

CHANGE IN PROFESSIONAL BELIEFS: A CASE STUDY ON HANDLING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOURS

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ABSTRACT

This study is a case study which describes the change processes of a teacher candidate's during professional development. The strategies that the participant of this study developed to deal with disruptive behaviours within the research period starting from the final year of teacher training and continuing through the first-year in the profession were explored. Data, collected via semi-structured interview, observation, vignette task and diary, were analyzed with the content analysis method. The participant commenced with a few strategies and moved to his full time teaching both enlarging his repertoire and questioning those handling strategies. As a conclusion, the change in the participant's professional development is found due to contribution of *experience* and *knowing the target population*.

Keywords: Professional development and change, disruptive behaviour, case study

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, mesleki gelişim esnasında öğretmen adayının değişim süreçlerini tasvir eden bir örnek olay incelemesidir. Öğretmenlik eğitiminin son yılından başlayarak meslekteki ilk yıl boyunca katılımcının dersin akışını bozan davranışlara karşı geliştirdiği stratejiler incelenmiştir. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme, gözlem, senaryo (vignette) ödevi ve günce yoluyla toplanan veriler içerik analizi yöntemi ile analiz edilmiştir. Katılımcı az sayıda strateji ile başladığı mesleki gelişimine, mesleğe başladığı yılda hem strateji sayısını arttırarak hem de kullandığı stratejileri sorgulama öngörüsüne sahip olarak devam etmiştir. Sonuç olarak, katılımcının mesleki değişiminde *tecrübe* ve *hedef kitle bilgisi* değişime katkıda bulunan ana faktörler olarak bulunmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Mesleki gelişim ve değişim, dersin akışını bozan davranış, örnek olay incelemesi.

1. Introduction

Change is an indispensable part of professional learning and teaching, which keeps that cycle progress (Cabaroğlu, 1999; Sendan, 1996). In a teacher training program, student-teachers are faced with many difficult tasks: at first, they have to conceptualize what is learning and/or teaching, how they create and/or use teaching materials, and also they should learn how to cope with many teaching hours a week, etc. Solving these problems demand that they should take some acts where they would try connecting theoretical knowledge with practical experiences. Such actions would put teachers in a state of reflection where they have to think and re-think on what they do. As a result of this process, they may come up with some probable solutions. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that new problems emerge constantly, which push teachers to find newer strategies that generate change.

Chan and Leung (1998), Farrell (2003) and Hebert and Worthy (2001) categorizes the problems teachers have at the beginning of the profession under the following headings:

- Classroom management and discipline problems (Chan and Leung, 1998; HMI 1988 report cited in Bennett & Turner-Bisset, 1993)
- Teaching resources and materials problems (Farrell, 2003),
- Handling the heavy workload problems (Farrell, 2003),
- Applying the theoretical knowledge they have to the practical issues in the classroom problems (Hebert & Worthy, 2001),
- Generating realistic beliefs about teaching problems (Hebert & Worthy, 2001).

Among these problems stated above, the first one has attracted most of the researchers' interest. Numerous studies investigated the beliefs of teachers about the classroom management in pre-service, in-service and expert years of teaching. Such studies have been conducted because "the biggest barriers to new teacher success are poor classroom management skills (82 percent) and *disruptive students* (italics added) (57 percent)" as reported by Gordon (cited in Parkay & Stanford, 2004, p.52). In addition, Orlich, Harder, Callahan and Gibson (1998) connect the difficulty of managing the classroom with the exuberance of studies conducted in this field to new teachers being lack of the ability of carrying on others' behaviours. It is a fact that before the first day on the job, new teachers have never given a thought of others' acts in terms of feeling responsibility. The problem starts before entering the classroom as full teacher. In her research, Martin (2004) mentions the problems experienced by the student-teachers during practice teaching. She proceeds with the idea that the direction of later professional development in classroom management depends on the initial conceptions of a student-teacher in the practicum (Martin, 2004). Similarly, Brouwers and Tomic (2000) state "when teachers have little confidence in their ability to maintain classroom order, they will likely to give up easily in the face of continuous *disruptive student* (italics added) behaviour" (p. 249).

Research about classroom management does not only reflect the difficulty of handling the management of classrooms, but also presents advantages and strategies of

effective classroom management. To illustrate this, Kaliska (2002) points out the benefits of effective classroom management as it “increases student engagement, decreases *disruptive behaviours* (italics added), and makes good use of instructional time” (p. 2). The key to successful classroom management is described by Brophy (1988) as “...the teacher’s ability to maximize the time that students spend actively engaged in worthwhile academic activities (...) and to minimize the time they spend waiting for activities to get started...” (p. 3).

