

Spotlight On Research



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Editor's Message

We hope your summer is going well. In the past year, we welcomed Dr. Lora Wolff, former Superintendent at Keokuk school district, to join us as an Assistant Professor. We also welcomed Angie Loudon as our new office support specialist. They have been wonderful additions to our department.

Following the departure of Dr. House last June, Dr. Reinhardt Lindner took the position of the Interim Chair and Dr. Carol Webb served as the Assistant Chair. We thank them both for graciously taking the leadership roles and for all they do to steer the department successfully through another year. Dr. Lindner will retire at the end of this June, and we wish him a very happy retirement.

In this issue of *Spotlight on Research*, we highlight four of our doctoral dissertation studies. The topics of these studies ranged from school crisis management, multiage education, teacher motivational orientation, to teacher evaluation.

Are schools prepared to react to a crisis? Dr. Mark Twomey explored this important topic in his dissertation. His study evaluated school crisis management plans among small, medium-sized, and large K-12 school districts in Illinois.

Dr. Ruth Ann Tobey-Brown's dissertation focused on multiage schooling. Utilizing data from multiple states, she examined the knowledge and beliefs of teachers and principals on multiage practices in their schools.

Framed within Edward Deci's self-determination theory, Dr. Mark Hansen's dissertation sought to measure differences in the motivational orientations of elementary, middle, and high school teachers.

With states looking at the Danielson model in teacher evaluation, Dr. Kim Huckstadt's dissertation on the impact of the standards-based teacher evaluation on teachers' instructional and professional practices in Iowa provides valuable information on this initiative.

We are happy to share our doctoral dissertation research studies with you. These studies tackle a wide range of issues in education and we hope that you find them interesting and intellectually stimulating. Please feel free to share these publications with your colleagues or to contact us or the authors about their research. We would be delighted to hear from you.

Dr. Bridget Sheng (Editor)
Dr. Lloyd Kilmer (Associate Editor)

Spotlight On Research

Analysis of Crisis Management Planning in Illinois Public Schools

Author: Patrick Mark Twomey, Superintendent, Havana School District #126 and Founder of the Center for Optimal Learning

Abstract

The study focused on the readiness level of Illinois school districts to react to a real crisis and the preparation necessary to have a comprehensive crisis management plan. With so much attention being given to the recent tragic events in our nation's schools it is necessary to explore the readiness level of our schools and to secure the mortar walls where our children spend their days.

The present study was designed to examine the readiness level of small, medium-sized, and large K-12 public school districts in Illinois. A crisis management assessment instrument was used to rate the critical components identified by Homeland Security. The components were analyzed by using Pearson's correlation to determine the relationship of number of students, budget, and operational expenditures per pupil to the total readiness score.

The study collected crisis plans via mail and/or made a site visit to thirty K-12 school districts and hand scored their crisis plans. The list of schools was generated from the Illinois State Board of Education website using the 2007 Fall Housing Report. Ten schools were randomly selected from small districts with a student population less than 1200, ten from medium-sized districts with a student population between 1201 and 3000 and ten was from large districts with a student population of greater than 3000.

Results found that the small school districts were less prepared than the medium-sized and large districts, and that the large districts were in general the most prepared. In most instances small school districts scored lower than the medium-sized and large districts in each of the component areas of mitigation/prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. Results also showed positive correlations between number of students, budget, and operational expenditures per pupil and the total readiness score.

Practical Implication

The study has implications in assisting and informing small and rural school leaders, legislators and communities at large in understanding and identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses as it pertains to their local ability to create effective crisis management plans. As a result of this study, the United States Rural School Safety Project was created and currently trains and provides services to rural and small school districts throughout West Central Illinois. Trainings and services include; Crisis Management Planning 101, School Safety Audits, and Practicing with Tabletop Exercises.

Citation

Twomey, P. M. (2009). *Analysis of Crisis Management Planning in Illinois Public School* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database (Publication No. AAT 3355825).

Spotlight On Research

Beliefs and Practices of Principals and Teachers of Multiage Schooling

*Author: Ruth Ann Tobey-Brown, Principal
Rock Island Center for Math and Science, Rock
Island Milan School District #41*

Abstract

One of the significant challenges education faces in the 21st century is the need to redesign schools to nurture the needs (social, emotional, intellectual, and physical) of all children. One way schools are addressing these needs is through multiage programming which is designed to build relationships with students, parents and community. This philosophy empowers students to develop their own learning and behavior goals, and encourages students to be leaders in an environment which is collaborative with all stakeholders. These relationships help educators address those social and emotional needs. The purpose of this study was to determine the knowledge and beliefs of teachers and principals and what they considered to have contributed to the success or limited the implementation of multiage practices in their schools.

A survey developed by Dr. Barbara Pavan in 1972, and updated in 1993, on the essential assumptions of multiage education was distributed to principals and teachers in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri. In addition, interview questions were asked of a sample of ten principals and twenty teachers. Three interview questions were based on the Multiage Implementation Interview developed by Miller (1994). Interview questions included: (1) Have you had multiage in your school at least three years? How have you monitored, evaluated, and modified your

multiage programs over time? (2) You have been doing this for more than three years; to what would you attribute your success? (3) Could you describe difficulties you may have encountered in implementing this approach? In other words, what barriers or challenges did you have had to overcome?

Data were compared between teachers and principals to determine the areas of accepted beliefs and implementation of multiage programs. Results indicated that teachers and principals have no significant difference in their beliefs about multiage programs, however, the teachers and principals were not in agreement with the components which are necessary for a strong multiage program.

