CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study, presented under the following headings: Summary of Findings, Limitations, Conclusions, Discussion, Implications for Further Research and Recommendations. This study sought to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between years of teaching experience and education and learning-inhibiting problems experienced by middle school teachers in the classroom. The sample comprised 244 middle school language arts, social studies, mathematics and science teachers. Analysis of variance statistical procedures were utilized to analyze the quantitative data. Classroom observations and focus groups comprised the qualitative data.

Thirteen null hypotheses were tested at the .05 alpha level. Data analysis provided information concerning learning-inhibiting problems (chronic talking not relative to lesson, refusing request by teacher, tardiness to class, inattentiveness in class, talking back to teacher in an unacceptable manner as perceived by the teacher) relative to years of teaching experience (0-5, 6-12, 13-20, 21+) and education (trained in middle school teacher preparation, untrained in middle school teacher preparation) as measured by surveys. The data provided further information on non-instructional strategies used to prevent disruptive behaviors in the classroom, the perceptions of administrators and the researcher on the teacher’s ability to manage a classroom, and the ability to deliver instruction as measured by classroom observations, review of teacher summative evaluation and focus group interviews.

Summary of Findings

The researcher failed to reject 12 null hypotheses. It was concluded that there was no statistically significant difference between:

1. Years of teaching experience (0-5, 6-12, 13-20, 21+) with respect to learning-inhibiting problems (chronic talking, refusing request, tardiness, inattentiveness, and talking back to teachers) experienced in the classroom.

2. Years of teaching experience (0-5, 6-12, 13-20, 21+) and the ability to deliver instruction
as perceived by the building administrator and the researcher.

3. Years of teaching experience (0-5, 6-12, 13-20, 21+) and the ability to manage the classroom as perceived by the building administrator and the researcher.

4. Years of teaching experience (0-5, 6-12, 13-20, 21+) and types of non-instructional strategies (ignore the problem, conference with the student, after school detention) used to prevent disruptions in the classroom.

These findings were similar to those reported in the related literature review in Chapter II. For example, research conducted by Clark and Clark (1983), Scales (1993), and U.S. Department of Education (1999) respectfully agreed that the most frequently recognized problems are in classroom management, teaching methods, and understanding adolescent characteristics. These problems occur regardless of the years of teaching experience.

5. There was no statistically significant difference between the years of teaching experience and the ability to manage a classroom as perceived by the researcher. However, the researcher found, upon observation, that the most effective teaching with the least amount of disruptions occurred in classrooms where the teacher continuously circulated the classroom while monitoring the students’ behavior (Figures 3 - 10). These findings coincide with Emmer, Evertson, and Anderson’s (1980) study of third grade classes. In this study, the most effective teacher was distinguished from the least effective teacher by the degree to which the effective teacher monitored the class and carefully stopped disruptions when they occurred. The findings of the research also support Kounin’s (1970) belief that the awareness of the environmental surroundings is an important element for stopping inappropriate behavior while continuing instruction in the classroom.

6. Year of inservice training and learning-inhibiting problems (chronic talking, refusing request, tardiness, inattentiveness, and talking back to teachers) experienced in the classroom.

7. Preservice education (trained in middle school teacher preparation, untrained in middle school teacher preparation) with respect to learning-inhibiting problems (chronic talking, refusing request, tardiness, inattentiveness, and talking back to teachers) experienced in the classroom.
8. During classroom observation:

Teachers with 0-5 years of teaching experiences tended to circulate in the class, while simultaneously directing instructions and managing behavior (See Figure 3). Students tended to be more attentive, to be more on-task, and to have less talking about non-instructional issues (See Figure 4).

Teacher with 6-12 years of teaching experience tended to direct instruction while standing and moving around in the front of the classroom (See Figure 5). The students tended to be inattentive (See Figure 6).

Teachers with 13-20 years of teaching experience tended to remain seated in the classroom while managing behavior. Students engaged in talking to one another and to be inattentive in class. The teacher ignored the behavior. See Figures 7-8.

