

WEB-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Action Research to Study Homelessness and High Mobility in School Communities: *Summary of Essays* 2005-2006

I. Academic Achievement and Flexible Instructional Strategies

Chapter 1: *Overcoming Barriers to Parent Participation – A Study of the Barriers that Limit Parents of Homeless and Highly Mobile Children from Participating in Their Child’s Education* by Kathy Gansemer, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, (Denver, Colorado)

Studies the barriers that limit parents of homeless and highly mobile children from participating in their child's education. Features research on the importance of parental involvement and issues related to poverty. Tracks and outlines the development of an after-school, homework help group for parents and children. An extensive appendix includes sample of surveys and assessments.

Chapter 2: *An Initiative to Increase Enrollment of Homeless and Highly Mobile Students in Our On-Site After School Homework Help enrichment Class* by Linda Meyer, Lowry Elementary School, (Denver, Colorado)

Examines how social economic issues impact access to resources in school-based settings. Provides chronology of action taken to address barriers and increase participation of homeless and highly mobile students in after school enrichment classes. Includes suggestions on how this work can be replicated in other schools.

Chapter 3: *Assisting with Homework – A Study Focusing on the Completion of Homework with Highly mobile students in a 4th Grade Classroom* by Anna Kluver-Fensler, Lowry Elementary School, (Denver, Colorado)

Tracks the development of a lunchtime, homework help club called “Lunch Bunch.” Examines results and offers reflection on the process.

Chapter 4: *Homework* by Tamara Marocco, Lowry Elementary, (Denver, Colorado)

Explores how to make homework meaningful for students. Includes an examination of the history, purpose and value of homework. Special attention is given to parental involvement and instruction for English Language Learners.

Chapter 5: *What Ways Can I Adjust My Teaching Style to Provide Meaningful Entry Points into Title Math Lab for my Homeless and Highly Mobile Students?* by Tobey Cho Bassoff, Columbine Elementary, (Longmont, Colorado)

An experienced, participatory action researcher tracks her efforts to improve educational instruction and math assessment for English Language Learners in transition. Included are her reflections, frustrations, and successes. Features use of Calendar Math and compliance with the Family Education Rights Protection Act (FERPA.)

Chapter 6: *Homeless and Highly Mobile Students – At Risk Factors and Educational Struggles in Northeastern Colorado* by Pam Watson, Columbine Elementary, (Fort Morgan, Colorado)

Considers the challenges teachers face in balancing standardized reading instruction with student engagement. Includes discussion of risk factors that impact academic achievement of homeless and highly mobile students and offers practical information to enhance educational practices.

To see the complete WBPD report visit: <http://www.schoolengagement.org/index.cfm/2005-2006%20Report>

Chapter 1

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO PARENT PARTICIPATION

By

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Abstract: A study of barriers that limit parents of homeless and highly mobile children from participating in their child's education. Features research on the importance of parental involvement and issues related to poverty. Tracks and outlines the development of an after-school, homework help group for parents and children. An extensive appendix includes samples of surveys and assessments.

Keywords: Academic Achievement, Guidelines for Replication, Homework Help, Language Translation, Parent Involvement, Parent Survey, Poverty, and Transitional Housing

Parent Participation

Now more than ever, schools, teachers and staff have been tasked with increasing the level of parent involvement in their students' education. Schools are being asked to re-evaluate their current policies and approaches to parent participation as well as find new strategies to further build on the educational relationship between parents, children and school.

For teachers already overwhelmed with the responsibilities of meeting the needs of their students, this charge becomes a difficult challenge, especially when trying to promote participation with families who are less likely or less capable of becoming involved for reasons such as homelessness and mobility. These parents have different life circumstances as well as different educational, economic, cultural and social backgrounds from those parents that come from middle-class. With limited knowledge and understanding of the complications that are a reality for many of these families, schools and teachers may be quick to assume or imply that parents are unsupportive or do not value education.

If the mission is to increase parent participation, perhaps schools could elicit parents' perspectives in order to identify and better understand the barriers that limit their

involvement. With a more accurate picture of these obstacles, schools are more likely to find ways to work collaboratively with parents in order to positively impact their students' learning and progress.

What We Know

Years of research tell us that parent involvement in a child's education has a significant impact on his/her educational performance. As indicated by (Henderson and Berla, 1997) "When parents are involved in their children's education at home, they do better in school. And when parents are involved in school, children go farther in school and the schools they go to are better." When parents participate in their children's education: (Funkhouser, Gonzales, Moles, 1997)

- Grades and tests scores improve
- Attendance is more regular
- More homework is completed
- Children demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors
- Drop out rates decrease
- Children are more likely to enroll in higher education

Many individuals have studied various levels of parent participation, however the most often implemented strategies of increasing involvement are those designed by Professor Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center for Family, School and Community Partnerships at John Hopkins University. Epstein's six types of involvement include: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with the Community (Elbaum, 2003).

With recent legislative initiatives, parent participation in their children's education is being made a priority in our nation's schools. Reported by (Elbaum, 2003), much literature suggests that there is a correlation between parent involvement and student outcome, yet there are limited studies that link specific types of involvement to specific types of student outcomes. Nevertheless, many districts and schools are going to great lengths to promote parent involvement in many ways. Even though most schools and parents support the movement to

increase parent involvement as a solution to raising academic achievement and attendance, it is not always as easy as it may seem, especially for economically disadvantaged children.

While we know what research tells us about the correlation between parent involvement and the academic performance of children, we also know what research says of the educational challenges Homeless and Highly Mobile children encounter in school everyday.

By the time Homeless and Highly Mobile children enter school, homelessness has already affected their social-emotional, physical, and academic lives (Hart-Shegos, 1999). They are already behind and needing to play “catch up” with peers who are coming from a stable home environment.

One third of homeless children have at least one major mental health disorder and nearly half (47%) suffer from anxiety, depression, or withdrawal, compared to 18% of other school-age children. Additionally, the stress of homelessness makes it difficult for children to adjust and can cause poor self-esteem, insecurity, aggression and other behavior problems (The Better Homes Fund, 1999).

Another area that impacts a child’s development is poor physical health. Homeless children typically have more health problems than poor children who have housing (Wood, 1989; Wood, 1990; Family Housing Fund, 1999). Homeless children are more likely to experience chronic health problems, yet they lack access to regular health care. In addition, the inadequate nutrition that is so common amongst homeless children only adds to a child’s poor health (Hart-Shegos, 1999).

The academic performance of homeless children is compromised by both poor cognitive development and circumstances of their homelessness at a rate of four times that of other children (Molhar, 1990). The average homeless child moves as many as three times in a year and attends three, and sometimes more, different schools during a single year (Hart-Shegos, 1999). Homeless children are four times more likely than other children to score below the 10th percentile in receptive vocabulary and reading. Seventy five percent of homeless children score below grade level in reading; 72% score below grade level in spelling and 54% score below grade level in math (Parker, 1991; The Better Homes Fund, 1999). More homeless

children are in need of special education services but are less likely to receive such services than other children (Hart-Shegos, 1999). Additionally, homeless children are more likely to be held back as a result of poor academic performance or due to their homeless situation including absenteeism and mobility (Sandel, 1999).

Identifying and Addressing Barriers

Although Homeless and Highly Mobile children face what seems an impossible journey, with appropriate intervention, children can overcome the impact of homelessness. According to a study by the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), some homeless children have been able to succeed academically. Through this study, CURA found that parents generally are "quite concerned about their children and value education as the most important need of their children beyond the survival basics of shelter, food and clothing." (Masten and Sesma, 1999). Additionally, when CURA looked at what contributed to this success, they found:

- parental closeness with their children and involvement in their children's education;
- high quality relationships with teachers in special intervention support programs;
- one-to-one relationships between tutors and children;
- relationships with competent and caring adults (Masten and Sesma, 1999).

CURA also noted that if these interventions are to be successful, parents must be given the opportunity to receive the necessary support. They must be given long term, stable housing with ongoing support services from program providers, schools and the community. Children, too, must be given support. It is vital that schools and communities work together to provide opportunities for children to develop meaningful relationships that foster resiliency. In *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Ruby Payne reminds us that the two things that help one move out of poverty are: education and relationships. (Payne, 1998)

Again, it must be noted that involving parents in their children's education and school is a very challenging task. Even if stable housing and basic support services have been put in place, families are still confronted with barriers that will restrict their participation on a daily basis. These barriers may come in many forms. For example, parents may be facing logistical

barriers such as time, money and child care (Sosa, 1997). It may also be possible that parents have had a negative experience in school as a child. Another barrier might be that they might have had little formal education themselves and feel unqualified to contribute. Yet another issue that is often overlooked is the differences in culture and language.

Whatever the circumstance, it is important to offer parents an opportunity to identify and recognize the barriers that keep them from fully participating in their children's education and to then assist them in addressing these obstacles in a way that will enhance the relationship between the school, the parent and the child.

Situation and Context of Study

If schools have been unsuccessful in raising the level of parent participation with Homeless and Highly Mobile children, then a good starting place to initiate change may be to ask: *“Whether, and to what extent do barriers limit parents of Homeless and Highly Mobile children from participating in their child's education?”*

The purpose of this study was to identify the barriers that limit parents of Homeless and Highly Mobile children from participating in their child's education and to then work collectively with the schools, community and parents to address them. The intent of this study was to encourage parent participation in order to increase attendance and academic performance of Homeless and Highly Mobile children.

This study was conducted with parents of Homeless and Highly Mobile children who currently live in two separate transitional housing programs and who attend Lowry Elementary in the Denver Public School District in Denver, Colorado. According to the HUD definition of homelessness, the term “homelessness” includes a person residing in an emergency shelter, transitional housing or other supportive programs (HUD, 2004). A methodology of Participatory Action Research, using a mixed methodological design for data collection and analysis was used with the participants of this research group.

The Lowry neighborhood of Denver has been undergoing a rapid transition. The Lowry community has recently established large tracts of high-end residential housing and a retail area. Yet preceding all this development, as well as the establishment of Lowry Elementary itself, there was, and still is an established housing area for low-income and homeless families. Within this affordable housing area are two transitional housing programs which provide families two years of rental assistance, case management and supportive services.

As of April 2006, there were 407 students enrolled in the Lowry Elementary School. Of those students, 48% were on free or reduced lunch. Approximately 16% of the student population currently lives in the area where the transitional housing programs are located. Since the beginning of the school year, 27 children have left Lowry Elementary. Sixty-seven percent of those who left have done so due to circumstances of their homelessness. (Denver Public Schools, 2006)

In effort to provide a learning environment that would promote educational success for children living in transitional housing, Lowry Elementary began looking specifically at the three domains that schools can implement in order to better serve homeless and highly mobile children (James, 2004). Dr. James reports that by providing better access to educational services, a welcoming school culture and flexible instructional strategies, Homeless and Highly Mobile children are more likely to experience academic success.

With these domains in mind, came the question of how to increase parent participation with the children living in transitional housing. According to the Principal at Lowry Elementary, teachers report that parents of children living in transitional housing are less likely than parents of other children attending Lowry Elementary to attend parent teacher conferences and school activities. She also reports that they are less likely to volunteer, participate in parent organizations and assist children with their homework (Riedlin, 2005). This concern prompted the staff at Lowry Elementary to take a look at school, family and community barriers that deter parents from becoming more involved and to find strategies that would result in successful experiences for parents and children.

Gathering Data

This study was conducted by the Children's Services Coordinator at the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless who assisted parents in identifying barriers to parent participation. Participants in the study included parents and in some cases extended family members of children living in transitional housing. The research began by creating and asking parents from the transitional housing program to partake in a survey about school participation. The purpose of this survey was to gather information about the importance of participation in a child's education, the ways to participate and the obstacles that limited their involvement.

Soon after the survey was distributed, it was quickly realized that the survey had been written from a middle-class point of view without any consideration of how this view of participation could significantly differ from the view of a person in poverty. In *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Ruby Payne tells us that resources of students and adults should be analyzed before dispensing advice or seeking solutions to the situation. She goes on to say, "What may seem to be very workable suggestions from a middle-class point of view may be virtually impossible given the resources available to those in poverty" (Payne, 1998).