Practical Implication

The results from this study should help principals and teachers understand that even though they have similarities in beliefs their priorities are sometimes different. Understanding the areas that need to be addressed in the successful implementation of a multiage program should help inform principals as they begin the planning process for the integration of multiage classrooms in their schools.

Citation

Tobey-Brown, R.A. (2009). *Beliefs and Practices of Principals and Teachers of Multiage Schooling*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database (Publication No. AAT 335842)

Spotlight On Research

A Comparison of Elementary, Middle, and High School Teachers' Orientations Toward Motivating Students

*Author: Mark D. Hansen, Superintendent,
Eastland CUSD #308*

Abstract

Developmental psychologists know that many students become less interested in school and academic tasks with each additional year in school. In addition, they know that the most effective predictor of motivation at any age is self-efficacy, a student's perception of his/her academic ability in a specific domain. Factors influencing self-efficacy include previous successful experiences, social models, the opinions of others, and one's self-perceived efficacy in relation to peers simultaneously engaged in the same tasks (Pressley & McCormick, 2007).

Using a sample of 424 teachers in four rural and one urban district in Northwest Illinois, this study sought to measure differences in the motivational orientations of elementary, middle, and high school teachers. The *Problems in School Questionnaire* (Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, & Ryan, 1981) was administered to teachers of grades 1-12 and collected at building meetings.

The results confirmed that high school teachers prefer more controlling, and less autonomy-supportive responses to common educational scenarios than do elementary and middle school teachers. The results further confirmed a positive interaction effect between a teacher's

gender, grade level teaching assignment, and his/her motivational orientation for control or autonomy-support. In grades 1-8, female teachers selected responses that were more autonomy-supportive than controlling, while male teachers selected responses that were more controlling than autonomy-supportive. However, the difference between male and female teachers' autonomy-supportive responses was not significant among high school teachers. According to *Self-Determination Theory* (Deci & Ryan, 2000), human motivation is influenced by our analysis of the likelihood that a given task will increase our feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. This study suggests that as students progress through school, they are less likely to be taught in a manner that is sensitive to these motivational needs.

Practical Implication

If secondary teachers are more controlling in their instructional approaches, and less supportive of the autonomy of their students than elementary teachers, this research helps to explain why academic gains in the nation's high schools have lagged behind the gains made in our K-8 schools. It may also explain why some students drop-out of school, or why secondary teachers are more likely to attribute poor student performance to apathy. Finally, because female elementary teachers are oriented to more autonomy-supportive approaches than male elementary teachers, yet female high school teachers are inclined to be as controlling in their

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approaches as their male counterparts, it may be evidence that the culture of the traditional American high school is inculcating teachers toward more controlling orientations.

Citation

Hansen, M. D. (2010). *A Comparison of Elementary, Middle, and High School Teachers' Orientations toward Motivating Students* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database (Publication No. AAT 3404714)

Analysis of Crisis Management Planning in Illinois Public Schools

Author: Kim P. Huckstadt, Superintendent, Maquoketa Community School District

Abstract

Teacher evaluation has historically been viewed as a personnel function, not as a tool designed to improve instructional practice. Significantly influenced by Danielson's Framework for Teaching (1996), the Iowa Teaching Standards and a Model Framework for Teacher Evaluation were adopted by the Iowa State Legislature in 2003. This statewide reform effort not only represented a significant investment of resources but also a crucial paradigm shift regarding the overall purpose of teacher evaluation as viewed by both teachers and administrators. As noted in the Model Framework For Designing A Local Staff Evaluation System (Iowa Department of Education, 2003):

Teacher evaluation should provide opportunities for teachers at different developmental stages to be involved in processes and activities appropriate to their experience and expertise. In addition, teacher evaluation should be

heavily focused on the formative aspects of evaluation, using staff-directed activities for the purpose of promoting professional development, especially development focused on improving student achievement as determined by district achievement goals (p. 1).

The study is comprised of two distinct components. The first component was designed to provide a descriptive quantitative analysis of the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the standards-based teacher evaluation system in Iowa. The second component was a statistical comparison of teacher and evaluator survey responses. The purpose of the comparability analysis was to determine if teachers and evaluators reported significant differences regarding the perceived utility of the standards-based evaluation system. In addition to the two phases identified above, the study also attempted to determine whether or not there is a relationship between grade level teaching/administrative assignments, years of experience, school size or gender and the perceived utility of the standards-based evaluation system.

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The study was significant in that it provides valuable data to school districts, higher educational institutions and state and federal governing bodies to determine the impact of standards-based evaluation on professional practices. This, in turn, may impact the quality of instruction received by the children in our school systems.

Practical Implication

One of the key findings of the study indicates that teachers reported the impact of the standards-based evaluation system on professional practices and the link between teacher evaluation and professional development are, for the most part, minimal. In addition, both teachers and administrators expressed that individual teacher professional development plans (the formative component of Iowa's teacher evaluation system) have had a relatively small impact on professional practices. From this, one might hypothesize that the implementation of the standards-based evaluation system has not reached a level whereby practicing teachers and administrators are making the important connection between teacher evaluation, professional development and the implementation of meaningful instructional practices.

Even though making these connections is identified as the "intended outcome, the data appear to be showing that (in the eyes of many practitioners) these events are still being conducted in isolation. Perhaps this should come as no surprise as prior research indicates that implementing a complex standards-based evaluation system is no small task.

Citation

Huckstadt, K.P. (2011). *The Impact of Standards-Based Teacher Evaluation on Instructional and Professional Practices in Iowa* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertation Database. (Publication No. AAT 3457019)