One term frequently mentioned in the research body on classroom management is *disruptive behaviour*, which teachers have to eliminate before proceeding to instructional management. Disruptive behaviour, which is also known as misbehaviour, may be defined as the interruptions of the educational process by student actions (Kerr and Nelson, 1998). Handling disruptive behaviours is important as such student actions demand too much teacher time and because “teachers want calm and productive classrooms; students, too, find disruptive behaviours disturbing” (Mullen as cited in Kerr and Nelson, 1998, p. 192). Furthermore, one of the basic roles of a teacher in class is to create a classroom environment where the problems are solved before erupting, and if a problem does emerge, to intervene quickly so that it does not disrupt the learning of others (Orlich, Harder, Callahan and Gibson, 1998).

The studies conducted to generate teacher beliefs about classroom management and disruptive behaviours are diverse. Martin, Yin and Baldwin (1998) highlight the bidirectional relation between teacher beliefs about classroom management and their experiences in the classroom. Therefore, exploring a teacher’s classroom management beliefs while investigating practices in the classroom is a good starting point (Alexander & Galbraith cited in Youssef, 2003). This is why, the present study aims to explore a student-teacher’s strategies to handle with disruptive behaviours longitudinally.

2. Method

Design

The present study is designed as a longitudinal qualitative research. The method of this study is naturalistic in that the research setting is not manipulated; instead, data is collected about the natural state of the research context (Patton, 1990). Furthermore, Merriam (2002) states that “understanding a phenomenon from the participants’ perspectives- the meanings people derive from a situation or understanding a process- requires asking important questions, questions that lend themselves to a qualitative inquiry” (p. xv). Hence, the aim is to investigate and understand as much as possible about the actual experiences of a student teacher in the training program and in his first-year of teaching. Such an aim could only be possible through a variety of qualitative design data collection tools such as interview and/or observation.

The Participant

The participant of this study was a 22 year-old male student teacher who was attending the teacher training program at English Language Teaching Department, Adana. He voluntarily accepted to attend such a study. Thus, a purposeful sampling

strategy was preferred to generate more credible data.

The participant attended an Anatolian High School for practice teaching during the training period. The school was at a high socio-economic level when the parents' income and status were considered. There were 350 students, 30 of whom were under the participant's control. The participant was teaching English to 9th and 10th graders. After that, when he graduated, he was appointed as a full time teacher to a boarding school where both primary and secondary school students studied. The students came from low socio-economic level families. Such boarding schools were founded for either the split family children or financially incapable parents whose kids need governmental assistance to pursue their basic rights for education. The participant was teaching English to the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th graders.

Instruments

Vignette Task

Vignette is defined as "a brief incident or scene (as in a play or movie)" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.m-w.com>). As Brewer (cited in Miller & Brewer, 2003) mentions, the vignette is used primarily in qualitative research to explore the participant's feelings and actions. It may also be used as an ice-breaker at the beginning of an interview. This is the reason why we preferred this task at the beginning of this study. The participant has been given five different classroom situations (samples of student disruptive behaviours excerpted from Cangelosi, 2004) with the teachers' reactions towards the events happened. The situations chosen were among the most recurring disruptive behaviours recorded in previous research such as off-task behaviour, talk between students, talking out of turn, bullying, and unwillingness to do a given task.

Interview

The semi-structured interview conducted in this study is the main data collection tool. This type of interviews has been used because of its possible advantages. The semi-structured interview falls between two marginal points of interviewing, namely, between structured and informal interviews. Structured interviews do not allow the interviewer to ask probing questions for the purpose of clarifying what the interviewee states and/or making sure what the interviewee comprehends from the verbal statements. Similarly, informal conversations do not allow the researcher to guide the conversation in the direction of the topics wanted. However, semi-structured interviews have the advantage of controlling the interview, asking probing questions and/or changing the order of the pre-set interview questions. Therefore, the researcher preferred using this type of interview.

It was administered to ask the participant which handling strategies he used for disruptions in his classes. The researcher conducted the interview three times in this study: Time 1, Time 2 and Time 3 changed in terms of interview administration. Time 1 may be described as the full interview. Time 2 and Time 3 were in the form of stimulated recall interview. In other words, the participant read the transcription of his previous interviews and was expected to react to see whether there had been any change or omission of the previous beliefs and ideas.