With this in mind, the research took a step back and solicited a definition of "Parent Participation" from teachers, parents in the transitional housing program as well as community members. The results were then compared. Overall the definitions were uniform, and all were in agreement that "involvement with homework" was one of the most important ways a parent could participate in his/her child's education.

Data collected from the survey demonstrated consistency among participants. Of the 19 surveys that were returned, all agreed that participation in a child's education is important and that participation would improve a child's attendance and performance. When asked how parents could participate in a child's education, the ways most often stated were:

- Reading at home
- Helping with homework
- Attending parent/teacher conferences and school events

All parents indicated that they participate in their child's education. Seventy four percent felt they participated often while 26% felt they participated sometimes. Nearly all parents stated that they wished they were able to participate more often. When asked what it was that limited participation in their child's education, the most often stated reasons were:

- Work schedules
- Stress and health
- Time management and lack of time
- Child care and transportation

For the second cycle of the research, parents from the transitional housing program were invited to participate in a focus group to continue a discussion about parent participation. The focus group included a total of 8 participants. Five additional participants who were unable to attend shared their input by partaking in individual interviews. The focus group was facilitated by two service providers from the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless. All participants in the group were currently working, or had in the recent past worked directly with both service providers. This familiarity paired with the informal setting gave parents a place where they could engage in a discussion while feeling safe and knowing that their input was valued.

The goals of the group were to first discuss the results of the survey and then identify any additional barriers that had not been mentioned on the survey. The next step was to address those barriers by creating a plan that would overcome the identified obstacles. The plan was to involve eliciting support from parents, the school and the community. They were told that this plan would be implemented and then later be evaluated to determine if the objectives of the plan had been met.

The group began by reviewing the results of the survey. The discussion then moved into the parents' definition of parent participation. Parents defined participation at various levels, yet throughout the discussion, parents regularly directed the conversation back to helping with homework as the most important way they could participate in their child's education. Parents reported that they felt unsure how to help their children with homework. They stated that the homework was unclear and that much of the work was done differently from when they were

in school. They reported that their own level of education and learning styles made it difficult to assist their children with the work. They were reluctant to admit to their children that they did not know the answers or how to do the work. Many felt that trying to help with homework would only lead to conflict between them and their children. With tremendous guilt, parents stated that at times it seemed easier to just give up. According to the families where language differences were barriers, these challenges were then multiplied.

From here, the group went on to discuss some of the logistical barriers previously mentioned. They talked about how those barriers not only interfered with homework but how they impacted their overall participation in the child's education. They discussed responsibilities outside the home such as work, meetings and appointments. They also talked about responsibilities inside the home such as caring for other children, cooking, cleaning and doing laundry. Some parents mentioned problems with time management and a lack of routine while others spoke of stress and health issues.

The next goal for the group was to create a plan that would address the identified barriers. In effort to build a successful partnership, the group was asked to involve parents, schools and community in their plan. With little hesitation, the parents quickly designed a project they felt would give them the support they would need to become positively involved in their children's education. The parents requested an opportunity for a Parent/Child Homework Group. Although appreciative of previous homework clubs for the kids, the parents envisioned this group in a different way. They wanted a place where they could work with their children and have the support of a teacher/volunteer. As one parent put it, "We don't want someone to help our children. We want someone to show us how to help our children."

Parents explained that an ideal Parent/Child Homework Group would provide a place where parents and children could come together to work on homework with the support of a teacher or volunteer who understood the work and would be available to assist whenever they had questions or needed help. They also asked that time, location and transportation be taken into consideration. They requested a translator for parents with language differences. They expressed the need for "one point of contact" at school, someone who would be available to answer questions regarding expectations of homework and assignments. They stated that

school supplies and materials would be helpful. They also asked that the need to provide child care for younger siblings be taken into consideration.

With a commitment from the parents, and the help of both the school and the community, parents felt strongly that they could overcome some of the barriers they had been experiencing with homework. They suggested that each group assume the following responsibilities:

Parents

- Show up for the homework group
- Participate
- Ask for help
- Communicate with school
- Encourage other parents to participate
- Assist with organizing the group

School

- Send work home with easy to understand directions and teaching “hints”
- Follow up with parents regarding results of homework
- Provide letters, notes and assignments in Spanish consistently
- Use interpreter to contact parents when necessary
- Assign one teacher or school staff as a “point of contact” for questions and concerns

Community

- Coordinate Parent/Child Homework Group including space, schedules and transportation
- Recruit teachers and/or volunteers, translators, and child care
- Coordinate with school staff
- Provide supplies and materials
- Arrange for child care
- Seek grant and funding opportunities
- Advocate

Action Taken

Using the plan created by the parents in the focus group, the Children's Service Coordinator set up a pilot project to implement a Parent/Child Homework Group. Anybody who took part in the surveys, interviews or the focus group was invited to participate in the homework group. All parents were contacted by phone, note or by home visit to inform them of the homework group and to ask for input regarding time, how often the group should meet, a name for the group, etc. Parents were later sent personal invitations to participate in the group. The week before the homework group was to begin, a final note was sent as a reminder. All communication to parents was done in both English and Spanish, and phone calls and home visits were made with a translator.

The homework group was held at two different Lowry Transitional Housing sites. The group met in the on-site community room three evenings each week (two nights at one site and one night at the other) from 5:30 until 6:30. They met for a total of six weeks. Staff from the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless and volunteers from the community offered support by mentoring parents and children as they collaborated on their children's assignments and school projects. Staff and parents volunteered to assist with translating for non-English speakers when necessary. A Middle School student, working on a Community Service Project provided child care for younger siblings. Materials and supplies were donated by churches and businesses. With additional funding through a grant and help from the parents, the program was able to provide dinner every evening.

Results

The homework group consisted of a total of 30 participants. This included parents, grandparents, extended family members and students, all of who participated to various degrees. Although the research applied only to those families who participated in the original surveys, focus group and interviews, there were several other families who showed interest in the group. Space permitting, these families and students were invited to attend the homework group.

Ten Transitional Housing families were enrolled in the project, a total of 12 children from Lowry Elementary. Additionally, 7 siblings from other schools were enrolled. On average, the

children attended 84% of the time and the parents attended 73% of the time. Although rare, children would sometimes attend the homework group unaccompanied by a parent when said parent was working late.

As families enrolled in the homework group, a Pre-Questionnaire regarding homework barriers was given to the parent. At the end of the 6 week project, a Post-Questionnaire was administered to determine if and to what extent the homework barriers had been reduced. According to the results of the Post-Questionnaires, nearly all homework barriers identified by parents in the Pre-Questionnaire were reduced. (Table 1) The only barrier that did not indicate a decrease was “My child is given too much homework”. In the Pre-Questionnaire, 30% of the parents agreed that their child was given too much homework while the Post-Questionnaire indicated that 43% of the parents agreed their child was given too much homework. During the homework group, parents often commented on the large amount of homework assigned to their children. Given these comments along with the questionnaire results, a dialogue with parents may have been able to shed some light on why their attitudes shifted. It is possible that it wasn’t until parents began to assist their children with homework that they realized just how much homework their children were given.

Following the Pre and Post Questionnaires, parents were given the opportunity to provide feedback about the group. They were encouraged to comment on “what worked” and “what could change”. The overall response was positive, and they requested that the Parent/Child Homework Group continue when school was back in session in the fall. According to parents, the homework group gave parents the support they needed, but had never had before, to help their children. They also stated that the collaboration between parent and child encouraged both to work hard and also had a positive effect on their self-esteem. Spanish speaking parents reported that the support of a volunteer able to translate assignment directions made a tremendous difference in their understanding and ability to help their children.

In addition to the positive responses, parents offered feedback that they felt would make the group even more successful. Several parents suggested that more families and children become involved. They pointed out that everyone could use the help, and that it was important to not “single out” Transitional Housing families. Parents added that they would like to see

more teachers and volunteers involved, because the one-on-one assistance was especially helpful. Although they were aware of the difficulty of the proposition, many commented that having a teacher from Lowry Elementary present would be very valuable. Finally, parents emphasized the importance of committing to the program. Many agreed strongly that if they were given the support they needed, it was then their responsibility to make a commitment to their children in order to assure their success in school.

Conclusion

A better understanding of the difficulties faced by Homeless and Highly Mobile families was gained when parents living in Transitional Housing were given the opportunity to share the barriers that limited parent participation in the education of their children. The Parent/Child Homework Group was a program designed, developed and implemented with the involvement of parents. Involving them in the process helped to maximize their strengths and empower them to make decisions based on what they themselves identified as their needs. With the additional support of the school and the community, they were able to break down barriers and move toward meaningful participation in their children's education. Given the opportunity, parents can and will contribute to their children's learning and achievement.

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Appendix A -Parent/Child Homework Group: A step by step guide to replicating a homework project with parent, schools and the community

What is the importance of parent participation in a child's education?

“When parents are involved in their children’s education at home, they do better in school. And when parents are involved in school, children go farther in school and the schools they go to are better.” (Henderson and Berla, 1997)

What is a Parent/Child Homework Group and how is it different from other homework groups?

Often “homework help” groups or clubs consists of a group of children and an individual who has had teacher training and who guides children through the steps necessary to complete an assignment.

Some parents have defined a Parent/Child Homework Group as a place where parents and children come together to work on homework in a place where an individual who has had teacher training is available to offer support by mentoring parents and children as they collaborate on their children’s assignments and school projects.

What is the goal of a Parent/Child Homework Group?

The goal of Parent/Child Homework Group is to remove the barriers that limit parents from participating in their child's education and to work collectively with the schools and the community to find strategies that would result in successful experiences for parents and children as well as promote educational success.

Who should be involved in a Parent/Child Homework Group?

It is vital that parents, schools and communities work together to promote educational success. However, a Parent/Child Homework Group that is developed with the involvement of parents in the process maximizes a parents’ strengths and empowers them to make decisions based on what they themselves identify as the needs. With the additional support of the school and the community, parents are better able to break down barriers and move toward meaningful participation in their children’s education.

Steps to organizing a Parent/Child Homework Group

Step 1

Organize a Pre-planning Meeting

Send out invitations and/or “save the date” cards to parents, schools, teachers and community members (service providers, volunteers, educational training programs etc.) to begin the planning of the Parent/Child Homework Group. Because of different life circumstances, be sensitive to dates, times and locations and be sure to reinforce original invitations with additional reminder calls or notes. Provide additional support to assure attendance (translators, written materials in both English and other languages if needed, transportation, child care). When possible obtain help from any involved service providers/case managers when reaching out to parents. Make certain you have recruited parents and participants from the school and from the community.

Step 2

Pre-planning Stage

The purpose of the pre-planning stage is to gather information and ideas about the Parent/Child Homework Group and to begin the planning process for organizing the homework group. This is a good time to ask parents about the barriers they experience with homework as well as their needs and ideas of how to address those concerns. Begin by talking about the purpose of the Parent/Child Homework Group and then the goals of the meeting. Discuss the roles of each participant and how he/she will be involved in the process. The following is an example of Roles and Responsibilities written by parents of a previous group:

Parents

- Show up for the homework group
- Participate
- Ask for help
- Communicate with school
- Encourage other parents to participate
- Assist with organizing the group

School

- Send work home with easy to understand directions and teaching “hints”

- Follow up with parents regarding results of homework
- Provide letters, notes and assignments in Spanish consistently
- Use interpreter to contact parents when necessary
- Assign one teacher or school staff as a “point of contact” for questions and concerns
- Volunteer as a teacher for the Parent/Child Homework Group

Community

- Coordinate Parent/Child Homework Group including space, schedules and transportation
- Recruit teachers as well as volunteers and translators
- Provide child care
- Coordinate with school staff
- Provide supplies and materials
- Arrange for child care
- Seek grant and funding opportunities
- Advocate

Although no decisions need to be made at this time, begin a discussion of what the needs are, who will be involved, where, when and how often the group will take place, how the group will look, and what support is needed to make the group successful, such as child care, transportation, volunteers, teachers, materials and supplies, resources, food/snacks, etc. Ask for a volunteer(s) or designate an individual(s) from each group (parent, school, community) to coordinate and participate in the ongoing planning. Ask those coordinators to begin outlining details and prepare to start making decisions regarding the implementation of the homework group. Set a date, location, time, etc. for the next meeting. Send out minutes from the meeting and reminder notes about the upcoming meeting. Be sure to continue inviting anyone who has shown an interest in participating. Again, provide necessary support to encourage attendance. As Lead Coordinator, always be available for questions, ideas and assistance.

