

Scott Jones
Ed Rem 7781 – Qualitative I
Reflection #2

The science of education is very tricky business. Countless numbers of studies indicate all sorts of things about how to educate children in the best possible way. Sometimes, the studies seem contradictory. This says nothing of the issue as to how to apply the studies to various classrooms. This is where the ideas of generalization of the study applies to the application of the findings. This is also where the most of the discussion about the research occurs among teaching professionals.

The idea of generalization is simply how the sample described in the study can be applied to other situations. In quantitative research, the researcher uses mathematical models to indicate the ability of the study to be generalized with certain limitations to the entire population. In qualitative research, the idea is murkier because no general model is available to indicate how it applies to the larger population, which is often difficult anyway due to the relative small sample sizes of qualitative research. This leaves us to discuss what use these studies are to the individual classroom teacher.

As a classroom teacher myself, our district administrators tell teachers that research indicates this, or research indicates that, and therefore, we should institute this strategy in order to get the students to do whatever it is the administrators want them to do. If that sounds confusing, it is. Very rarely are the teachers ever given the study to analyze for ourselves the results of the study. Besides, I don't know if many of my colleagues would be able to analyze the methodology of the study in much of a scientific manner. However, most of my colleagues would be able to read the study and analyze

the sample used in the study to see how similar or different the sample is to our students. The problem, however, is even that would not make the manner any more simple.

In this attempt to use science to drive practice within the classroom, I fear that the individual teacher is being marginalized. Definitely, some teachers are better than others, but the individual teacher is what drives the classroom, and no amount of science will make him/her a better teacher. For example, educational science is finding that character education methods in schools and classrooms all around the country is an effective way to improve test scores of students, which currently is the only end goal “central office” administrators worry about today. However, character education in the hands of a bad teacher is a different program of development than character education in the hands of a good teacher, which is different from character education in the hands of a great teacher. The point of this being that generalization of the research becomes difficult when these types of factors are included in the analysis and applicability to my classroom.

Unfortunately, the quality of the instruction is not part of the discussion as new strategies from the administration are given to teachers in order to improve test scores. I don't know if the administrators think every teacher is great and the research will replicate itself perfectly in every classroom in the district. Alternatively, I don't know if the administrators think every teacher is poor and the new “research-based” strategy will make each teacher a great teachers, which then improves test scores. Both beliefs are naïve and reduces the role of the teacher to robotic lesson giver.

Great teachers are great teacher no matter what research indicates is the most effective strategy for classroom instruction. The reason for their greatness is that science does drive their methods in their classrooms. Whether or not these teachers are actively

finding research for teaching strategies, which they do, or they are conducting their own action research within their own classrooms, which they do, these teachers put tremendous effort into their practice.

No amount of generalized research can turn a poor teacher into a great one. Great teachers develop themselves, because they have a desire to be the best they can be for their students. They find the research and apply it to their instruction if it fits within their own pedagogy of instruction. If they feel it doesn't generalize to their situation, they take it into account, but they won't apply it. There is no study ever done that applies to everyone and everywhere. Great teachers understand this. It is part of what makes them great teachers to all of their students.