

The relationships among teachers' perception of university partnership and the factors of student support and teacher affiliation

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this correlation study was to explore teachers' set of perceptions of a university partnership; their beliefs in the partnership, the necessity of such partnership, and the partnership itself, student supports and teacher affiliation. Thirteen out of thirty five teachers responded to this survey. Although the data indicated there was no correlation among teacher perceptions and the factors of student support and teacher affiliation, the descriptive statistics seemed to suggest that teachers' perceptions indicated they found the university partnership necessary and future interventions successful.

Keywords: Teacher support, Teacher Affiliation

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INTRODUCTION

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) had determined to retract the accreditation of a Texas school district and close it down due to unsatisfactory progress in their academic and fiscal management. The newly hired superintendent reached out to the community with a proposed tax increase and the community passed the proposed tax ratification which gave them a year reprieve with TEA. This led to an innovative decision to partner with a nearby Texas university to improve the school both academically and fiscally. The future of this Texas school district is uncertain still (Grobe, 2012). This low socio-economic school district is made up of 85% persons of Hispanic origin with a median household income of less than \$30, 000. This district has continued to receive an academically unacceptable rating by TEA (TEA, 2010). This partnership may create an opportunity for interventions, specifically student support and teacher affiliation.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers' perceptions of their beliefs in, the necessity of, and-or the possible success with the partnership between the district and the university was unknown. The objective of this study is to ascertain if there was a relationship among teacher perceptions of the partnership or future interventions and their perceptions of student support and teacher affiliation.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored teachers' set of perceptions of their belief in their newfound partnership with a university, the necessity of such a partnership, and the success of the partnership and their perceptions of student support and teacher affiliation in Texas.

Research Hypotheses

Is there a relationship among teachers' perceptions of the necessity of, belief in, and success of the university partnership with the factors of teacher affiliation and student success?

H₁: There will be a significant relationship among teachers' perceptions of the necessity of, belief in, and success in the university partnership with the factors of teacher affiliation and student success as measured by the School-Level Environment Questionnaire (SLEQ) in a school in Texas.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Culture and Change

A school district in Texas, in an effort to effect school wide-systemic change partnered with a Texas university with the determination to improve the school, both academically and fiscally. Finnan (1996) suggested, "The issue for school reform is not that change is foreign to schools; it is that change is usually not welcomed by schools" (p. 105). The big picture is change and how it occurs within a school system. Bohan & Many (2011) believed that to truly effect change, the change must be "plausible, doable, testable, and meaningful" (p. 148). According to

Whitaker (2009) there are three levels of change: procedural change, structural change, and cultural change. Since this study is focused on relationships of the partnership with teacher affiliation and student support, cultural change will be the main thrust of information regarding change.

Every school has its own culture, the complex understanding of how things are done, the spirit and soul of an organization. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) describes culture as “the relationship between three factors: the attitudes and beliefs of persons both inside the school and in the external environment, the cultural norms of the schools, and the relationships between persons in the school” (Boethel, 1992). There are cultural relationships among all the players, both students and teachers. The mention of change is intimidating to some as it may require changes in the status quo. Procedural and structural changes are hard enough to work through, but factoring in change to culture or the way things have always been done, evokes fear and resistance from most individuals. The challenge of all change involves struggle, anxiety, and loss (Bohan & Many, 2011). Structural and procedural changes depend on the cultural change which is the biggest change agent (Whitaker, 2009). Thompson (2010) writes that educational change begins with educators taking a good look at themselves, their students, and their work. Changing the school environment brings the focus back to culture (Thompson, 2010).

Change begins by changing the school environment, bringing the focus back to culture (Thompson, 2010). Cultural change begins with the development of a culture where change is embraced and leaders discuss the core beliefs, intended results, and a picture or vision of what is to change (Thompson, 2010; Whitaker, 2010). Continuous improvement is rooted in understanding the whole working organization as well as understanding that changes in one area often causes changes in another area (Thompson, 2010). Sustainable change is developed as educators utilize shared decision making, believe the education of students is their responsibility, and promote student achievement through human resources (Bohan & Many, 2011).

Change and Intervention

Examining schools that are similar in student standings and demographics is essential in order to develop a better understanding of the teachers’ opinions regarding interventions taking place in their school. In order to assess how to promote change through state intervention, it is necessary to know how teachers react to the public announcement concerning the underperforming status of their school. This will shape how school personnel perceive what follows (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008).