Step 3

Ongoing Planning Stage

At this stage of planning, review details outlined by group coordinators. Begin making decisions regarding specifics about the group. Discuss services still needing to be put in place.

Problem solve areas of concern. Develop “to do” lists and assign responsibilities. At this point you should be prepared to make decisions about location, days, time, length of sessions, number of participants, who and what ages, and enrollment. You should have ideas of how you will address the need for additional support such as child care, materials, transportation, food/snacks etc. Most importantly, you must initiate a plan for bringing in teachers, volunteers and translators who are willing to commit to the Parent/Child Homework Group. Additionally, there needs to be some thought given to coordinating and maintaining ongoing communication with the schools and the community regarding the project. Set a date, location, time, etc. for next meeting. Send out minutes from the meeting and reminder notes about the upcoming meeting. Be sure to continue inviting anyone who has shown an interest in participation. Again, provide the necessary support to encourage attendance. Over the coming week(s), the Lead Coordinator should assist with organizing final details of the homework group and assure that the planning group is prepared to discuss implementation by the next meeting.

Step 4

Final Planning Stage

Review all details involving implementation. Problem solve areas of concern and assign any last minute responsibilities. Either at this meeting or at another time you may consider inviting all teachers, volunteers, community members and support help for a training or an orientation.

Step 5

Follow Up

At different points throughout the year or at the end of a cycle, it is recommended that follow up meetings be held with all participants including the children. This follow up will help to determine if the homework barriers have been reduced and if parent participation has increased. It will also help determine if and to what extent children have experienced academic success. Additionally, parents, schools and the community will have an opportunity to provide feedback about “what worked” and “what could change” as well as how to make the group more successful.

Recommendations

- Involve parents in the entire process of developing the program
- Use parent's expertise (translating, homework assistance, child care, food prep)
- Include extended family members (grandparents, aunts, uncles, step-parents, etc.)
- Provide translator and translate all written material into appropriate language
- Recruit teachers from teacher training colleges
- Recruit interns
- Recruit volunteers from churches
- Consider necessary background checks on all volunteers
- Involve teachers from the school
- Communicate regularly with the school re: curriculum, homework packets, homework policies, etc.
- Request a "point of contact" at each school
- Get parents to sign necessary Releases of Information
- Gather materials and resources
- Maintain attendance records
- Maintain communication with parents
- Communicate with involved Service Providers
- Provide ongoing outreach to uninvolved parents/families (notes, phone calls, home visits)
- Provide child care
- Provide transportation
- Provide snacks/dinner
- Use incentives

Appendix B - SURVEY: SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

Date: _____

My youngest school age child attends:

Lowry Elem Another Elem Middle School High School

Is parent participation in a child's education important?

Yes No Unsure

Do you believe that parent participation improves a child's attendance and performance?

Yes No Unsure

Which of the following do you think are ways for a parent to participate in a child's education?
(please check all that apply)

- Help with homework at home
- Read with my child at home
- Play games at home with my child
- Volunteer in school and classroom
- Go to parent/teacher conferences
- Attend school events (Back to School Night, field trips, evening events, parties, etc.)
- Communicate with teachers and principal (phone, visits, notes)
- Attend Individualized Education Plan meetings
- Involvement in Parent Teacher Organization, parent councils, parent committees
- Other: _____

Do you participate in your child's education?

Yes No

If yes, how much do you participate in your child/children's education?

Often Sometimes Rarely Never

What keeps you or limits you from participating in your child/children's education? (please check all that apply)

- Not my responsibility
- Not interested
- Language
- No books, games or school supplies at home
- Health issues
- No time
- Transportation
- Uncomfortable at school; feel judged and not welcomed by staff and other parents
- Work schedule
- Stress
- Child care
- Unaware of events and meetings
- Other: _____

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey

Appendix C - Individual Interviews

Individual Interview: Parent Participation

Date:

ID Number:

Interviewed By:

What is your definition of “Parent Participation” in your child’s education?

A previous survey showed that the majority of parents believe participation in a child’s education is important and agree that it improves attendance and school performance. It also showed that the majority of parents felt they participated in their child’s education.

Comment:

The survey indicated that the 3 most often stated ways to participate are: read to your child, help with homework, and attend parent/teacher conferences.

Would you agree and why?

Is there anything else you would add and what?

Comments and discussion:

A previous survey indicated that the 3-4 most often stated barriers that limit participation are: work schedules, stress, time and health.

Would you agree and why?

Is there anything else you would add and what?

Comments and discussion:

The above stated barriers might be considered “logistical” barriers. Can you think of any other barriers (cultural, attitudinal)? What are they and how do they limit participation?

What could make participation easier or better?

How can we make these changes?

What would the responsibility of the parent, the school and the community be in making the changes?

Is there anything else that comes to mind?

Ideas and Suggestions:

Appendix D – Pre and Post Questionnaires

Homework Barriers - Pre-Questionnaire

Date:

Initials:

Lowry Elem _____ Other _____ Both _____

1. Not having enough space and supplies makes it difficult to help my child with homework.
_____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Does not apply

2. My responsibilities outside the home (example: work, TANF appointments, job search, medical appointments, etc) make it difficult to help my child with homework.
___ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Does not apply

3. My responsibilities inside the home (care for other children, cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc) make it difficult to help my child with homework.
___ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Does not apply

4. My health makes it difficult to help my child with homework.
___ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Does not apply

5. Having more than one child in school makes it difficult to help my child with homework.
___ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Does not apply

6. My child/ren is given too much homework.
_____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Does not apply

7. Language differences make it difficult to help my child with homework.
___ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Does not apply

8. I'm not sure how to get help when I'm not able to help my child with homework.
___ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Does not apply

9. I feel frustrated when I can't help my child with homework.
___ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Does not apply

10. Not understanding homework assignments and directions make it difficult for me to help my child with homework.
___ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Does not apply

Comments:

Homework Barriers - Post-Questionnaire

Date:

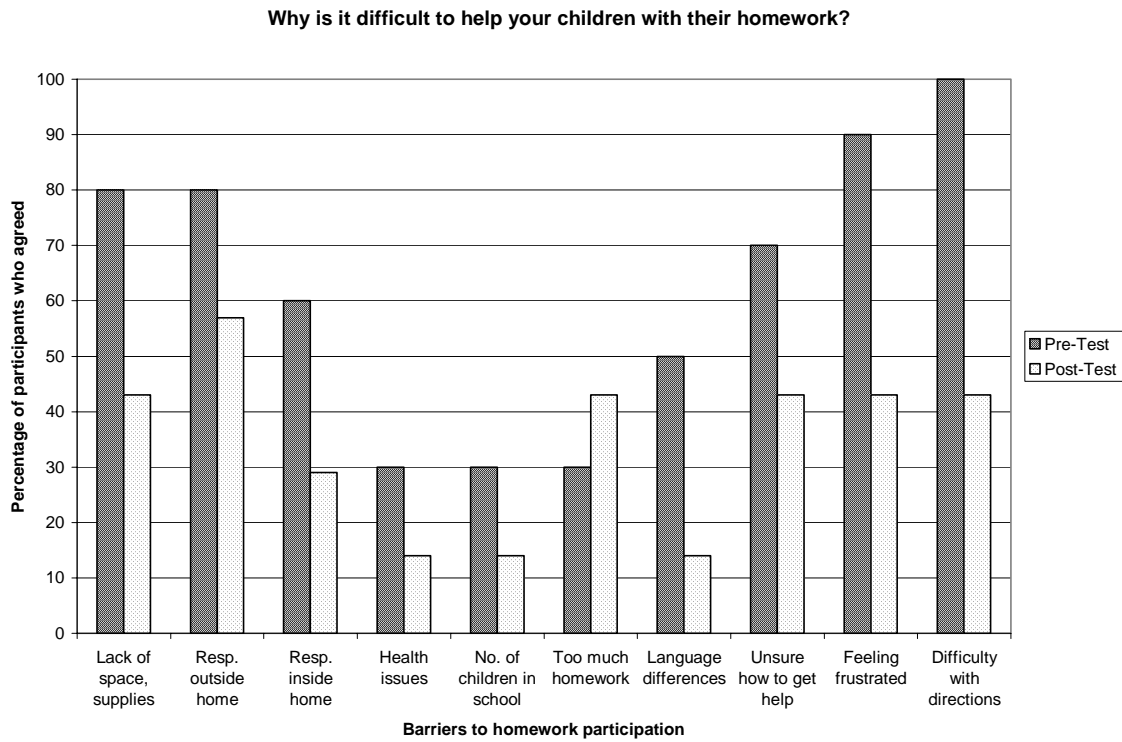
Initials:

Lowry Elem _____ Other _____ Both _____

1. Not having enough space and supplies makes it difficult to help my child with homework.
_____Agree _____ Disagree _____Does not apply
2. My responsibilities outside the home (example: work, TANF appointments, job search, medical appointments, etc) make it difficult to help my child with homework.
___Agree _____ Disagree _____Does not apply
3. My responsibilities inside the home (care for other children, cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc) make it difficult to help my child with homework.
___Agree _____ Disagree _____Does not apply
4. My health makes it difficult to help my child with homework.
___Agree _____ Disagree _____Does not apply
5. Having more than one child in school makes it difficult to help my child with homework.
___Agree _____ Disagree _____Does not apply
6. My child/ren is given too much homework.
_____Agree _____ Disagree _____Does not apply
7. Language differences make it difficult to help my child with homework.
___Agree _____ Disagree _____Does not apply
8. I'm not sure how to get help when I'm not able to help my child with homework.
___Agree _____ Disagree _____Does not apply
9. I feel frustrated when I can't help my child with homework.
___Agree _____ Disagree _____Does not apply
10. Not understanding homework assignments and directions make it difficult for me to help my child with homework.
___Agree _____ Disagree _____Does not apply
11. Parent/Child homework group has reduced some of the barriers to helping my child with homework. Yes _____ No _____
12. I would like Parent/Child homework to continue. Yes _____ No _____

Comments:

Appendix E - Homework Barriers Chart



Chapter 2

AN INITIATIVE TO INCREASE ENROLLMENT OF HOMELESS/HIGHLY MOBILE STUDENTS IN ON-SITE AFTER SCHOOL HOMEWORK HELP ENRICHMENT CLASS

By

Linda Meyer

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Abstract: Examines how social economic issues impact access to resources in school-based settings. Provides chronology of action taken to address barriers and increase participation of homeless and highly mobile students in after school enrichment classes. Includes suggestions on how this work can be replicated in other schools.

Keywords: Access to Resources, After School, Elementary School, Guidelines for Replication, Homework Help, Poverty, and Welcoming School Culture

Introduction

I teach second grade at Lowry Elementary in Denver, Colorado. Lowry is named after Lieutenant Francis B. Lowry, the first airman from Denver to die in World War II. Our school was built and opened in 2002 on the former Lowry Air Force Base. The 1700-acre property is being redeveloped into a mixed-use community. Their motto is “Live. Learn. Work. Play.” The Lowry Redevelopment Authority is committed to developing a high quality, diverse community. This commitment includes the provision of a full range of housing, from transitional and entry-level homes to luxury custom homes. The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless manages two mixed-income apartment communities in two areas of Lowry. Seventy units will provide transitional housing for formerly homeless families, and 142 units will provide affordable housing for working families (www.lowry.org.) Coincidentally (more like luckily) I also live in Lowry community.

During my first three years at Lowry Elementary, I became increasingly intrigued with the challenges of our homeless/highly mobile students because of their chaotic lifestyle. The concept had looked great on paper – to integrate homeless/highly mobile students with the

more affluent, stable neighborhood students. However, there were some clear differences of the “haves” and “have nots” families and their students. Even though our school made conscious efforts to make the differences invisible at school, the integration didn’t permeate much beyond the school walls. The “haves” tried to cross the boundaries but didn’t understand the fragile plight of the homeless/highly mobile. The “have nots” didn’t have the resources, the social register and sometimes motivation to associate with the others. “In the shadows of poverty, off the highways of prosperity, the distance from aspiration to achievement is strewn with social policies and obstacles whose number, intensity, and complexity is disheartening and debilitating.” (Cooper) I wanted to do something to improve the situation and blur the lines that were starting to be drawn in the sand.