Observation

Observation was done to see the participant's handling strategies during his teaching. The researcher employed a non-participant observer role. Although the researcher was in the classroom, she did not participate in the class activities with the students. Her only role was to record the procedure using a video camcorder. The researcher overtly recorded the teaching sessions for the participant and their students to meet the demands of ethical codes. During practice teaching phase, the participant was recorded for one-class hour (around 45 minutes), allowing him to schedule the time of the recording. Moreover, in full-time teaching phase of the present study the participant was visited three times and was recorded three hours while teaching for during each visit, for a total of nine hours. Video recording for observational purposes was deliberately chosen. It was because in a prior pilot study, the participants stated that they benefited much from watching their teaching in the tapes. Moreover, they also thanked us as we gave them one copy of the records we prepared for the research purposes.

Diary

The participant was asked to keep notes on instances which may not be recalled during the researcher-participant interviews but could possibly arise in a more relaxed setting. Therefore, the researcher provided the participant with guiding questions at the beginning of full-time teaching phase which permitted him not only to keep notes about what happened in classes but also to reflect on his handling strategies. This tool was particularly chosen because of the distance between us and the participant. We could only see him teaching three times during the academic year. Thus, we thought that keeping diary would close the gap.

Procedure

As in Table 1, instruments were administered and the data were collected in two different phases.

Table 1 Procedure

WHEN	WHAT
PRACTICE TEACHING PERIOD	
6-7 MARCH 2005	Vignette task
10-20 APRIL 2005	Field observation 1 through video recording
10-30 MAY 2005	Semi-structured interview at Time 1
10-30 MAY 2005	Stimulated video recall
FULL-TIME TEACHING PERIOD	
8-15 DECEMBER 2005	Semi-structured interview at Time 2
8-15 DECEMBER 2005	Observation 2 (video recording) + stimulated video recall
8- DECEMBER 2005- 19 MAY 2006	Diary keeping
8-15 FEBRUARY 2006	Observation 3 + stimulated video recall
8-15 MAY 2006	Semi-structured interview at Time 3
10-19 May 2006	Observation 4+ stimulated video recall

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with the content analysis method procedures. Codes were found and they were grouped under clusters. Finally, categories were achieved. After that, results were exemplified and interpreted with the direct quotes from the raw data.

Data gathered from all tools generated the handling strategies of the participant. Applying the same tool (observation and interview) in a time serial provided us the changes (if any) in the participant's handling style. As a result, the findings, below, are presented in two phases: practice teaching and full-time teaching period deriving the results from each data collection tool.

3. Results

Practice Teaching period Vignette

The participant was found to employ different strategies for each vignette scenario. For the first scenario which was about a task reluctance disruption, the

participant chose *encouraging* strategy to handle with. The second scenario was about a noisy off-task disruption. The participant's strategy to deal with it was *using proximity*. The third one was about talking-out-of-turn student behaviour. The participant dealt with such a disruptive behaviour with his *facial expressions*. The fourth scenario was another off-task disruption: show off. The participant chose *ignoring* this one. The last scenario was about a student using bad language and defying the authority. The participant preferred *encouraging* this student to focus on the classroom task at hand. As in the following excerpt, the participant usually chose not to challenge the disrupting student in his handling to deal with problem behaviours.

I would deal with the student through a tactful choice of words that will help me win him/her over. I would say "Come on! You know you can do that. You are intelligent, but today I see that you are not feeling all right. I think you will come up with a great idea about this subject for the next lesson."
(Vignette Task, Scenario 5)

Observation

During the observation session the participant dealt with the disruptions with a few strategies. He was observed employing *using proximity*, *encouraging*, *using intonation*. He preferred some milder interventions rather than using preventive measures. Interventions are the actions performed after the disruption occurs; preventive measures are the ones taken beforehand.

Interview

During the interview, participant expressed that he would *ignore* the problem students if the problem is milder. When the problems are more disturbing, he stated using his *intonation* or *gestures* as well as his *facial expressions*. Similar to other results obtained from vignette and observation, the participant was found to be employing a milder attitude towards handling disruptions where he preferred not to reveal the problem student's identity.

Full-Time Teaching Period

Interview

Interview was repeated twice in this period of the present study. According to Table 2 below, the participant used verbal and non-verbal strategies at Time 2. He used *warning*, *reinforcement*, *deliberate nomination*, *changing seats* and *ignoring*. On the other hand, at Time 3, he stated that he did not benefit from verbal strategies but verbal ones. He only utilized *reinforcements*. However, he started to use preventive strategies such as using *interesting teaching materials* and *extra activities* to keep the students on task.