The teacher with 21+ years of teaching experience tended to circulate throughout the classroom while engaging students in the lesson and keeping them on task. See Figures 9-10.

9. Using a frequency distribution, 57% of disruptions occurred “before class” actually started. Subjects in the 0-5 years of experience showed the greatest percentile of distribution (21.3%).

10. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis that there was no statistically significant difference between 0-5 years of teaching experience and the non-instructional strategy, consultation with administrator used to prevent disruption in the classroom. Teachers with less than six years of experience preferred this non-instructional strategy more than teachers with experience greater than six years.
Figure 3. 0-5 Years of Teaching Experience (Frequency of Teacher Behavior)
Figure 4. 0-5 Years of Teaching Experience (Frequency of Student Behavior)
Figure 5. 6-12 Years of Teaching Experience (Frequency of Teacher Behavior)
Figure 6. 6-12 Years of Teaching Experience (Frequency of Student Behavior)
Figure 7. 13-20 Years of Teaching Experience (Frequency of Teacher Behavior)
Figure 8. 13-20 Years of Teaching Experience (Frequency of Student Behavior)
Figure 9. 21+ Years of Teaching Experience (Frequency of Teacher Behavior)
Figure 10. 21+ Years of Teaching Experience (Frequency of Student Behavior)
A qualitative-quantitative triangulation-approach to data collection was utilized in this study. Data was collected from survey responses of 244 middle school teachers, documented information on summative teacher appraisal instrument from eight administrators on 44 teachers, documented information by researcher on classroom observations of six teachers, and actual teacher recommendations from six teachers in a structured focus group interview on staff development needs. The findings suggest that regardless of the years of teaching or background in middle school education, all middle school teachers experience the same degree of learning-inhibiting problems in the classroom. Perhaps, it is directly related to the training in middle school teacher preparation, instructional delivery strategies, classroom management techniques, or their overall attitude toward the teaching profession.

Limitations

This study focused on the teacher’s perception of learning-inhibiting problems (chronic talking, refusing request, tardiness, inattentiveness, talking back to teachers) that interfere and disrupt student learning. The problems that were experienced by middle school teachers in the classroom were investigated relative to years of teaching experience and education. This research did not attempt to address the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs. It also did not attempt to address other factors that may disrupt or interfere with student learning. The study was limited to the population of middle school teachers of language arts, social studies, mathematics and science in a single urban public school system. Due to the restrictions on the nature of this study, it could be potentially replicated with a population and school district of similar or larger size and type.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were generated from the study:

1. The initial middle school teacher endorsement was not a factor in the types of problems encountered by teachers in the classroom. It was also not a factor in how these problems were handled. Teachers who were initially trained in elementary education and secondary education experienced the same types of problems. They also used the same types of
instructional and non-instructional strategies when dealing with such problems.

2. Inservice education on classroom management did not serve to improve the teachers’
skills for handling disruptive behavior in the classroom. Forty percent of the middle school
teachers had received training between 1996-99. Eighteen percent had received inservice
training prior to 1996, and 42% had never received training in classroom management
skills.

3. Middle school teachers within 0-5, 6-12,13-20, 21+ years of teaching service experienced
problems in instructional delivery and classroom management. The frequency of the
problems or the occurrence of the problem did not increase with less experienced teachers
nor did they decrease with more experienced teachers. There was no statistically
significant difference between the types of instructional strategies used by teachers in the
0-5, 6-12,13-20, 21+ years of teaching experience.

4. Middle school teachers with 0-5 years of experience preferred consultation with
administrators as the strategy for preventing disruptive behavior in the classroom.

5. Based on classroom observations, the teachers who experienced less disruption in the
classroom were those who circulated during class while directing lessons, while engaging
students in the lesson, and while simultaneously managing behavior. Teachers who were
seated at their desk, who tended to direct the lessons, and who tended to ignore the
problems had the most disruptions in the classroom (Figures 3-10).

6. Cross tabulation of responses revealed that the most disruptions occurred before class
(57%). Teachers with 0-5 years of teaching experience encountered the greatest
percentage (21%).