When my principal first shared the idea of this project, Web Based Professional Development (WBPD) to study the effect of homelessness on elementary schoolchildren, I was quite excited. This was an opportunity to better understand the dilemma of homelessness and education and be able to create some solutions for the students and their families in our school. When Lowry Elementary was accepted into the WBPD, we thought we were going to do a group project all together. However, it quickly became clear that we would each do our own project, thus allowing each of us to follow/pursue our individual passion. We met on a regular basis to discuss our thoughts and ideas. It was very helpful to have such a group so we could brainstorm and problem-solve together. Other researchers did not have this advantage to the extent that we did. In the absence of an on-site group, the on-line chats and discussions are invaluable for checking in, seeing if you’re on the right track, bouncing around ideas or just sharing insights.

There seemed to be so many areas for us to fix from feeding and clothing students, to improving their living situations to more realistic education-based solutions such as, assisting with school supplies, making enrollment easier and integrating them into the school culture. Certainly, fund-raising was a common theme. Most of our ideas had a common theme of giving tangible items to our students and their families. However, referring to the old saying, “Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime,” we didn’t want to just alleviate a short-term problem but help them be more self-sufficient.

In September 2005, I attended a local conference on Homelessness. Here, we were introduced to the works of Ruby Payne as well as the hidden languages of the different socio-economic classes in the United States. This was particularly eye-opening, because, as middle-class citizens, we like to think that the lines between the classes aren't so distinct and that simply by being Americans, we can achieve our dreams. But, this new information clarified the distinct differences, the challenges within each class and the challenges of attempting to change (usually improve) classes.

Cycle One

After the first several months of meetings and the learning curve about the problems affecting homeless/highly mobile students, we were pressed into duty to decide on a project. Our school had a newly formed After School Enrichment Program of activities that were tuition based and run by our Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). The first year of the program had gone well but was definitely more heavily attended by our more affluent neighborhood students even though transportation was provided. We also have the luxury of being part of a brand new community that includes many businesses. Since we were all new to the area, it seemed that these businesses had not yet been "tapped" to contribute time/funds to schools.

My first idea for a project, I wanted to foster a relationship to solicit funds from our community business partners and the student body could either now or later contribute to the businesses either via community service or long-term gainful employment skills. The funds would be used to supplement our Enrichment program so that more of our homeless/highly mobile students could take classes. As Eric Cooper quoted Ronald Edmonds, "...declaration is clear: If the child's education is important enough to us as a local community or entire nation, then we will find a way to educate that child."

The classes vary from Spanish, karate, theater, science, golf, yoga and Homework Help. We have three sessions each year – Fall, Winter and Spring. Each session lasts six weeks with the exception of the spring session which is five weeks long. The registration forms are sent home in each student's Thursday Folder and has been translated into Spanish this year. Families are given approximately two weeks to return their forms. Enrollment in the classes was first come/first served. But when we received more requests than spaces available, we

started a lottery system to ensure equity. Many of our homeless/highly mobile parents are not in the building very often, making it difficult to return the registration forms themselves. They have to rely on their students who are often forgetful or not organized to remember details and turn in paperwork. The Homework Help class is the only one which meets twice a week and is taught by Lowry teachers. This helps to provide quality and continuity as the teachers communicate with their peers about homework assignments and expectations.

In discussing with my team my project of raising funds from our community business partners to bolster our Enrichment program, they were appropriately encouraging but a little less than optimistic. I was excited about the prospect of “marketing” to our local business neighbors and starting a working relationship with them. However, I was concerned that I would be met with polite declines and/or that the funds wouldn’t be available in time for our project and/or current Enrichment program. Another concern was that my first interaction with these businesses was going to be asking for money, which I felt might put them on the defensive right away. I decided this idea was not a good one for now. There was too much to do in too short a time frame.

Cycle Two

During this same discussion, the specific topic of Homework Help class came up. We all agreed that many of our homeless/highly mobile students weren’t partaking in this valuable resource. In conjunction with the other projects, I decided to switch my project to increasing the participation in Homework Help class amongst the homeless/highly mobile student population.

Cycle Three

To start this new process, I decided to meet with several key people involved in the Enrichment Program – our principal, PTO chairperson, Enrichment coordinator, previous Enrichment coordinator and our Homeless Liaison Social Worker. We met to discuss the issues and objectives and identified the following enhancements to our Program for the purpose of increasing enrollment of our homeless/highly mobile students:

- nominations by teachers
- passive enrollment (parents/guardians sign only to decline enrollment)

- clarify qualifications for scholarships
- more user-friendly enrollment/scholarship form
- inclusion of snacks
- anything else to contribute to the goal.

We met the end of January 2006 and had a lengthy and lively discussion. Due to personal investment in the Program, we had to discuss the history of the Program's development so that everybody could better understand how it evolved and its Mission. As with many volunteer-run organizations, there were some personal territory issues as well as financial issues to consider in the process of revamping the Program. This process consumed more time/energy than I had anticipated. However, quickly realizing how vital this process was, I relaxed the agenda to accommodate this critical aspect. Apparently there was concern that the Program would be drastically changed and that it would impact other funding. We concluded that was not the case.

My biggest concern was to increase awareness of our Homework Help class and reduce barriers for homeless/highly mobile students to participate. Through our discussion, it became apparent that the information as well as the format was very confusing and thus itself, the barrier. We eliminated the aspects that we couldn't change due to logistics or confidentiality – snacks and automatic scholarship qualification based on free/reduced lunch status.

Discussion

After several meetings with the group and individuals, we were able to make several adjustments to the Program. We streamlined the enrollment form from a two-part document to one-part. This was rushed due to a deadline before Spring Break. The revised Spring edition went home with students two weeks before Spring Break so students could return their registrations and start the Program the first week after we got back. Our Social Worker agreed to be a point person to facilitate registration of her clients (homeless/highly mobile students) stating that many of the parents shared frustration in this process. Her assistance was instrumental and pivotal in increasing their enrollment. She would accept nominations from teachers then contact the family and caseworker to discuss enrollment. Parents/guardians seemed more open to this approach than having teachers contact them,

perhaps because the Social Worker was familiar with their casual register (Payne). If the parents/guardians agreed to enroll their child, then the Social Worker would assist them in completing the registration including dietary restrictions, emergency contact information and transportation arrangements (as most of these students relied on the school bus for daily transportation). She would then return the registration forms to the Coordinator for enrollment and to be included in the lottery process, if needed. All teachers were advised of these procedural enhancements and encouraged to nominate students for Homework Help.

Conclusions

Comparing statistics for the winter 2006 Homework Help Enrichment sessions to the spring 2006 sessions, we experienced significant increase in enrollment of our homeless/highly mobile students as evidenced by the percentage of scholarships awarded. These results are:

Winter Session

Monday - 57% of 14 students received scholarships

Thursday - 50% of 8 students received scholarships

Winter total - 56% of the 22 students received scholarships

Spring Session

Monday - 67% of 12 students received scholarships

Tuesday - 93% of 14 students received scholarships

Spring total - 80% of the 26 students received scholarships

Overall, this represents a 24% increase!

Mayor John Hickenlooper, Denver, has recently launched the Commission to End Homelessness. One of the plan's eight objectives states, "Raise community awareness and create a regional response to homelessness." To this end, my project helped raise community awareness and created a local response to affect homelessness in our Lowry Elementary community

Recommended Step by Step Process

Step One: If your school doesn't already have an after-school enrichment program, consult your principal, governing board and/or PTO/PTA to get one started.

Step Two: If you don't have funds readily available, make a plan for fundraising. In the meantime, there are many grants available including "Lights On After School."

Step Three: Secure instructors. Using our own teachers was ideal due to their knowledge of the school system, students and curriculum. It also helped improve relations with the parents, as they could get to know teachers from other grade levels. This was a great way to help build our internal school community.

Step Four: Secure a location. We found that on-site at school was the best. It keeps the students in the school environment longer (less distractions). The Program has access to educational resources.

Step Five: Establish a schedule. We discovered that having three, six-week sessions during the school year was the most beneficial although you may want to consider a year-round program. The Homework Help class met twice a week. We changed from Monday and Thursday to Monday and Tuesday due to parent request. The class is 50 minutes long and is taught by our teachers.

Step Six: Ensure that the enrollment/registration forms are clear and concise with translations available for other represented languages.

Step Seven: A critical component of the program is to provide transportation that is approved by your school district.

Step Eight: Establish a contact person either within or associated with your school (Social Worker is ideal) to process teacher nomination forms for homeless/highly mobile students. This person should:

1. contact the parent/guardian to assist in completing the forms,
2. consider obtaining most information from student records so as not to duplicate the process and then verbally confirm the information,
3. request scholarship funding from the Program, and
4. register the student.

Hopefully, you can offer quality after-school homework assistance at little or no cost to your homeless/highly mobile students that will teach valuable skills, increase their success at school, improve their relations and contribute to their ability to break out of the homelessness/high mobility cycle.

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www.DenversRoadHome.org

www.lowry.org

Chapter 3

ASSISTING WITH HOMEWORK:

A study focusing on the completion of homework
with highly mobile students in a 4th grade classroom

By

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Lowry Elementary School

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Abstract: Tracks the development of a lunchtime, homework help club called “Lunch Bunch.” Examines results and offers reflection on the process.

Keywords: Academic Achievement, Access to Resources, Elementary School, Flexible Instruction, Homework Help, Parent Involvement, Parent and Student Surveys, and Poverty

Introduction/Background

For the past three years I have been teaching 4th grade at Lowry Elementary School in the Denver Public School district. Lowry Elementary has a diverse student population. In fact, it is more diverse than many people assume it to be. Surrounding the school itself are high-end residential homes which gives the façade that the school is full of upper middle class families. But in actuality the school is made up of a complex combination of upper middle class students, as well as lower income families, along with a fair number of homeless or highly mobile children. According to the latest figures, as of April 2006, there were 407 students enrolled in Lowry Elementary. Of these students, 48% are on free and reduced lunch and approximately 16% of the student population is living in transitional housing. (Denver Public Schools, 2006.) There are two transitional housing complexes managed by Colorado Coalition for the Homeless. This program offers families two years of rental assistance, case management and supportive services. All three of these very different populations create the community which is Lowry. This diverse and complex make up of students and families is what compelled me to move to Lowry and continues to drive me to teach at this very special school.

There are two 4th grade classrooms in our school. We have approximately 45 children in both rooms. This year I began the school year with 24 students in my room. By the end of the year

I had a total of 20 students. I have gained and lost many families, more this year than in any previous year. In all, 11 students left my classroom. Many of the students that our classroom lost were considered our transient/homeless children. When the year began I had six children classified as transient or working with our transitional housing program. At the end of the year I only had 3 students working with this program. I am unsure of why most of them left Lowry Elementary. I can only hope it was because they were moving on to better situations.

High mobility coupled with lack of structure, as well as consistency, are major concerns of mine. When compared to my upper and middle class students, I have noticed that my highly mobile/ transient children have more attendance issues. They seem to have more attention problems in class and many of them have poor behavior. I have also noticed issues regarding completion of schoolwork and homework being done properly or completely. As many teachers do, I try to evaluate my teaching style and methods. This helps to improve my techniques to better help all of my students needs. For this study, I began to think of how I could improve and change things to make things easier and more helpful for my highly mobile students. I decided that I couldn't tackle all of the concerns in one school year, but could focus on one major element and decided to study the affects of homework on my homeless and highly mobile students. I was not just looking for completed homework but work that was done well, with thoughtful planning, turned in on time, and with as many correct answers as possible.

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether offering homework help during lunch hours, after school, or during free time helped to improve the quality and quantity of homework being turned in from our homeless and highly mobile population. The study was conducted with the highly mobile students in my 4th grade classroom during the 2005-2006 school year.

Lunch Bunch

Since the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year I had noticed that a fair number of my students were having difficulty turning in completed homework. Most homework issues were cleared up with simple phone calls home or conferences with parents. However, even after these parental talks, many of the problems with homework continued with my highly mobile

students. The children would fail to bring in homework or they brought in part of the work and tried to turn it in incomplete. I became upset and a bit angry with the fact that the behavior hadn't changed even with parent involvement. Why didn't the parents and students see the value in completing homework? Did this correlate to a lack of responsibility? My response was to then become challenged and invigorated as to how to assist these students with completing their homework. I wanted to help this highly mobile group of students to understand the importance of homework, the importance of completing quality work, and to learn about the responsible nature of the task.