Table 2 Interview Results

Interview at Time 2		Interview at Time 3	
<u>Verbal</u>	<u>Non-verbal</u>	<u>Verbal</u>	<u>Non-verbal</u>
Reinforcement	Changing seat	Reinforcement	----
Warning	Ignoring		
Deliberate nom.			
		<u>Preventive</u>	
		Interesting teaching material	
		Extra activities	

Observation

Observation was repeated for three times during this period of the study. Table 3 below, shows the participant added many verbal and non-verbal strategies to his repertoire. He began by employing *warning, calling out, reminding of rules, assigning a task, hushing, reinforcement, using intonation, gesture/facial expressions* and *using proximity*. At Time 3, he continued adding new tactics to his repertoire, and he tried *physical contact* with the improperly behaving students. At Time 4, he excluded many of his formerly applied strategies and he used only *assigning a task, reminding of rules, reinforcement, using proximity* and *ignoring*.

Table 3 Observation Results

Observation at Time 2		Observation at Time 3		Observation at Time 4	
<u>Verbal</u>	<u>Non-verbal</u>	<u>Verbal</u>	<u>Non-verbal</u>	<u>Verbal</u>	<u>Non-verbal</u>
Warning	Gesture/facial expre.s.	Hushing	Physical contact	Ass.a task	Using prox.
Calling out	Using prox.	Calling out	Using prox.	Reminding of rules	
Reminding of rules		Deliberate nom.	Gesture/	Reinforcement	Ignoring
Assigning a task		Using inton.	facial expr.s		
Hushing					
Reinforcement					
Using inton.					

Diary

Participant noted down some critical incidents he experienced and commented on them for six months in this period. Table 4 demonstrates the sum of his strategies obtained from his diary. The participant explained (see the following excerpt) how he tried to establish a 'finger rule' utilizing a *ripple effect* in his class. He continued employing *gesture/facial expressions* and *ignoring* tactics. He often used *intonation, changing seats* and *calling out* strategies as well. *Reminding of rules* and *reinforcement* were also among the strategies the participant reported in his diary.

I developed a kind of strategy to repel disruptive behaviours. I turned my back on the disruptive students and told them explicitly that I wanted to have a lesson with attentive and respectful students (I mean students that respect and listen to their friends' opinions and obey the 'finger rule') students. (Diary entry, January, 2006, case 1)

Table 4 Diary Results

Verbal	Non-verbal
Calling out Reinforcement Using intonation Ripple effect Reminding of rules	Gesture/facial expressions Ignoring Changing seats

4. Summary and Discussion

During the practice teaching period, the participant was seen employing very few strategies and usually similar ones, such as *gesture/facial expressions*, *using proximity*, and *encouraging* as interventionist strategies. His strategy choices are in line with Wolfgang's (2001) study with developmental stages in maintaining discipline in class. According to his findings, the participant of the present study corresponds to what he calls Level I, Intuitive-Survival Teacher. At this level, teachers' main concern is to survive. Thus, they feel forced to follow harsh controlling methods although such methods do not fit their style. Yet, teachers are not well prepared for the "tacky" or "trashy" student behaviours (Kauffman, Mostert, Trent & Hallahan, 1998). However, contradiction exists between this study and that of Wolfgang's premises. The data of this study suggest that the participant employed milder behaviour management strategies to deal with disruptions. Furthermore, the participant avoided revealing the disruptive student's identity while dealing with him/her.

During Interview at Time 1, he reported that he ignored most of the disruptions in his class during practice teaching. The video stimulated recall session for the Observation at Time 1 also revealed that ignoring disruptions were dominant. However, in the later times, when he started to work as a full-time teacher, he employed the same strategy consciously and could reason why he used such a strategy for unwanted student behaviours.

Primarily, the participant was using more interventionist strategies than preventive ones. The observations revealed he had dealt with the disruptions after they occurred. Across relevant literature, Martin, Linfoot and Stephenson (1999) found that teachers often employ disapproval rather than praise in classrooms, which raises the possibility of more often applying interventionist strategies. Moreover, he handled the misbehaviours both verbally and non-verbally. However, his few preventive strategies were only non-verbal.

