Chapter 1: The Study of Teaching: Modern and Emerging Conceptions

THOMAS L. GOOD, BRUCE J. BIDDLE, IVOR F. GOODSON

University of Arizona, University of Missouri-Columbia, and University of East Anglia
and University of Rochester

In the past 30 years, research on teaching has displayed an amazing burst of energy and has generated many important concepts and research findings. One prominent feature of this effort has been researchers' willingness to observe instructional process and to conceptualize the complex interactions of classrooms as fast moving social settings. Prior to 1960 most educational research (whether conducted by educators, sociologists, or psychologists) used research methods that excluded direct examination of instructional process. Modern research, in contrast, has included observation of classroom processes and detailed interviews with students and teachers. These data sources have generated greater awareness of the complexities of classroom life and have begun to steer theory away from simple notions to more complex, contingent, contextualized knowledge about what makes for good teaching.

Although identifying the start of modern research in any area is difficult, clearly the first Handbook of Research on Teaching (Gage, 1963) had an important impact upon the field. This publication provided authoritative account summaries of research to that date and called for better observational studies of teaching. The dominant paradigm for the study of teaching immediately prior to the onset of observational research had been research on teacher personalities. Teachers who had certain personalities (warmth, openness) had been thought to be better facilitators of student achievement in the classroom than teachers who did not have these characteristics. By the mid 1960s, however, many researchers were beginning to debunk the myth that there was a 'personality for teaching' (Getzels & Jackson, 1963), and this led to calls for better research on the processes of teaching.

It is beyond the scope of this introductory essay to provide a historical analysis of the various ways researchers responded to this call (for extensive coverage see Anderson, 1995; Good, 1996). However, it is instructive to understand that several different research paradigms for exploring instruction and learning in classrooms became influential within a short time period.
Research Perspectives and Progress

One major goal of researchers, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, was to demonstrate that variation in the behaviors of teachers could be related to student learning. The title 'teacher behavior' subsumes hundreds of studies with different intentions, research methods, and findings. For example, included within this research tradition were studies of specific teaching behaviors such as 'indirectness,' clarity, or enthusiasm (see, for example, Flanders, 1970); investigations of teachers' management behavior toward the whole class (e.g., Kounin, 1970); wait time research (e.g., Rowe, 1969); naturalistic process-product studies (e.g., Brophy, 1973); research on instructional pace and content coverage (Barr & Dreeben, 1983); and experimental studies of process-product relations (Clark, Gage, Marx, Peterson, Stayrook, & Winne, 1979; Evertson, Anderson, Anderson, & Brophy, 1980).

Another emphasis that flourished in the past 30 years has been research on the effects of teacher cognition. Many types of teacher thought have been explored within this broad tradition including teacher expectations for students (Good & Brophy, 1973); teacher conceptions of the teacher's role (Biddle, Rosencranz, & Rankin, 1961); teacher decision making (Borko, Cone, Russo, & Shavelson, 1979); teachers' conceptions of lessons (Leinhardt & Putnam, 1987); teachers' ideas about subject matter (Shulman, 1987); teachers' expert knowledge (Berliner, 1992); and teacher responsibility, morality, and ethics (e.g., Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993; Tom, 1984).

More recently, a flurry of research interest has appeared concerned with student mediation of instructional behaviors. Although research had long demonstrated the effects of instructional behavior in the classroom (see Dunkin & Biddle, 1974), some scholars have also argued that true understanding of classroom events and their implications for student learning cannot be achieved without an understanding of student thinking and student mediation of classroom events. Research responding to this insight has included studies of student social cognition (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1984; Rohrkemper & Corno, 1988); student learning in small groups (e.g., Webb, 1983); student task literature (Alton-Lee, Nuthall, & Patrick, 1993; Anderson, 1981; Mergendoller, Marchman, Mitman, & Packer, 1988); student passivity (Good, Slavings, Harel, & Emerson, 1987; Sizer, 1984); students' self-regulated learning (Corno & Mandinach, 1983; Pressley & Levine, 1983); student volition (Corno, 1992; Snow, Corno, & Jackson, 1996); and student goal-regulation (McCaslin & Good, 1996).

And if these various traditions of research were not sufficient, other insights about classroom teaching have been generated by the recent flowering of works on the lives of teachers (see Goodson, 1981; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996). (Chapter 1 of the first volume of this *Handbook* provides a more detailed intro-
duction to this latter tradition, and several chapters representing it appear in that volume.)

Given both the amount of effort and the breadth of perspectives that have characterized recent research on teaching, it is little wonder that scholars have begun to comment on the gains in knowledge that have resulted. Weinert and Helmke (1995) have recently noted, for example, ‘It was only 20 years ago that Good, Biddle, and Brophy (1975) wrote, “Do teachers make a difference? No definite answer exists because little search has been directed to the question in a comprehensive way.” (p. 3). Since then, we have gained a good deal of convincing empirical evidence’ confirming large differences in the quality of instruction among teachers and classrooms and that these differences have significant impact on students’ academic performance (see also Gage, 1991).