McQuillan and Salomon-Fernandez (2008) focused on Massachusetts where it was well known that state involvement in public school accountability predated NCLB. Massachusetts was one of the first states to have NCLB and represented a long time pioneer in public accountability. Between the years 2000 to 2004, the Massachusetts Department of Education (MADOE) had intervened in 77 schools. These schools served high numbers of low-income, minority, English language learners, and migrant students. In order to better understand how to promote change in a low performing school, observing how teachers and administrators initially reacted to the news broadcast to the community about their underperforming status was necessary. Some teachers were upset because they felt that MADOE was holding them personally responsible for the students’ failure. They felt there were many different reasons for these failures. Some of these students were homeless, some lived on their own, many lived in

shelters, and some children did not go to bed at night as they raised themselves. Teachers and administrators also questioned whether their schools had the resources to realize the goals set by the state. They cited they lacked technology, putting them at a disadvantage. Textbooks were also piled up in classrooms, because they were not allowed to be sent home. McQuillan and Salomon-Fernandez (2008) believed that many school personnel felt demoralized with being titled as “potentially underperforming” and that they internalized the label placed on them, because it reflected on the caliber of their contribution to the success or failure of a student. The administrators felt that “good teacher morale” was critical for an intervention, but there were not many individuals who felt that what was taking place promoted positive morale. The faculty was responding at an emotional level due to finding out that state interventions would soon be taking place at their school (Hargreaves, 2004).

After studying four schools, Kiersted and Harvell (2005) concluded that “State and district actions that are not well integrated or coordinated...create additional issues for schools ill-equipped to manage multiple initiatives,” (p.1). Many teachers and administrators believed that state intervention negatively affected their schools. An example of this was that schools were considered disadvantaged because of the label, and this caused parents to place their students in other schools (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008, p.27). In addition, the morale of teachers was reported to be low, because they believed too much work was being placed on them. The process put in place by MADOE states that personnel are not to demoralize hard-working teachers and are told to “be polite and sensitive to the school’s needs,” but some personnel perceived state intervention as being disrespectful (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008 p.21).

The McQuillan and Salomon-Fernandez’ (2008) research study offered a series of proposals aimed at helping state officials nationwide consider how to conceptualize and implement reform. Administrators’, teachers’, and students’ points of view should be respected, while student achievement must be their highest priority. The state should explicitly point this out from the very start of any intervention and also seek to honor the opinions of teachers and administrators (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008, p. 29). Finally, teachers who worked in these underperforming schools in Massachusetts believed they faced an unfair disadvantage because of state testing. They reported that holding all students to the same standards was not fair to teachers who worked with large numbers of transient, low-income, ELL, and special needs children (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008, p. 29).

Collaboration

This study has measured the climate of the perception of working together in collaboration. Although there are several entities working in this project, teachers, students, and other administrators working in distinct groups seek to become a cohesive team with the same purpose of moving towards the success of saving of the school. Hilliard (2009) describes a common organizational structure when working in groups by dividing chores, determining goals and objectives, identifying agendas and timelines, setting participant responsibilities, gathering summative data, and sharing outcomes. Effective in group work is an action plan that can be followed both by students and teachers that will facilitate staying on track with the step by step goals posted in plain sight everywhere for all to see, and promoted at all times. However, Troen and Boles (2010) make a distinction between collaboration and effective teaming in that the former does not guarantee success when the directive is merely to work together and collaborate.

Instead they suggest implementing a framework that can improve teaching and learning. Among the conditions of working in said groups, Task Focus, Leadership, Establishing Structure and Processes, Collaborative Climate as well as Personal Accountability must be present and promoted at all times (p.60). Incorporation of work group dynamics can be illustrated by the need for change when working with groups. Getinet (2012) has moved from didactic teaching towards interactive student group learning after his study on the impact of role change in teaching Physics, which yielded a more effective method of learning. (Getinet, 2011) Specifically, peer collaboration and student empowerment provided through a group centered approach provided a different way of problem solving, which as an intervention resulted more favorably than the typical top-down instruction.

RESEARCH METHODS

Data Collection

The data from this study was taken from the surveys which were answered by thirteen participants who taught at the school district. Participation was voluntary and the survey was opened up to willing and able teacher participants who are currently employed at the district.

Data Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationship among teachers' perceptions of the necessity of, belief in, and success in the university partnership with the factors of teacher affiliation and student success. The School-Level Environment Questionnaire (SLEQ), created by Fisher and Fraser, was the instrument utilized to gather information from the teachers at the struggling Texas school district. The SLEQ (Appendix A) contains fifty-six items divided into the following constructs: Student Support, Affiliation, Professional Interest, Missions Consensus, Empowerment, Innovation, Resource Adequacy, and Work Pressure. Empowerment and Work Pressure were the focus of this research. The items in the survey relating to Student Support, 1, 9, 17, 25, 33, 41, and 49, along with the questions concerning Affiliation, 2, 10, 18, 26, 34, 42, and 50, were used in the Pearson Correlation analysis. In addition to the SLQ, there were three additional questions pertaining to the relationship between a Texas school district and a Texas university. These include: I agree that the university and the school district should be working together; I believe that the partnership/future interventions will be successful, and I believe that the partnership/future interventions of the university and district. Pearson's correlation calculated teacher responses as a criterion based measure of validity.

