and apply knowledge

Methodology

Analyzed individual lessons through field notes to:

- Determine points at which students were engaged or not engaged
- Determine practices that result in student engagement or non-engagement

Methodology

Data Analysis

- Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998)
- Coding procedure
 - Open-coding: reducing data
 - Axial coding : reassembling data
 - Selective coding : integrating data and developing core category
- Trustworthiness
 - Triangulation : multiple observations and observers
 - Peer debriefing

Findings

Teaching behaviors linked to high student engagement during reading instruction

Theme 1: Teachers use pedagogy that promotes versus regulates student participation and learning

Theme 2: Teachers demonstrate a responsiveness to student learning and understanding

Theme 3: Teachers provide cohesive, well-coordinated lessons

Theme 4: Teachers create a safe and warm environment for participation

Explanation of Theme 1

Teachers use pedagogy that promotes versus regulates student participation and learning

- Create a willingness to respond and stay engaged through specific teacher actions
- Help students think on own and work independently
- Foster higher level thinking
- Monitor student behavior unobtrusively to encourage participation

Explanation of Theme 2

Teachers are responsive to student learning and understanding

- Recognize when students need assistance
- Provide specific help when needed
- Adjust instruction based on student need
- Reinforce student achievement using specific feedback

Explanation of Theme 3

Teachers provide cohesive, well-coordinated lessons

- Balanced instruction incorporating all elements of reading
- Fast-paced transitions to new activities
- Connections between ideas and activities

Explanation of Theme 4

Teachers create a safe and supportive environment for participation

- Employ effective behavior management techniques
- Arrange and manipulate learning environments to foster participation
- Use peers to assist student responding and learning

What We Learned

- Techniques and structures used to promote engagement demonstrate an integration of what we know from the process-product and motivation literature
- Teachers can foster high engagement even when using highly structured curriculum

Implications for Preparation

- Knowing pedagogy as well as reading content matters in fostering engagement during instruction, suggesting that preparation matters
- Beginning teachers provide glimpses of expertise suggesting need for on-going learning on the job

Next Steps

- Determine if beginning special educators who create consistently engaging lessons also foster student reading achievement or do other factors get in the way
- Quantify practices that best promote student engagement and reading achievement
- Look for relationships between teachers' reading pedagogy and opportunities to learn in preparation programs and schools