



## COPSSE II: Studies of Beginning Teacher Instruction in Special Education

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### Beginning Teacher Quality in Special Education

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, 2000)
  - Policy studies employing teacher characteristics (Laczko & Berliner, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Rice, 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 education, and student outcomes
    - But first, we need to establish what effective beginning teacher practice looks like

### Teacher Quality Research in Special Education

#### ***Rationale for Current Study:***

- In this study, 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 Current 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 COPSE study linking beginning teacher practice and reading achievement

### Methodology

Eight special education teachers with 1-3 years experience

- 2 teachers provided reading instruction in a co-teaching situation
- 6 teachers provided reading instruction in a resource room

### Methodology

#### **Participants:**

- Preparation backgrounds varied considerably
- Class size varied from 4 to 25 students
- All taught in high poverty urban and rural schools
- Four teachers used highly structured curriculum

### Methodology

#### **Data collected:**

- Twenty reading lessons observed
- Two to three observations per teacher (two observers in 90% of observations)

Interviews with teachers discussing preservice preparation and current practice

### Methodology

Grounded theory was used to analyze individual lessons to:

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

### Methodology

How we conducted the data analysis :

- **Opening coding--**
  - labeled all observed classroom practices and looked for incidences of student engagement
- **Axial coding--**
  - Identified engaging points in lessons (conditions, interactions/actions, consequences)
  - Reassembled smaller units of data into broader units

### Methodology

How we conducted the data analysis:

- **Selective coding:**
  - Identified a core category "Promoting versus Regulating Instruction"
  - Integrated concepts and categories around this core category
- Trustworthiness determined through:
  - Multiple observers and multiple observations
  - Peer debriefing during analysis

### 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 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 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 literacy instruction
- Fast-paced transitions to new activities
- Connections between ideas and activities

#### Explanation of Theme 4

Teachers create a safe and warm environment for participation

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

#### Discussion and Implications

- 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
- Knowing pedagogy as well as reading content matters in fostering engagement during instruction
- Beginning teachers provide glimpses of expertise suggesting need for well-structured induction programs

#### 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