Teachers invited were selected based on a convenience sample (Erlandson, 1983). A request for teacher e-mail addresses was sent to the Texas school district superintendent. Teachers were contacted through their school e-mail addresses. The survey was internet based, so teachers were sent a link to the on-line survey.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The patterns that evolved demonstrated a negative tendency in the area of Student Supports and suggest that teachers felt that students' disruptive behavior was a problem, as

illustrated through Median scores of 2 out of a possible 5 “There are many disruptive, difficult students in this school” and “Strict discipline is needed to control many of the students.” “There are many noisy, badly-behaved students.” received a median of 3 out of a possible 5. The total possible score for student support was 35. The data appears to suggest teachers felt there was a lack of student support (M = 21.15, SD = 7.43). This could suggest a need for professional development in the area of classroom management. The total possible score for teacher affiliation was 35. The results (Table 1) also seemed to indicate that there were some problems with teachers’ perceptions of teacher affiliation (M = 24.31, SD = 5.69). The following questions received a median of 3 out of a possible 5: “My colleagues take notice of my professional views and opinions.” “I feel that I have many friends among my colleagues at this school” “I feel lonely and left out of things in the staff room.” This suggested teacher morale was not as high as it could be in these particular areas. Possibly, hope was found in the external partnership to fix the issues which caused the school to struggle.

Table 1:

Student Success/Teacher Affiliation

	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Student Success			
Most students are pleasant and friendly to teachers	4.00	3.46	1.20
Most students are helpful and cooperative to Teachers	4.00	3.38	1.26
There are many disruptive, difficult students in this school	2.00	2.38	1.19
There are many noisy, badly-behaved students	3.00	2.69	1.44
Students get along well with teachers	4.00	3.76	.72
Most students are well-mannered and respectful to the school staff	4.00	3.50	1.12
Strict discipline is needed to control many of the Students	2.00	2.75	1.48
Teacher Affiliation			
I receive encouragement from colleagues	4.00	3.69	1.11
I feel accepted by other teachers	4.00	3.85	.99
I am ignored by other teachers	4.00	3.92	1.04
I feel that I could rely on my colleagues for assistance if I needed it	4.00	4.08	1.12
My colleagues take notice of my professional views and opinions	3.00	3.49	.87

I feel that I have many friends among my colleagues at this school	3.00	3.08	.95
I feel lonely and left out of things in the staff room	2.92	2.92	1.32

However, there were no significant correlations among teacher perceptions of the partnership and the factors of students’ success and teacher affiliation (Table 2).

Table 2:
Partnership Correlations

	Student Support	Affiliation
I believe that the partnership/future interventions of TAMUK and Premont I.S.D. are necessary.	-.499	-.230
I agree that TAMUK and Premont ISD should be working together.	-.499	-.230
When it comes to the TAMUK and Premont ISD partnership, I believe that the partnership/future interventions will be successful.	-.293	-.100

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Conversely, the perceptions of the teachers in regards to the university partnership are positive with average scores above 4.5 for all three areas (Table 3). The data seems to suggest that teachers perceived the university partnership as necessary, that future interventions would be successful, and that they should be working together..

Table 3:
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
I agree that the university and the ISD should be working together.	4.54	.52	13
When it comes to the university and ISD partnership, I believe that the partnership/future interventions will be successful.	4.62	.51	13

I believe that the partnership/future interventions of university and I.S.D. are necessary.	4.54	.52	13
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RECOMMENDATIONS

A renewed sense of inclusion and respect is essential when building a team. Addressing all of the questions teachers rated low would begin to provide a sense of acknowledgement to their sense of being discounted. A focus on team-spirit supported by a plan of action can be strengthened by motivating staff and faculty to improve the school climate. Shared decision making is required if sustainable change is to be realized in addition to teachers' acceptance that the education of all students is their responsibility (Bohan & Many, 2011). Erlichson, (2005) stated that one way to lessen tension at the campuses and to build on the foundation of support for intervention is to bring teachers and administrators into the intervention process. Schools need the time to discuss, plan, and create opportunities that will allow them to shape, reform, understand and create a vision (Erlichson, 2005). Such participation is essential when developing a Professional Learning Community. According to Troen and Boles (2010), the factors of Task Focus, Leadership, Establishing Structure and Processes, Collaborative Climate as well as Personal Accountability are necessary for effective working groups.

In order to address student support, classroom management training is essential. This can convert low student expectations to higher positive expectations and thus increase student support. This could prevent or diminish any student behavior not conducive to learning, as well as prevent discouragement and attrition. Sustainable change is developed as educators utilize shared decision making, believe the education of students is their responsibility, and promote student achievement through human resources (Bohan & Many, 2011). In addition, leaders can look into other research-based intervention programs to better fit their school's particular needs for supporting their students. Some of these programs include, Early School Success, Integrated Systems Model (ISM), and Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports. Utilizing the Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) is an opportunity for teachers and students to engage in a feasible learning intervention strategy or support system. The prohibitive technology costs can be skirted by utilizing a computer-supported collaborative learning approach such as Single Display Software with multiple applications for large groups within the classroom and multiple players' set-up with multiple mice which has been built for English Language Learners (Szewkis, et al., 2011).

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