

The 2007-2008 NEA Foundation

Action Research Fellows

Project Summaries

What are the general education teachers and parents of students with (IEPs) perceptions of the Individualized Educational process?

Abstract

Researcher: *Linda F. Arms-Lewis*

The purpose of this study was to determine if general education teachers and parents of students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) understand their important roles on the IEP teams. The study addressed the knowledge of parents and general education teachers regarding special education testing and for determining eligibility. The results of the surveys showed that the majority of the general education teachers found IEP's useful in the formation of goals for their students and that the process of developing and implementing the IEP was a team decision. However, some teachers reported that the IEP did not help them understand the instructional accommodations or the application of those accommodations needed in order to reach those goals. Parents felt that the team treated them equally on the team and respected their opinions but were not always sure what a "disability" meant. It is essential that general education teachers receive training and support that facilitates the skills needed to provide services for children with different categories or types of disabilities. There is also a need for better communication between the school and the home in terms of what a "disability" constitutes, to ensure that all parties work from the same definition.

**Closing the Achievement Gaps: What Can Teachers Learn About Student Needs and Interests
Through a Cross Cultural Letter Writing Project?**

Researcher: Mike Bonnie

Abstract

Global education literature indicates that, in part, achievement gaps are impacted by narrow and naïve perceptions of, and experiences within, a global society that is both diverse and multi-cultural. This study investigated a letter writing exchange between students in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and in Urumqi, Xinjiang, China. Four English language classroom teachers, approximately 45 students in a Milwaukee and 90 students in China, participated in the study. Using a “student-centered” approach the letters were content analyzed; formative assessment of student writing. Teacher and student surveys were also conducted. A content analysis of the letters revealed that, in general, that Chinese and American students’ goals included many similarities: doing well in classes, improving first language and second language proficiency; graduation and career goals; sports, music, pets, the importance of family and friends; However, the American urban students were also focused on getting jobs (Chinese students attending school are not permitted to work until after graduation). Teachers expressed satisfaction with the project, stated that students required little external motivation to participate and eagerly awaited responses to their letters. The project demonstrates that teachers can learn about students’ goals from a letter writing exchange activity. Understanding students’ goals can help urban educators address the academic and personal needs of their students.

The IEP Team Process: A Meaningful Way to Increase Parental Involvement

Researcher: Shandowlyon Hendricks-Williams

Abstract

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is the framework utilized to drive instruction for students with disabilities. Effective IEP's are major determinants as to whether or not students receive appropriate services that will increase academic achievement. This research examined parental involvement during the IEP team process. Marzano has cited parental involvement as a research based instructional strategy to increased student achievement. As school districts attempt to address the achievement gaps, developing a process to increase parental involvement during the IEP team process can serve as a starting point for encouraging parents to participate in school-based parental involvement opportunities. Surveys were conducted to ascertain parental satisfaction during the IEP process. Following intensive supervisory intervention, parents' favorable responses increased per the results of the post test. The findings of this study suggest that there is a relationship between supervisory intervention and parental involvement during the IEP team process.

Basic Concepts Skill Acquisition for Preschools in a Speech and Language Classroom

Researcher: Jayne Jaskolski

Abstract

Research indicates that preschoolers with diagnosed speech and language delays are at risk for future academic challenges (Paul & Smith, 1993). Preschoolers with unresolved speech and language delays will actually be "left behind" before they even begin kindergarten. This study identified and implemented interventions to increase basic concept vocabulary skills for preschoolers with diagnosed speech and language delays who were enrolled in an intensive early childhood speech and language classroom. Each week for 3 months, students participated in daily activities to increase their receptive understanding and expressive use of basic concepts such as colors/shapes, quality/condition and weight/volume. After three months of interventions, students demonstrated a significant increase in both their receptive and expressive basic concept knowledge. Overall, students' had an average 44% increase between their pre- and post-test standard scores. This research demonstrated how intensive basic concept vocabulary interventions can accelerate preschooler learning. The research further demonstrates the need for early childhood speech and language classrooms in order to close the achievement gaps for at-risk preschoolers.

Using Self-Directed, Behavior Management Goal Setting to Improve Learning

Researcher: Tequila S. Kurth

Abstract

The Academic Competence Evaluation Scales (ACES) piloted by Dr. Elliott and Dr. DiPerna (2000) were used in this research to examine the correlation between student behaviors and academic progress. Behavior-related office referrals, teacher and student reports, and student work samples assisted in identifying the selected students for this study. After involving students in behavior management goal setting, and using the ACES scales to evaluate student achievement toward the identified goals, teachers witnessed significant improvements in behaviors. Consequently, students displayed increased attention to lessons, which enhanced overall learning. The implications for this research suggest that when students are intimately involved in the behavior management goal setting process, and when the strategies are implemented with integrity, student learning increases. As large urban school districts continue to face the challenge of closing the achievement gaps, focusing on student-centered goal setting may produce promising results.

Integrating Technology into the Reading Curriculum

Researcher: Susan Mildren

Abstract

Although the National Educational Technology Plan was issued in 2004 as part of *No Child Left Behind*, schools continue to resist integrating technology into the curriculum. This research revealed the many rewards of using software-based literacy instruction with special education students as well as some of the challenges. One of the greatest rewards of computer-based literacy is the students' daily excitement to use the computer and gaining self-motivation for reading. Post-tests showed that large gains were made, especially with word recognition. In a time of accountability and the need to ensure progress for all students, technology offers a multi-sensory approach to learning as well as helping provide individual, differentiated instruction. Administrators and teachers need to place more value on using technology as an instructional tool and allocate appropriate resources for quality software and professional development to help close the achievement gaps that widely exist in large, urban districts.

Closing Achievement Gaps through Mentoring and Networking

Researcher: John Pitta

Abstract

Research indicates that mentoring and networking opportunities in schools can have a positive impact on closing achievement gaps. Coaching athletics has also influenced my beliefs that mentoring and networking; that is, building close personal and professional relationships with students, can help close achievement gaps. This action research investigated how establishing a network to mentor particular 7th grade students, whose grades and referral rates for behavioral issues were not proficient, influenced both their academic performance as well as attendance, honor level performance, office referrals, and overall school climate. The data collected demonstrated that, overall, the participating student's academic performance did improve in terms of both grades received and office referrals. In addition, data collected from both teachers and parents demonstrated that communication about academic work and school involvement in projects or extra-curricular activities also improved. As large urban districts struggle with closing the achievement gap, this fundamental issue related to building relationships with students should be considered as a critical factor.

Developing Mathematical Problem Solving Skills with Bilingual Students

Researcher: Leticia Rico

Abstract

Mathematics achievement gaps exist across the nation and within and between our communities, school district and classrooms. These gaps are most observed through discrepancies in standardized test scores between minority students and their Asian and Caucasian peers. Research shows that children learn mathematics better when instruction is related to real life experiences along with interesting hands-on activities. District research also indicates that many minority students have difficulties with mathematical problem solving skills. Bilingual students encounter an additional problem besides lack of mathematical problem solving skills: the language barrier. This action research investigates how a Four Step Problem Solving Process supports the development of mathematical problem solving skills with fifth grade bilingual students. Real-life mathematical problems reflecting the students' lived experiences were used to help students brainstorm, in both English and Spanish, possible ways to solve math problems. In addition, students used a pen to record and represent their brainstorming and the Four Step Process in a mathematics notebook so they and the teacher would become aware of how their critical thinking developed. While there were differences in students' willingness and ability to use the Four Step Process, the data collected revealed that many fifth grade bilingual students improved their mathematical problem solving skills.