7. Focus group results indicated that mandatory staff development did not address the
specific discipline challenges that teachers face daily in the classroom. Learning-inhibiting
problems such as chronic talking in the classroom, refusing request by teachers, tardiness
to class, inattentiveness in class, and talking back to teachers could be prevented through
the knowledge and practical application of a variety of instructional strategies.
Discussion

The question of whether learning-inhibiting problems experienced by middle school teachers were relative to years of experience and education was answered for this sample. The research showed that there was not a statistically difference between the number of years that a teacher had in service and the problems that were encountered in the classroom. It also showed that all teachers handled disruptive behaviors in a similar manner.

Upon observation in the classroom, the researcher observed that the students in the classroom with the teacher who had 21+ years of experience were on-task with their assignments. The behavior of the teacher was that of circulating throughout the class while directing instruction. The students were engaged by responding to questions asked by the teacher. Similar behavior was noted in the classroom of teachers with 0-5 years of teaching experience. In both classrooms the arrangement of the desk was an open format allowing students to see one another.

In the classroom of teachers with 6-12 and 13-20 years of experience, the teacher tended to remain seated at the desk or to have limited movement from the front of the room. The desk arrangement was a closed format allowing all students to face the front of the room. In this setting students tended to be inattentive, and they tended to engage in more talking that was unrelated to instruction. Disruptive behavior also tended to be ignored by the teacher.

Given the target population of 244 teachers in the study and only six teachers observed in the classroom, these findings in no way reflect the behavior of all teachers in those particular categories of years of experience. What the findings do show is that the method of instructional delivery which allows students to become engaged in the lesson, the teacher’s movement throughout the class while maintaining close proximity to students, and the teacher’s dealing appropriately with disruptive behavior when it arises will minimize learning-inhibiting problems, thus allowing quality learning to take place.

The researcher found that there was no statistically significant difference between those trained in middle school education (62%) and those untrained in middle school education (38%) and the learning-inhibiting problem experienced by middle school teachers in the classroom. What the study did not include was the year in which teachers completed the teacher preparation program, the content of the program, or the state in which the program was
completed. This is important information because the middle school concept emerged in the 1960s (Clark and Clark, 1993) when there was limited middle school teacher certification. Teachers were trained in secondary and elementary teacher preparation programs. At the onset of middle schools, many teachers from both levels were transferred to middle level teaching. Today there still remain states that do not require middle school teacher certification. According to the 1992 national licensure study, 33 states reported specialized middle school licensure/certification (Valentine & Mogar, 1992). Previous surveys reported certification or endorsement in 28 states in 1987, 15 states in 1978, and two states in 1968. In 1991, states with middle level license/endorsements held 82 percent of all middle school teacher preparation programs. Fifty-seven percent of the middle school teacher preparation programs were in five states. These states included Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, and Virginia. These states also required special licensure for teaching the middle school level (McEwin, 1992). Many states still maintain the option of allowing teachers to have an overlapping certification that covers a range of both elementary and middle level grades.

Understanding the concept that most teachers are trained in different teacher preparation programs from different states, and that many exceptional teachers of middle school students had to “learn on the job”, it is important for preservice and inservice education to include the essential elements of providing a thorough study of the nature and needs of early adolescents and developing an understanding of the middle school curriculum and instruction to provide differentiation of instruction for all students (NMSA, 1991). Having this understanding along with the academic knowledge and background of how adolescence best learn will arm teachers with appropriate tools to prevent learning-inhibiting problems in the classroom.

With the continuous emphasis that has been placed on quality education within the last five to ten years, it is the perception of the researcher that middle school teachers with less than ten years of experience have been receiving more concentrated courses in middle level education. Appropriate inservice training and mentoring after hire will not only enhance the preservice education but will help the novice and experienced teachers deal appropriately with problems that disrupt and interfere with student learning in the classroom.
Implications for Further Research

This study should serve as a useful framework for further study of the behavioral problems that students exhibit in the classroom that disrupt and interfere with their learning. Based on the findings, the following implications are generated.