To begin, I first sent out a questionnaire about homework and its significance to children and families. The survey was sent to all families in my room, including the highly mobile and low income families. I also had the students in the classroom fill out their own version of the survey about homework. The survey consisted of 7 questions about homework and its importance. Some of the results are as follows:

- The students all seemed to understand that homework is given as a review of the day's lessons and as a way to practice what they had learned in class that day.
- Most kids had a place set aside at home to do their work such as, the kitchen table or their bedroom. And most agreed that homework should take anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour a night to complete.
- The kids noted they didn't always have the materials needed to do their homework properly.
- Most of the students said they went to their parents for help if they needed it on homework. Even my highly mobile kids agreed with most of these statements.

When the parents results came in it was very interesting to see how closely they resembled their children's answers. Of the 23 surveys I sent out, I received 16 completed surveys. Out of these 16 surveys, 5 were from my highly mobile parents. The parent survey showed:

- Almost every parent said that homework is to reinforce work done in the classroom and to help practice the day's lessons.
- They all seemed to agree that 30 – 60 minutes was a reasonable amount of time for homework completion and that their child had a place to complete their homework without distractions.

- The parents also said that sometimes they don't have the materials needed to complete the homework such as, pencils, rulers, etc.
- In response to the question about parent involvement on homework and who their child goes to for help, many said they help when they can or if they understand the work. If they don't understand the question or how to help, they tell their child to come back to school and ask the teacher. They also asked for suggestions on the survey about how to help their child with homework at home.

From this information I decided I needed to address completion of homework, quality of the homework done, how it is getting done, and where to look for help. I decided to create a lunch bunch homework help club.

Lunch bunch would meet every Tuesday and/or Thursday during the 45 minute lunch hour in my classroom. The club was open to everyone but I emphasized the importance and significance of the club with my highly mobile students. I insisted they come to the lunch bunch. This small group, made up of 4 students attended lunch bunch every Tuesday or Thursday for two months.

During our first meeting we created homework boxes. The kids were given old shoe boxes that they could decorate in anyway they wanted using wrapping paper or construction paper. They then filled these boxes with supplies that they might need to help them complete their homework at home. We discussed the significance of the materials and why each one was important to help complete homework. They were able to put in pencils, paper, notebooks, crayons, scissors, rulers, erasers, and even a few books. All the materials were either donated by Colorado Coalition for the Homeless or the school. We then discussed how they needed to keep these very special homework boxes in a secretive place, away from little sibling's hands, and a place where they would remember where they put the box. Each had their own special place in mind to keep their box and seemed excited about having the materials to help get their work done.

At the next lunch bunch meeting I asked students to bring a homework assignment that was giving them trouble or was hard to complete on their own, even after they had asked their

parents for help. I had the best intentions in mind when asking them to bring in their own questions, but it turned into chaos. There were too many questions that I couldn't answer. Each child had brought in a different piece of work and I was unable to help everyone with their problems. I was only able to help a few and they really weren't quality, helpful answers. It was more like I was trying to get the job done and move onto the next child. The one-on-one attention was lacking and I was making myself very tired trying to help a variety of problems. When the second session was over I had to reevaluate the lunch bunch idea. I knew I wanted to continue to help with specific homework problems, but I couldn't do it on such a large scale. So I opened up lunch bunch to two days a week. We had Tuesday and Thursday lunch bunches. Again it was open to all students, but my highly mobile students had to choose at least one day to attend. Most students actually ended coming both days during the week for help.

Once again, I had good intentions by adding another day but the chaos still existed and the quality of the help was not very good. We changed it up again. I decided to have Tuesday lunch bunch for specific questions only on a variety of homework. Everyone attending Tuesday lunch bunch had to be patient and be willing to work on something else while waiting for me to help them with their homework. On Thursday lunch bunch we decided to have math questions only. We even went as far as to work on specific math homework pages. For example, I would say that we were going to work lesson 10.3 and 10.4 only during Thursday lunch bunch. This assignment of homework on Thursday helped to cut down on the chaos and gave us a more organized and thoughtful time together. We were able to focus on the quality of the math work getting completed, not just the correct answers without understanding the concepts. I began to truly appreciate and look forward to Thursday lunch bunch. The students were also enjoying it and were asking on Monday which papers to bring to lunch bunch for their assignment on that following Thursday.

Results

We started the lunch bunch with five highly mobile students. One child left only after a few weeks because she moved. For the remainder of the time we had four students attending lunch bunch every Tuesday and/or Thursday. Most of these students attended both days. On Tuesdays they could get help with any spelling homework or math homework they were

struggling with. On Thursday it was specifically math work. The math work was usually concepts the students had difficulty learning in class or needed extra practice. We would review the concept taught in class, go over examples, and then they worked on their own asking me for assistance when needed. They were also able to get help from fellow lunch bunch attendees. Small groups sometimes formed to discuss an idea. Leaders always seemed to emerge and were able to help the other kids out with their work. They began to gain independence with their work and were able to see the importance of completing a task. After they completed the homework during lunch bunch they would then turn it in. They usually had big smiles on their faces and explained they were happy to be done and felt they better understood the information. Out of the four students, three consistently turned in completed homework weekly homework. They were able to do parts of their work in school and then the more independent work such as reading was done at home. They seemed to see that the homework was not as hard as they once had envisioned. As for the one student who was unable to complete the work, she continued to have attendance issues that were out of her control. Many of the weeks she did not turn in homework because she was absent on the Friday it was due.

After the two month lunch bunch time the students were asked to take a post survey. The questions focused on the importance of help for homework, responsibility of completing a task, and how they could get more help if needed. All of the students agreed that lunch bunch helped them to turn in homework on time. They said they were able to get it done without distractions. They were able to ask someone for help immediately when they had a question. They were also able to take their time with the work and not feel rushed into getting the work completed without taking the time to think about it. Most of the students also said it helped to be able to go over the lesson again in a one-on-one situation with their teacher. They weren't too embarrassed to ask questions and they were able to focus more on the task. They also said that their homework boxes were still in safe places in their rooms and that they used them as often as possible while doing their work at home.

After completing the lunch bunch I noticed that more homework was being turned in. It seemed that more thought was taken into doing the work well and with care. It was not only the homework that we did together that was done well, but also the independent work. The

students were also more organized after attending lunch bunch. They had established homework folders and were able to keep their materials together as opposed to being scattered about throughout their backpacks. We developed stronger relationships with each other. The kids were able to share information about their lives with me and the struggles that they dealt with daily. The students took pride in coming to lunch bunch and didn't seem to mind missing their lunch play time for two days a week. In all, the lunch bunch was successful.

Conclusion

This work has given me a much better and broader understanding of homelessness and high mobility in education. I began to research transient and highly mobile issues for children. I used some of this information to help design my daily lessons and practice tasks. I was able to attend a conference on Ruby Payne's work about homelessness. I had noticed that I was not always looking at the situation through a variety of lenses, but instead using my own middle class views and thoughts to mold my thinking about education of this particular group of transient people. For example, in the beginning I didn't seem to understand why these students were unable to complete work or were not able to focus during the time they were expected to do so. But after doing this work for the past nine months I feel that I have a better understanding of homeless families and their needs. I feel I am more sympathetic about issues that arise for these students and more willing to make changes to help accommodate their learning. I am still going to set these kids to the same standards as the other students, but I am now able to see the situation from a different perspective and make changes if needed.

Through this work, our school has been able to build a better relationship with the representatives from Colorado Coalition for the Homeless. We have visited the transitional housing units with our coalition liaison and were able to gain a better understanding of where they kids live and the daily struggles that they experience. We have been able to meet more of the case workers for these families and were able to build more solid relationships with them. For example, we have done a lot of work with Kathy Gansemer, the Homeless Coalition liaison, this year and without this work I am not sure that we would have built such a solid and trusting relationship. This has been one of the most important and beneficial aspects of doing this research.

Recommendations/Process for WBPD

1. Create a solid team. Get to know your teammates if you don't already. Do your readings and work and then create meetings to chat about the assigned tasks and work. It really helped us to build a solid foundation within our team so we could easily help each other out.
2. Gain a better understanding of the homeless/ transient population in your area. Try to gain knowledge about how to help this group of people. Go out into the community; visit the shelters or housing complexes where they live. Meet with counselors and people that aid in this kind of work. Talk to the transient families if they are willing to chat with you. Attend seminars and informational gathering classes. Just become informed about his subject of homelessness and education.
3. Find a specific issue that you want to focus on. Don't try to take on too much but instead choose one important factor that you notice is affecting your school or community that involve these highly mobile families.
4. Try to collect as much honest information and feedback as possible from this group of people. Send out questionnaires, surveys or hold focus groups. Make sure that the surveys or questionnaires are easy to follow and translate any paperwork if needed. I found that during my study, surveys and questionnaires were the easiest way to get honest feedback. Don't discount anyone's ideas or thoughts. Take it all in, make sure to keep an open mind and open frame of thought. Try not to cloud your work with our own values and background. If you just get out there, open your mind, and be willing to change, than the success will come to your students as well as your community.
5. Make sure to keep notes on what you are studying. Create a notebook and write down as much information possible. During my lunch bunch I would take notes or afterwards I would jot down a few ideas because they were fresh on my mind. Take notes during your meetings with your team. Just write down everything so you can refer to it later.
6. When it comes to writing the end paper. Just start writing. Refer to your notes, surveys, etc. Use examples from previous papers. Talk to your group and have them help you mold your ideas.

Appendix

1. Student Survey
2. Parent Survey
3. End of Lunch Bunch Survey

Appendix 1

Student Survey!

Name _____

Date: _____

Why do teachers give homework?

Do you know why homework is so important?

What makes “good” homework?

What are the benefits of doing homework?

Where do you do your homework?

Where do you go to get help with your homework?

How much time do you think you should spend on homework each night?

Appendix 2

Dear Parents,

I am currently working on an action research project for a class that I am involved in through school. I am working with several other teachers here at Lowry on this project. I have decided to study homework and its effects on my 4th grade students as well as their parents. Part of my project involves a questionnaire for parents. If you have a moment, please take the time to fill out this form about homework. Send it back as soon as possible with your child. You do not need to put your name on the paper, it is completely anonymous.

Thanks for you time!!!
Anna Kluver-Fensler

In you opinion, what is the purpose of homework?

What are the benefits of doing homework?

What is a reasonable amount of homework per night for a 4th grade student?

What makes “good” homework? Meaning what homework is actually good and what could we do without?

What is your role when it comes to your child’s homework?

Where does your child do their homework?

What are some things you can do as a parent to help your child be successful with their homework?

Chapter 4

HOMEWORK

By
Tamara Marocco, 2nd Grade Teacher
Lowry Elementary
Denver, CO

Abstract: Explores how to make homework meaningful for students. Includes an examination of the history, purpose and value of homework. Special attention is given to parental involvement and instruction for English Language Learners.

Keywords: Elementary School, Flexible Instruction, Homework, Language/Translation, Literature Review, Parent Involvement, and Poverty

Introduction/Background

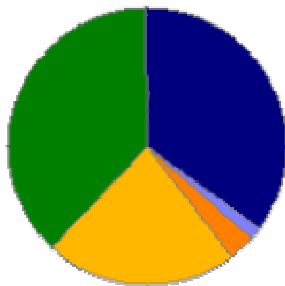
The Lowry community was once a working Air Force Base in Denver, Colorado. Now it is transformed into a “mixed-use” community. The idea behind Lowry was to take an existing urban area, give it new life, and avoid adding to the problem of urban sprawl. Lowry has become a model community for urban-infill projects across the country. “As an infill development, Lowry is utilizing existing urban areas and road systems rather than expanding into the suburbs. Old Air Force base runways have been recycled into brand new roads; beautiful trees have been moved rather than cut down; new trees have been planted. Lowry’s streets, roundabouts and trails system are designed to reduce car trips – and pollution. Many of Lowry’s homes are built to maximize energy efficiency, minimize pollution and conserve natural resources. Careful land planning and xeriscaping, plus a golf course that incorporates sustainable resource management techniques, will save one of Colorado’s most precious resources: water”.