When longitudinally analyzed, the participant was seen to employ more and more strategies after he had started to work full-time. Winitzky, Kauchak and Kelly (1994) also support this idea by their findings that beginning teachers beliefs are open to change in structural complexity one year after their training program completion. Apparently, he developed an ownership towards his profession and started to try as many strategies as possible. In the last interviews and observations of the participant, he was seen as having established behaviour management strategies and decreased the number of the tactics he applied. The research findings on this shortening of the tactics

explain this process as ‘skill learning’ (Winitzky & Kauchak, 1995). When teachers start acquiring a teaching skill, they verbalize it with many descriptive words. As time passes, they start to act on it, get feedback from students and revise their actions again: action-feedback-revision. Later, the procedure gets more and more stabilized, and teachers start to chunk their actions under some big umbrella terms. This is why he started to express his actions with fewer words. This might be the explanation of why the participant had come up with fewer strategies in the final observations and interviews.

The following table presents a summary of the participant’s strategies. Considering the data collected from him, he may be labelled as an inventor or non-verbalist. He tended to utilize non-verbal strategies more often. However, those strategies were newly invented ones in most cases. He not only utilized negative reinforcements as well as giving extra writing assignments but also utilized a laser beam to make the high noise rate in class clear to the students. During the observations, students were observed warning each other since they had assumed his intention when using the laser or another similar strategy. When a student was misbehaving, he encouraged other students to protest or intervene. Generally, he was a quiet teacher. Whenever he faced with misbehaviour, he would rather act in such a way as to prevent it from going on than directly deal with. As Cartledge and Johnson (1996) asserted, confident teachers tend to use more proactive measures. In personal talks with him, he remarked that his full-time teaching experience opened a new window in his professional life. He, furthermore, added that the misbehaviours with which he faced could be regarded as a means of more closely recognizing the family situation or economic background of students. In Interview at Time 3, he was able to understand why some of the students were dominant in disrupting his classes at the end of the present study. In other words, he could reason why his students were performing in such a misbehaving way, knowing their personal life stories.

Table 5 Handling Strategies of the Participant throughout the Study

Interventionist	Verbal	Calling out Reinforcement Using intonation Ripple effect Reminding of rules Assigning a task Hushing Deliberate nomination
	Non-verbal	Warning Physical contact Ignoring Gesture/facial expressions Changing seats Using proximity
Preventive	Non-verbal	Using interesting teaching material Extra activities

The change observed in the participant of this study was found to be correlated with two factors. *Experience* and *knowing the target population* (Atıcı, 1999) were two contributing aspects of the professional context to the change the participant had followed in his strategy use. As the participant became more experienced, it seems that he started to realize alternative handling strategies. Once, he got to know the target population in detail, he also started to realize when and why he had to employ some of the strategies in his repertoire more often.

5. Conclusion

The change described in the participant of this study may be pictured as a bell curve. Figure, below, represents the change that the participant experienced throughout the present study in terms of strategy use. At the beginning of the study, the participant was engaged in getting an awareness of his choices. After being aware of his options, he started to add new and more strategies into his repertoire. Finally, toward the end of this study, he was observed omitting some of the strategies he had used. Although this figure may give some ideas to the researchers in the field, it should be noted that we do not have any intention of generalizing such a picture for the larger population. As a result, this study may be regarded as a new entry for the data relevant with the graduates of Cukurova University Foreign Languages Unit English Language Teaching Department. In the literature, such a longitudinal tracking has not been found yet. Although this is a case study concerning one graduate, it may present fruitful insights. We believe that the data from this and further studies will yield beneficial results in shaping the training curriculum.

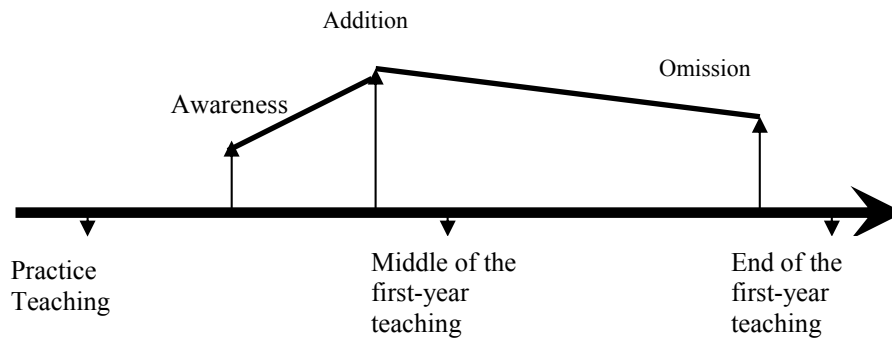


Figure Strategy Use throughout the Study

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