New Directions and Contributions

As important as research within these traditions has been, most chapters in this volume assert the need for radical changes in the conceptualization of teaching and learning in American classrooms. These calls for new conceptualization of classroom teaching and learning are based upon various considerations. For example, obvious changes have appeared as many countries in the world have moved from economies based on agriculture and mining, to those based on industry, and are now entering a post-industrial world focused on the provision of services, the exchange of information, and global interdependence. The demographic characteristics of students and teachers are also changing in many countries, and much more information is now available from governments and other sources concerning the status and ‘progress’ of education in many societies. In addition, competition for tax-supported services has become more acute, and this has led to the flowering of conservative ideologies and attacks on public education (see, for example, Berliner & Biddle, 1995, who deal with the American case). Given such societal changes, it is apparent that goals for schools in the year 2000 will differ sharply from goals that were expressed for schools in 1900, 1950, 1970, or even 1990. And, if there are new goals, it follows that there must be new instructional processes and new forms of learning opportunities for students. The chapters of this volume provide an exciting set of arguments, images, and recommendations about the transformations needed in the teaching-learning process to accommodate these changes.

The volume begins with four chapters focused on student thought and its importance in understanding the processes and effects of teaching. In chapter 2, Graham Nuthall argues that a radical change has recently appeared in educators’ conception of students’ thinking and learning in classroom settings. He argues that it is no longer possible to retain the concepts and theories that provided
the foundation for virtually all classroom research until a decade ago and that the field is in the midst of a profound paradigm shift. To help with this reconceptualization, he reviews three different traditions of research that beg for synthesis: studies of student thinking in which students are seen as creating or constructing their own knowledge and skills; studies that are sociocultural in orientation in which learning and thinking are conceived as social processes that are laid within specific contexts; and studies that have a sociolinguistic orientation in which the language of the classroom conceived as both the content and the medium of learning and thinking. Chapter 3 by Deborah Ball maintains that no task is more fundamental or difficult for teachers than understanding what students are learning. She argues that there are major challenges in trying to listen to students. For example, teachers must learn from individuals who are quite different from themselves. She suggests that what a student is thinking 'here and now' may not be what they are thinking later in the week and that teachers need to listen to students through multiple contexts. She also asserts that because teachers want children to understand and to learn, they are prone to overinterpret what children might say and do. Her chapter includes suggestions about how teachers may improve their ability to listen and understand students' perspectives—a fundamental necessity if teachers are to implement the perspectives of constructivists.

The fourth chapter—by Phyllis Blumenfeld, Ronald Marx, Helen Patrick Joseph Krajcik, and Elliot Soloway—focuses upon the instructional importance of teaching for understanding. The authors provide a rich historical analysis of how the field of research on teaching has evolved from models stressing the transmission of information to current conceptions of practice which emphasize students' transformation of knowledge. They compare a variety of extant programs that incorporate elements of constructivist thought and identify issues that merit further research. Importantly, these authors also explore issues of emerging technologies in their pursuit of integrating new technology with modern constructions of students' learning.

In the fifth chapter, Barbara Bank reviews research on the peer cultures of children and adolescents and their effects on teaching. She argues that such peer cultures often conflict with teacher's goals and the official school culture, that many discussions of teaching ignore the tensions and contradictions created by peer cultures, and that the latter have important theoretical and instructional implications. She suggests that it is useful to separate three aspects of school culture—academic goals, extra curricular activities, and school discipline policies—and she discusses how each interacts with the peer cultures that students create. She also examines the implications of peer cultures for teaching and offers suggestions about what schools and teachers can do to deal more effectively with peer concerns.
The next few chapters focus on changing conditions in the society that affect teaching. Chapter 6, by Joseph Blase, explores recent research on the social and cultural aspects of the teacher’s work with particular emphasis on the micro-politics of teaching. His analysis begins by discussing how individuals and groups use power to advance their interests in various kinds of relationships, such as those that are nominally democratic, collegial, or conflictual. He notes that most micro-political studies of teachers have so far been conducted in traditional school settings. Not surprisingly, these studies suggest that teachers are vulnerable to pressure from other adults in their work, especially to thoughtless, self-serving, or manipulative school principals. He argues that current research illustrates a substantial discrepancy between the expected and actual political roles of teachers in the school restructuring process. Thus, current reforms that stress greater teacher empowerment and more democracy in school decision making may be more illusionary than real.

In chapter 7, Peter Cookson and Charlotte Lucks argue that schools are becoming increasingly politicized and suggest that if the United States continues to adhere to market solutions for public policy, it is likely that public education as a unifying social force will be seriously weakened or destroyed. Although this unfortunate outcome is possible, they argue that the picture need not necessarily be gloomy and that greater teacher autonomy might leave teachers with a strong voice if they can increase their professional autonomy. The authors contend that this can best be achieved by setting higher standards for those who enter and who stay in the profession.

Chapter 8 by Hans Vonk notes that many policies regarding social welfare and the labor market are no longer the primary domain of an individual nation but are also influenced by regional or global events and policies. His analysis leads to the conclusion that the work of teaching in Europe is now becoming more narrowly defined and more thoroughly supervised. He maintains that if teachers want to see themselves as professionals that are fully recognized by governing bodies, they will have to gain some degree of control over the decisions that affect their work and the curricula of teaching.

In chapter 9, Linda Darling-Hammond and Marcella Bullmaster contend that challenges faced in America are also being more affected by the global economy than has been the case historically. They assert that changing social contexts and expectations for learners in the twenty-first century require teachers who can teach for understanding—who can scaffold key ideas in part by anticipating misconceptions that students have. Such skills should allow teachers to create learning experiences that build upon students’ own thinking, while at the same time reflecting the standards of inquiry in a particular discipline. This suggests that teachers must diversify classroom practice and must allow for greater variability rather than assuming uniformity in learners.
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