Education is a fundamental part of a healthy and prosperous community. For that reason, you’ll find a wide range of educational facilities at Lowry, from private pre-K through high schools and a public elementary school to college level and continuing education facilities at the Lowry Campus.

Lowry is one of the elementary schools in the Denver Public School District. The school is located in the Southwest Neighborhood, north of Alameda and west of Fairmount Drive. It

houses grades Pre-K through 5th. Lowry was in its fourth year in 2005-2006. Its student population is constantly growing. The student population in the 2004 school year was approximately 412 students. The cultural make-up of the school was as follows:

Student Ethnicity 2004-05



| Ethnicity | This School |
|------------------|-------------|
| African American | 35.0% |
| American Indian | 1.5% |
| Asian | 3.2% |
| Hispanic | 22.1% |
| White | 38.3% |

The table below shows the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. The high percentage of students in this program indicates a lower economic status of the school community and additional needs for student programs.

Free or Reduced Price Lunch 2004-05

| | This School | District Average |
|--|-------------|------------------|
| % Students Receiving Free or Reduced-Price Lunch | 40.5% | 69.3% |

English Language Learners 2004-05

| | This School | District Average |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| % English Language Learners (Total) | 13.3% | 35.8% |

The mission of Lowry Elementary is to establish and maintain a solid academic foundation from early childhood education (ECE) through fifth grade so children will have the necessary skills to be successful learners. Each student will be empowered to be a lifelong learner, critical thinker and problem solver. All educational elements are integrated into a cohesive curriculum.

The Lowry community provides the underpinnings for strength as a school. The PTO encourages parent involvement and participation in many school activities, as well as monetary assistance through fund-raisers. The CSC presents a strong voice that represents the robust and diverse community.

Introduction to the Project

My role at Lowry Elementary was to serve as an ELA-E second grade teacher. I was responsible for teaching seventeen second-grade students. It was my job to vary the instructional pace for a variety of levels of learners. In order to do this, I needed to collaborate with the other second grade team members, the special educator, the gifted and talented teacher, the ELA instructor, and the other specialists at the school (school counselor, psychologist, nurse). My teaching style combined times for whole group instruction mini lessons, small group instruction, peer to peer time, as well as time for independent practice. I had a handful of involved parents in her classroom, so a big job of mine was to communicate with them. I tried to keep all of my families aware of what was going on in the classroom as well as in the school. I sent home a monthly newsletter, put the newsletter on the school's website, and made phone calls whenever possible.

I was responsible for coordinating individual learning plans for all students who were achieving below grade level. For this plan, I had a conference with the parent(s) and explained the goals that I would work on in the classroom to try and get the student back to where they should be. I then offered strategies that the parent(s) could do at home to help meet these goals as well. I could have as many conferences as needed with the parent(s) to make sure that action was taking place not only in the school setting, but also at home.

A problem that I was noticing in my second grade class was that many of my students, including my highly mobile students, were not doing homework or turning in quality homework assignments. Since this was a problem that I was seeing this year and in years past I decided to investigate the homework issue further. This project was designed to help students and their families get the most out of homework. The purpose of this study was to determine what barriers were making doing homework difficult and to teach appropriate

strategies that students could use to help them work independently on homework. In addition, I wanted to give parent's helpful hints and tips on how they could help their children do their homework. The study also provided teachers with a protocol to follow when sending homework assignments home. It also provided teachers with helpful tips to make homework more beneficially for families.

Homework has been a part of students' lives since the beginning of formal schooling in the United States. The practice of homework, however, has always been debated by educators and parents because of the positive and negative effects on children's learning and attitudes toward school. This causes homework to either be accepted or rejected.

Harris Cooper and Russell Gersten prepared a document for the U.S. Department of Education on 100 years of homework. It stated that in the early 20th century the mind was viewed as a muscle that could be strengthened through mental exercise. Since exercise could be done at home, homework was viewed favorably. In the 1940's the shift went from memorization to problem solving. Homework fell out of favor because it was closely linked with the repetition of material. In the 50's, Americans worried that education lacked rigor and left children unprepared for the new technologies, such as computers. Many believed homework could speed up the learning. In the 60's and 70's, educators and parents became concerned that homework was crowding out social experiences. In the 1980's and 90's, homework again came back into favor. Homework was pushed due to the rising academic standards.

So the question remains the same throughout the years; to do or not to do homework? Homework does have many benefits for young children. It serves as reinforcement for what is taught in the classroom. This helps students realize that learning doesn't stop when they leave the classroom walls or when the school bell rings. It can teach them that learning takes place anywhere. Homework can foster independence and responsibility. Doing homework everyday at the same time helps develop this responsibility and prepares children for upper grade expectations and adult responsibilities. It can also teach children to manage time. For many students there is a sense of accomplishment. They take pride in homework assignments that are a sign of a job well done.

On the other hand, homework if not properly assigned and monitored, can have negative effects on children. There is a worry that children will become bored if they are required to spend too much time on schoolwork. Many parents believe that homework prevents their children from taking part in leisure-time and community activities that take place after school. Some educators and parents even believe that homework can lead to undesirable character traits, such as cheating, either through copying or with help of homework that goes beyond tutoring.

The issue is not which effects, the positive or negative, are correct. To some extent, both are. It is the job of educators and parents to maximize the benefit of homework.

Literature Review

Every year parents of elementary students ask their classroom teachers countless questions, but one topic that seems to get the most attention is homework. This is understandable since homework is the one element of education that parents see first hand every day. With the many demands of parenthood today educators want to do their part in making homework less hectic in the households. This is one area of education where parents and families play an important role in the process. Together, families and teachers can help children develop good study habits and attitudes to become lifelong learners. It is important that schools form partnerships with parents to promote the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. Children benefit from loving, supportive relationships at home and at school. Research says family involvement in education makes a difference.

Patricia von Oelhoffen (2003), author of *The Importance of Homework*, is a Program Specialist for the Pacific Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center. She states that those students who complete homework and turn it in on time improve academically and learn important lessons on discipline, responsibility, and communication. She believes that planning after school activities around homework reassures children that they can maintain a balance between home and school. She also says that parents and other caregivers act as role models. “When we show that we value education and emphasize the importance of homework, we help children succeed”.

Etta Kralovec and John Buell (2000) have some differing points of view in their book titled, *The End of Homework: How Homework Disrupts Families, Overburdens Children, and Limits Learning*. Both are educators who dared to challenge one of the most widely accepted practices in American schools; homework. Their provocative argument was the first to challenge the gospel of “the more homework the better.”

They want us to consider:

- In 1901, homework was legally banned in parts of the U.S. There are no studies showing that assigning homework before junior high school improves academic achievement.
- As the homework load increases (and studies show that it is increasing) family priorities are neglected.
- Homework is a great discriminator, effectively allowing students whose families “have” to surge ahead of their classmates who may have less. (Kralovec, 2000).

In a discussion in a series of Ask with Education forums Kralovec (2006) presented her case for reducing, if not abolishing homework in the nation's public schools. "Homework simply doesn't make sense in this brave new constructivist world of teaching and learning," Kralovec stated. "When work goes home, teachers have little control over who does the work," she continued. "Teachers [are] unable to scaffold new knowledge for students, and [are] unaware of each student's true educational progress. Kralovec's co-author Buell suggested that homework increases the "achievement gap" between children of different socioeconomic backgrounds. "Schools can expand the quality of economic opportunities, but they can also entrench privilege," he explained. Buell expressed doubts that students perform better simply because schools are demanding more from them (Gavel, Doug; Harvard University Gazette). Another aspect of homework that has been studied is how student, family, and parenting-style differences relate to the homework process. At the University of Missouri a study was conducted by Cooper, H, Lindsay JJ, and Nye, B. They surveyed about 700 parents about the involvement in their child's homework. The study results state:

A factor analysis revealed three dimensions of homework involvement similar to those found in more general studies of parenting style. These dimensions are

autonomy support, direct involvement, and elimination of distractions. A fourth dimension, parental interference, differentiated itself from autonomy support for students in higher grades. Two-thirds of parents reported some negative or inappropriate form of involvement. Parenting style for homework was then related to student and family characteristics and student schooling outcomes. Results indicated parents with students in higher grade levels reported giving students more homework autonomy and less involvement of all other types. Parents in poorer families reported less support for autonomy and more interference. Parents reported less elimination of distractions when an adult was not at home after school and, for elementary school students, when there was more than one child living in the home. Student attitudes toward homework were unrelated to parenting style for homework. (Copyright 2000, Academic Press).

Methodology

To begin my action research project I developed a survey about homework and sent it home for the parents to respond. Some of the questions were:

- ~In your opinion, what is the purpose of homework?
- ~How much time does your child spend each night on homework? How much time do you think is appropriate for homework each night?
- ~What is your role when it comes to your child's homework?
- ~Do you as a parent/guardian know how to help your child be successful with homework? If so, what do you do? If not, how can I help?
- ~Do you know where to go to find resources to help with homework? If so, what do you use? If not, would you like some resources?

Overall parents understood that homework was sent home to reinforce what has been taught in the classroom. Many also stated that it is a way to form studying habits for the future. I was surprised by the varying amounts of time that is spent on homework each night. The range was from 10 minutes to two hours. I knew from this survey that this was an area I needed to address for some of my students and parents. Many parents said their role was to remind their child to do their homework, to keep him/her from getting distracted, to be available for

directions, to help check the finished assignment and point out errors, to encourage and assist when necessary. Many parents said that just by being available that helps their child be successful with homework. Some others said that the way they learned how to do certain skills is not the way their child is learning. They would love some guidance or methods to help out at home. Two parents said that they do not have the knowledge/language to help their child understand the concepts. This seemed to be another area that I needed to address. About half of the responses I received (15 total) stated they knew where to find resources, but didn't say what they used. The other half said they did not know where to go to get resources to help with homework. I figured that this area would be easy to address.

I also had my students fill out a homework survey. This survey was to gain some insight as to how the kids felt about homework, if they knew why homework was so important, when and where they did their homework, and what they did if they had a problem on their homework. Many of my students said that homework is important because it makes you smart and it helps you learn. There was a variety of answers for when and where they did their homework. Some did their homework right after school, some did it before dinner or after dinner, and some did it right before bedtime. Some kids said they did homework at their after school child care, in the car, at home in their kitchen, or in their bedroom, at a desk, or even on the floor. Every single one of the surveys said that if they had a problem with their homework that they asked someone at home or someone at school, or that they skipped it.

These surveys were the basis of my action research plan. I took the information from these surveys to lead me in my next steps. Throughout this process my goals remained the same but my thinking and implementation at times needed to be changed. Each family situation was different which made me realize that there had to be more than one way to help them get the most out of homework. The following were the outcomes that I wanted to implement.

Expected Outcomes

1. The first expected outcome was to establish communication with the parents.
 - a. A monthly newsletter was sent home with "Homework Tips" and educational websites for use if they had computer access.

- b. A homework survey was sent home to acquire knowledge about each family and their homework practices.
 - c. Provide a family educational night.
 - 2. The second expected outcome was that students would be responsible for doing and turning in their homework assignments.
 - a. The student's family was able sign up for After School Homework Help, six week sessions with scholarships available.
 - b. Students were paired up with another student for peer tutoring or help.
 - c. Students were given the incentive of Fun Monday if all homework was completed to the best of their ability.
 - 3. Consequences for the students with continued homework problems were put into place.
 - a. No Fun Monday
 - b. No privileges (recess) until all missed work was completed and passed in within the given time frame that the teacher had provided.

Measurement of Outcomes

In order to establish results right away in the action research process of trying to improve the quality and quantity homework being turned in I had to be very attentive to each student's needs of homework and how often he/she was or wasn't turning it in. When I graded homework weekly I had to keep track of any particular student who wasn't turning homework in. When I noticed a student who hadn't turned homework in, I made a list on the board for those who were not able to participate in Fun Monday.

Fun Monday was an incentive where students who turned in their homework got to have 30 minutes of free activity time. Some of the activities included playing games, computer time, arts and crafts, and extra recess. Using rewards and incentives for an issue such as homework has caused some controversy, but there is evidence that they work in improving academics. In an elementary setting, simple rewards, such as stickers, pencils, erasers, lunch with the teacher, free time, books, and snacks seem to work really well. Teachers can even have small awards ceremonies with certificates for homework turned in consistently, or most improved.