1. This study highlights specific problems (chronic talking, refusing request, inattentiveness, tardiness, and talking back inappropriately to teachers) experienced by middle school teachers in the classroom. These problems were experienced by all teachers regardless of the years of teaching experience or levels of teacher preparation. It also showed that all teachers exhibit similar strategies when managing behavior and delivering instruction. Further research might examine the gender and ethnicity of the teacher relative to learning-inhibiting problems experienced in the classroom.

2. This study should provide a useful framework for further study of the gender and ethnicity of students exhibiting learning-inhibiting problems in the classroom.

3. The setting for this study was in an urban school district with 60% of its student population on free and reduced-price lunch. Further research might examine the types of schools (urban, suburban, rural) and the types of problems experienced in those respective classrooms.

4. The findings of this study showed that teachers with less than six years of experience preferred consulting with administrators as a strategy for preventing learning-inhibiting problems. It is the perception of the researcher that these teachers prefer consultation with an administrator because they lack the specific skills needed for dealing with various problems. Additionally, it is the perception of the researcher that once the teacher has consulted with the student and parent they need additional strategies to utilize if the behavior continues. This study should provide a useful framework for further study of the contents of the consultation between the teacher and administrator to determine the reason for this strategy being the preferred method.

5. The population for this study included middle school teachers requiring a specific middle school teacher certification. Further research might compare the abilities of the resource teacher with a general certification (physical education, foreign language, art, music,
computer education) with middle school certified teachers in handling learning-inhibiting problems in the classroom.

6. Data analysis included a review of the summative teacher appraisal instrument which incorporated the observable behaviors in classroom management, delivery of instruction, and planning for instruction as documented by the building administrator. Further research might examine the teacher’s knowledge of content, personal traits and professionalism, and monitoring and evaluating student outcomes as it relates to learning-inhibiting problems of students in the classroom.

7. The research showed that all states do not require middle school teacher certification. It also showed that all four year college and university teacher preparation programs do not have a separate middle school teacher preparation track. Further research might examine teacher preparation programs and its curriculum for middle school education.

Recommendations

“A mind once stretched by a new idea never regains its original dimension”.

.......Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894)

Using Nominal Group Technique to facilitate the focus group process (Van de Ven, 1974), a stratified random sample of middle school teachers was selected to provide recommendations for staff development based on the research gathered from this study. The group members were stratified to include the years of teaching experience, 0-5, 6-12,13-20, 21+.

The results of this study have led to the following recommendations:

1. Based on the findings of this study and the findings in the Arkansas School district (Evertson, 1985), it is recommended that all middle school teacher engage in a classroom management training utilizing a manual and follow-up. This method has proven to be successful in providing on-the-job training with feedback and support.

2. It is recommended that staff development be conducted on encouraging creative ways of student self-expression. It should emphasize strategies for allowing students to express themselves positively as a part of the learning experience in class.

3. It is recommended that staff development be conducted on effective strategies for
communicating with students. It should emphasize techniques for addressing disruptive behaviors, and negative behaviors of students.

4. It is recommended that staff development be conducted on effective strategies for communicating with parents. Student-led conferences has proven to be effective for long-lasting improvement in students’ intellectual focus and in building positive relationships with parents (Farber, 1999).

5. It is recommended that teachers be involved in focus groups for the purpose of identifying relevant topics to be addressed for staff development. The involvement of teachers in topic selection would provide input on content that would be meaningful in the classroom. This recommendation coincides with the involvement of teachers in the selection of staff development content outlined in the Standards for Staff Development (National Staff Development Council, 1995).

6. It is recommended that staff development be conducted on effective lesson facilitation. It should emphasize teacher facilitation skills as a means of monitoring behavior and motivating students.

7. It is recommended that staff development be conducted on developing effective anticipatory sets to ensure the management and preparation of students at the beginning of class. Activities might include instructional exercises that would review instruction of the previous day or instructional activities to introduce new material. Immediate presentation of material that promotes student involvement at the beginning of class will prevent learning-inhibiting problems.