I then sent a letter to the parents (or contacted them by phone). This letter stated that their son/daughter was not able to participate in Fun Monday due to the following assignments not being done. The homework assignment that was not done was listed in that space. It also stated that their son/daughter was provided 30 additional minutes during class time to complete the assignment. They could work with a peer or ask the teacher for help during this time. If the work still didn't get completed, the student was taking the assignment home to work on. The parent then needed to sign the letter and send it back to school. There was a space provided for the parent to make comments or communicate with me any difficulties that still needed to be address with that particular student.

After the parents became aware about the homework assignments not being completed, it was my job to continue to track the assignment until it was done. In most situations the parents were happy to receive the notice about their son or daughter and what assignments were not done. Most parents signed the note and returned it the next day while others had to be contacted again by note or by phone.

In order for me to see if any results were occurring academically, I needed to analyze the work that these students were turning in so I could see if they were getting the skills that were being taught and reinforced through the homework. I needed to keep track of the missed assignments and see if the students were responsible enough to turn them in by the time frame allotted. I compared pre and post observation notes of homework grades.

The ideal situation was once the action research was in place to see that students who were not turning in homework on a regular basis were given some incentive to get it turned in on time. These students would also have gained a greater self esteem in knowing that they could succeed. During this whole process, it was my responsibility to monitor and maintain a consistent approach to solve the problem.

We, as educators, need to acknowledge just how much families have changed. Family structure has become more complicated, with many more children living with step-parents or in single parent households. Families today may face extra difficulties and we have to take that into considerations when trying to team together with them to tackle the war on

homework. Teachers need to focus on family practices instead of family structure. One way to get parent's involvement in learning activities at home is to provide families with printed suggestions for simple things they can do at home to help students achieve at higher levels. Some suggestions are to have parents set aside a specific amount of time each day for doing homework. Parents should also set aside time daily to read to or listen to their child read. They could use library books, hobby books, newspapers, and magazines as the source of this activity. Teachers could create a student homework/class work notebook. Class assignments or homework assignments could be written in the book and this way teachers and parents can communicate about how the student was doing. This can provide a means of notifying parents on the student's progress, about problems that were beginning to arise, and to remind them of meetings or upcoming conferences. Teachers could also suggest questions for parents to ask students about homework assignments and how to stimulate conversations about learning.

There needs to be a school-home connection. This is the basic obligation of a school to communicate from school to home about school programs and student progress. Using letters, memos, phone calls, report cards, newsletters, and conferences can do this type of communication. I sent home a monthly newsletter to parents. They knew to look for it at the beginning of each month. The letter informed them about what we were learning in the classroom, upcoming events in our classroom or at school, and then a section with reminders. I added a section at the start of this action research project that included homework tips. These tips were easy ideas and solutions to many parents' questions. It gave them concrete ways that they could help their child with their homework. I also gave them educational websites that they could use to supplement homework or for fun if they had computer access. I posted this letter on our school's website and posted one outside of my classroom door.

Families should be involved in the school as well. Some parents volunteer their time in the classroom assisting the teacher and students, or in the school assisting administration or children in classrooms and other areas of the school. Not all parents have time during the day to come to school to participate and learn what is being taught in the classrooms. In order to serve as many of our families as possible we provided a family math night. The night was designed to pull families into the school setting and show them how the district math program (Everyday Math) is set up and how to play the math games at home with their children. We

were even able to hand out the materials to play the games (i.e. dice, number cards, fact triangles, etc). About 75 of our families attended the family math night and commented on how helpful it was for them.

I was in charge of our after school Homework Help for a six week session. I had students ranging from K-3. It was amazing to me that half of the kids didn't have homework, didn't know what their homework was, or didn't have a clue how to do the homework (and sometimes I didn't even know how to do the homework). It made me realize how frustrating this can be not only for the child, but for the parents as well. I started communication with the teachers to try to set up an arrangement for those who were enrolled in Homework Help. One expectation was that if they had a student in Homework Help they must come with homework. The student must know what the directions are to complete the homework. If a student's native language was not English then appropriate translation of directions or assignments in their native language were to be given (for example, the Everyday Math Program has homework links in Spanish). If a student is functioning below grade level then modified assignments would be sent with them. One aspect that was taken care of during the Homework Help program was that community members donated educational materials for the students to take home and be able to use for homework purposes. Such materials included scissors, pencils, writing paper, rulers, crayons, etc. Our principal and a small group of staff members are involved in setting up school wide expectations for homework for the 2006-2007 school year and to work on a protocol for the Homework Help program.

The main goal is to make sure that all homework is meaningful to the students who are doing it. Teachers also need to care about homework too. If homework is important enough make copies and send home, then it should be important enough to give some feedback. Research shows that when homework is turned into the teacher, graded, and discussed with students, it can improve students' grades and understanding of their schoolwork. I found that many teachers at my school don't even look at their student's homework, let alone give it a check or a grade. The biggest comment from my students' parents is that they appreciated the feedback and follow through of my homework assignments. If something is not done appropriately, then it had to be fixed and turned in again. The student's knew that I viewed homework as important, so their parents and each one of them valued it too!

An important aspect of homework is that each teacher should have a homework policy that is clearly stated and easy to understand by parents and students. The policy should be provided to the parents and the students at the very beginning of the year and families should be reminded of this information on a regular basis. This reiterates how important homework really is.

If students continue to have difficulty with homework then teachers should look into tutoring programs or other forms of academic support. These types of academic help have a positive effect on student achievement. These programs give the students a feeling of success and then they are much more likely to complete their work on a regular basis. Also, students may form a bond with whoever the person is in charge of their program and they are not willing to disappoint the person who is helping them succeed, so they do their work and turn it in. One of my highly mobile student's was set up with a tutor/mentor for half of the school year. There was an observable increase in this student's homework progress simply due to the fact that he loved working with his tutor.

Analysis of my data indicated that students definitely wanted to be successful with homework. It also showed that parents wanted to provide their children with the support and encouragement needed for completing assignments. The overall success of this project showed that some students did improve, but it became very apparent that sometimes the situation was out of the student's control. Students and parents in my class learned that they were accountable for the work that was assigned as homework.

As with any education issue there is no magical solution to the problem. It takes a combination of procedures, policies, programs, and time. It also takes a school and teachers who create an inviting climate to bring students into the school and keep them there. It is my hope to continue these strategies next year and to make improvements as I go.

Plans for Dissemination

The results of this project will be shared with the staff at Lowry Elementary school at the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year. The ideas for improvement discussed in this study

are worthy of other teachers using or improving on their own. Many schools nationwide suffer from the same issue on homework.

Recommendations

At the start of an action research project you must do a lot of research and studying on your own. It is my suggestion to learn as much as you can about the homeless and highly mobile population and the laws. A wonderful book to read is Ruby Paine's *Framework for Understanding Poverty*. It may not be your position at your school, but this information should be shared with all the staff as well. If possible, get the support from your administration to have knowledgeable people come in and discuss the homeless and highly mobile. Don't assume you know who is labeled under this category. It is important to know who falls under this group in your classroom as well as in the school.

Get out into your community. Drive around and see first hand where these children and their families are living. Visit the motels, the shelters, and if you can visit transitional housing units so you can better understand the struggles of everyday life that these families experience. Do a home visit. If you can build a connection with an at risk family, then they might begin to step out of their comfort zone and trust the school environment. You have to be able to set aside your judgments and just be there.

Build a relationship with the people who work with the homeless and highly mobile population. Make an effort to meet the case workers or the liaisons who work with these families. They can help answer questions, show you around the housing complexes, and can assist you before, during, and after your action research project. Their amount of resources and information and knowledge is invaluable.

Take a really close look at your school. Ask yourself, "What are we doing right"? and "what are we doing wrong"? Ask these same questions to other people on the staff, parents, and to the students. From here you can get an idea for your action research plan. Make sure you choose an idea that is important to you and something that you have control over making a difference. Make sure that can implement, measure, and reflect on this project. This could be some of the most significant work you do during your school year.

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Chapter 5

IN WHAT WAYS CAN I ADJUST MY TEACHING STYLE TO PROVIDE MEANINGFUL ENTRY POINTS INTO TITLE MATH LAB FOR MY HOMELESS AND HIGHLY MOBILE STUDENTS?

By

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Abstract: An experienced, participatory action researcher tracks her efforts to improve educational instruction and math assessment for English Language Learners in transition. Included are her reflections, frustrations, and successes. Features use of Calendar Math and compliance with the Family Education Rights Protection Act (FERPA.)

Keywords: Confidentiality, Elementary School, English Language Learners, Flexible Instruction, Math Assessment, and Welcoming School Culture

Background

I teach Title One Math Lab at Columbine Elementary School in Longmont, CO, which is 37 miles northwest of Denver at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. Longmont is home to roughly 90,000 people. The major employer of our students' families is the turkey plant. Columbine's ethnic breakdown is 56% Hispanic, 39% Caucasian, 3% African American, and 2% Asian. Due to Columbine's high number of homeless and highly mobile students, our population varies. Free or reduced lunch applies to 88.9% of our student population.

I participated in Colorado's first attempt at using Participatory Action Research (PAR) for the improvement of educational practices and I knew how rewarding a critical and deliberate reflection could be. Participation in a web-based national PAR project focusing on homeless and highly mobile students would be particularly valuable as I started in a new role as the bilingual Title One Math teacher. Title One Math programs are a new concept. Similar to Title I Literacy programs, which have been around for many years, math programs use federal funds to support students who are more than two years behind in mathematics. Our program

is in its second year, and I provide pull-out intervention services for small groups of five students who are in grades 2-4.

How did I get started?

I already understood the concept of “participatory action research,” so I began reflecting about my job as bilingual Title Math teacher through journaling and having little or no direction in my new position, journaling allowed me to sort things through, and my journal became a sanctuary for me. My next step was to observe the school and students because those observations would help me formulate the question that would serve as the focus for the first cycle of research and to take notice of the multiple factors that contribute to the school culture.

Since this was my second year participating in an ambitious action research project, I prepared myself for feeling uneasy about not having a set direction. PAR is by nature an “organic” process that does not have a pre-set direction; rather it is guided by observation, action, more observation, and more action. In spite of my knowledge and experience, I still felt anxious about the process and overwhelmed with the work that is inevitable when starting a new job.

Surprisingly, I found reflecting and observing helpful instead of burdensome. The action research project kept me focused with a great deal to learn and little time to learn it compared to a classroom teacher, I had fewer variables competing for my attention. I focused on one subject, math, and taught five ability-grouped students for 45 minutes per day. Yet, I was also faced with mastering one subject, while learning and shaping a new program, building relationships with students and teachers, and finding time to coach teachers and instruct students.

Cycle One

Editor Note: The names of the students were changed and identifiable information removed to ensure confidentiality.

As I documented my journey, I articulated several difficulties early in the process. First, I shared my job with a woman who started the first Title Math program at our school just last

year. She couldn't provide me with much guidance since she herself was new and not bilingual or a language acquisition specialist. Without a mentor, I was left to figure out the structure of my groups, the English language transitioning students' needs and how they affected grouping, the level of coaching required of teachers, and a meaningful assessment program. Second, the principal who successfully led the school for the past six years accepted a new leadership role in a nearby urban school district. His replacement was not a good fit with the community and by early November she was reassigned to a different position. The lack of instructional leadership left me floundering as I tried to evaluate the quality and breadth of our math assessments. Finally, I didn't have a formal team with which to work on my PAR project. As questions arose I needed to seek out others who could act as sounding boards for my untamed yet heartfelt ideas and strategies for increasing student achievement in my homeless and highly mobile population so that problems could be identified and solutions put into effect. The only participatory element in my project was my occasional conversations with the Project facilitator.

I reflected quite a bit on the obstacles confronting my students and through the process of action research, I narrowed my focus. I kept coming back to why I pursued this math specialist position in the first place. I knew how literacy affected math skills, yet I wanted an opportunity to focus solely on the building blocks of math. I noticed in my first year of action research that many of my Mexican –American students had solid computational skills, yet their conceptual understanding of math was non-existent. When working with students, I noticed that they only wanted to review rote problems and shutdown when it came to understanding mathematics. My question emerged: How do I make Title One Math group meaningful for my homeless and highly mobile students? If I could identify the keys to make it meaningful, then I could get them motivated to build the conceptual skills they lacked.

A seasoned action research participant knows that once a question forms, it is crucial to look at the assumptions inherent in the question. Unexpectedly, this was a lot harder than I thought it would be for me. I turned to my colleagues at school. It wasn't hard to explain the project and the meaning of assumptions. It was hard, however, to admit to myself that I couldn't do the action research project by myself. As critical as collaboration is to the success of any project, when it is not fostered by the leadership in the building it is likely to fail. I wanted so

much to do everything right the first time that I was blocked from seeing the assumptions that I was making about my students and their learning. I was also afraid that uncovering those assumptions might thwart my project. However, knowing their importance, I pushed on.

Forming my own participatory group

My staff proved to be incredibly insightful and supportive. Ruth, a third grade bilingual teacher, asked me how I knew that math lab wasn't meaningful for my H/HM students. Ouch! That was true. I hadn't even considered that the program may already be meeting the needs of those students. Maria, a second grade bilingual teacher from Mexico, asked me to consider why meaningful was important. She reasoned that students were here to learn and their families expected them to behave and learn regardless of whether they found the content meaningful. Finally, Julie a fourth grade teacher, wanted to know if I considered how to test for meaningful. Were students even taught to be reflective about this in terms of identifying "meaningful?" Even though I respected my colleagues before I asked for their help, the depth of their responses facilitated the collaborative school culture I was missing from the lack of a strong principal. Furthermore, it helped me build relationships with my colleagues. I valued their opinions' and they were honored to be included in the project and asked for their opinions.

As I thought about their questions, I devised a plan for finding answers to my question. Data collection would involve my journal, student assessments both formal and informal, and some kind of affective data about their mood with respect to learning math. Once students were given a baseline test to see if they qualified for Title Math services, I would need to identify the students who were homeless and/or highly mobile and also qualified for Title Math. This data was frustratingly difficult to compile given the misunderstanding of FERPA (Family Education Rights Protection Act) regulations by district personnel. No one wanted to give me the H/HM status out of fear of getting sued for giving away privileged information. Furthermore, our district liaison for homeless students was out on maternity leave, and few people understood this law. After contacting the state coordinator for Title X funds, as well as the director of priority schools, who happened to be one of the women with whom I worked in COPAR, I was granted access to the information. This process, which should have taken at most a day, took six weeks of constant calls, visits, explanations, and effort. My

frustration level rose, yet I was soothed by the knowledge that once I found the answer, my work would lead to increased understanding about the law and access to an improved quality of education for homeless and highly mobile students. An unexpected benefit was building relationships with people in the district.

As I worked the identification piece, I also spent time in the school cafeteria, as well as outside the building before and after school. Since I didn't have a classroom of my own, I needed to be intentional in my effort to get to know and observe students outside of class. This practice led me to Emilio, who worried over his younger sister not having adequate supplies for school. Her backpack had holes in it and the zipper was broken. Emilio couldn't focus because he feared the ridicule of other students. Their father promised to replace it, but there hadn't been enough money to do that for several weeks. Even though our school had backpacks with supplies for H/HM students, these backpacks were given to students upon enrolling at school. If the students developed a need after that time, there was no system for replacement. When I brought Emilio's situation to the office secretaries and asked them how we identify students who need replacement supplies, they said that "we discover them when they come up." Clearly this system failed the Emilio's family. So, I discussed it with the office staff at a staff meeting. Teachers agreed to keep an extra careful eye on their students and to also put a system in place for students to request supplies they may need. I also ensured that the office was stocked with extra supplies. Emilio's younger sister, Tessa, happened to be one of the students I served in Title Math. Due to my limited time with Tessa and the fact that I provided all of the supplies, I would never have known about her distress had I not gotten to know her brother.

Emilio and Tessa's situation was similar to that of one of my second grade students, Maria who was prevented from buying a la carte items because she had a debt on her lunch account. Neither the policy nor the girl's situation made sense to me. She not only qualified for free lunch, but she was also highly mobile. Maria had recently moved back to the States from Mexico. She didn't understand why she was being blocked from purchasing snacks. She was in tears, frustrated, and embarrassed when I approached her in the cafeteria. The cashier told me that even though Maria qualified for free lunch, policy stated that until students get their free lunch forms submitted, they are required to pay full price for lunch. Once they qualify

for free lunch, any debt remaining on the account doesn't go away, it must be paid by the family before a la carte items can be bought. Maria, terrified of the lunch lady, and sick with grief from the situation, went home physically ill from the stress of the incident. I investigated this issue and hit a block because my principal said it was the Director of Food Services call, not ours. Three weeks later, Maria's family moved back to Mexico.

Cycle Two

My first round of observations clarified the difficult nature of the Title Math job. As support teachers, we are not immersed in a regular classroom setting where we would see what is going on for our students. We have students only for a precious 30 – 45 minutes per day. Nor do we observe them in other settings, unless we go out of our way to do so. My next question was how do you make something meaningful for students without knowing who they are? And, once you know about their lives, then what are you going to do with that information? Emilio, Tessa, and Maria are just three students in a school full of children whom I got to know a little. Yet, as I learned from the first COPAR experience; if my students don't feel a connection to me, they won't learn. For students from a Hispanic background, where interpersonal relationships come first in every aspect of life, this is especially true.

So, I needed to take a critical look at my groups and what I was doing to build relationships. Sadly, it wasn't much. Faced with the daunting task of getting students who were drastically falling further and further behind in school, I was on warp speed. Students were seated and we dove right into the lesson without any conversation. It went like this: "Hi! How are you? Have a seat. We have lots to do today!" Then, we launched into review, a new lesson, and application of our knowledge. Then they were out the door where the next group was waiting for me. I hadn't built the relationships or the learning community necessary to do meaningful work in any subject. Yes, I was following the model of the Title One literacy program, yet it wasn't working for me. More importantly it wasn't working for any of my students. Furthermore, I built in no time between groups to reflect about them and about the effectiveness of my teaching. The unspoken rule (or expectation) in the building was that you crammed in as many groups as possible during a day because contact with students was far more important than thinking about their education and their well being. This was disturbing.

So, I made three adjustments. First, I added ten minutes between groups to allow myself time to process the students' needs and to give myself a chance to reflect on what just took place in group. Second, I added time at the beginning of the group to allow students to share news about their day, their life, or anything else. Finally, I took extra time on Monday mornings to allow students to talk and make connections to each other and me about our weekends. In addition to this piece, I added an English word wall that served as a place not just to put math words but also to put words that assisted us in the descriptions we made about what was meaningful to us in our lives.

In addition to these adjustments, I sought out research around best practices for teaching math and English language learners. I read two articles that had a profound impact on how I thought about my groups. First, there was an article by Marilyn Burns in the Winter 2005 edition of *Leadership Compass* entitled "Building a Teaching Bridge from Reading to Math." This article particularly piqued my interest because teaching reading is my strength and teaching math is a competence I am developing. Burns gives ideas about applying what teachers know and love about teaching reading to teaching math. Second, an article entitled "Teacher Skills to Support English Language Learners," in the January 2005 edition of *Educational Leadership*, identifies a lack of background knowledge as a contributing factor to why English Language Learners struggle in the classroom. It made sense to me that this would also apply to H/HM students. If a student is constantly moving, what sense are they making of curriculum content as it changes from one school to another and what background knowledge is missing from their skill set as they attack word problems?

Third Cycle

As I pondered these questions, my thoughts turned to quantitative data. In critically looking at the assessments we use to anchor the math program and gauge student achievement, I found a major flaw. The tests, formulated by Kathy Richardson, Mathematical Perspectives Inc., were offered only in English. A core component of the Richardson assessments is the scripted questions. I could translate the English script, but the translations wouldn't be consistent from student to student unless every one of the nine core assessments was translated into a script. Furthermore, the district required that translations be done by certified

translators, and I wasn't one. Another issue was that while a common language developed the previous year in Math Lab for English speaking students to discuss mathematical strategies and ideas, a common language had yet to develop for Spanish speaking students. Since, the eventual seven students whom I tracked as part of this study spoke Spanish and were in all Spanish instruction for the day, this was a pretty big deal. Next, I looked at the kind of data I received from the Richardson assessments, as well as the other indicators we used to qualify students for the program. Most of the data spoke to conceptual understanding but left out specific standards-based benchmarks that students would need to know to be proficient at their grade level. Furthermore, I discovered that the district math test, originally designed to be given by classroom teachers, question by question as math units were completed, was misused in our school. Our school and many other schools used the tests as beginning, middle, and end-of-the-year assessments. Also, the assessments contained anywhere from eight to twelve questions that were poorly translated into Spanish and needed to be omitted. Due to these errors, the current grading system for the district assessments allowed teachers to disregard any question they felt was unfair. Therefore, the district assessments had little continuity in administration or grading. The tests were also limited in scope and didn't address many of the standards needed for grade level proficiency. Finally, I searched for other modes of data that I could bring in to my group of H/HM students to increase my understanding of their needs and thereby improve my teaching. This final piece allowed me to use and compare actual data for meaningful feedback.

In order to tackle the Richardson assessment piece, I contacted the Directors of Priority Schools for our district and received approval to have a district translator paid to do the work. Next, I sent the tests to the translator. Because of the limited number of translators available and an inordinate number of translating requests, we didn't get the translations back from the translator until five months after we had requested them. In the meantime, I translated the tests orally and began to develop a common language for my students. I used a picture word wall to elucidate their understanding of the concepts and developed their English language skills while teaching them in Spanish. I continued to use the Burns article as an inspiration to find entry points into the math curriculum for my students, while also researching strategies for teaching math. The Echevarria and Short article encouraged me to try posting English language acquisition standards for students to attain each day. For example, when students

left the room they knew they would have to know and understand the difference between the oral pronunciation of “thirteen” and “thirty.” Spanish-speaking students typically struggle with this concept because the words sound identical to them.

The district math assessments proved to be a challenge. Due to miscommunication received by many school principals, it was hard to retract the tests and simply not use them. Our district math and assessment coordinators were in the process of changing the assessments for the upcoming year, yet our math program was stuck with using these tests for this year.

Alarmed at the prospect of using a flawed data along with a test that gave an incomplete picture of my students’ mathematical knowledge, I sought ways to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses in math lab on a daily basis. As their math lab teacher, I needed a reliable way to gauge progress and adjust my teaching style to meet their needs. I decided that I needed to identify their strengths and weaknesses using a standards-based data driven system. Ideally, the system would document individual students’ progress and achievement of the math standards that Title Math Lab was helping them address. Unfortunately, there was no software available to our school to do this, nor was there enough time to research programs, secure funding, and garner approval from the district and principal. So, what I did was set up folders for each student which contained a checklist of state and district math standards. Then I included samples of their work as they met each standard. I dated the assessment and recorded the student’s proficiency status. When a student passed, or showed proficiency on the benchmark, I dated the checklist. This system, along with my anecdotal notes from group, guided my instruction and proved to be effective for me as a teacher. At parent/teacher conferences in the spring, I shared data with parents, who were grateful to see their student’s actual work. One parent indicated that she now understood this “new” grading system with the numbers (standards-based grading) better than ever before because it was accompanied by examples of student work.

The next aspect of the data puzzle to be addressed was the formal assessment piece of language learners. I decided early on that students needed to be monitored for language acquisition as well as math standards on formal tests. The Richardson assessments are all oral. The district tests are written, flawed, and limited in scope. I had my everyday informal

assessments in the math folders, but now I wanted a more formal way of seeing what students could do with English as it related to math. So, I appealed to our Priority Schools office for the funds to purchase Calendar Math from Great Source, Inc. The Calendar Math program proved to be an ingenious way of getting students to practice foundational basic skills while building community and vocabulary. The kit comes with a calendar, which students visit each day for about 5 to 10 minutes. Calendars give students an opportunity to discuss patterns, money, time, holidays, birthdays, and other events that relate directly to math and real life. There are pre and post assessments in English that are linked to standards. As the students completed the tests, I created a chart with the standards on one side and their proficiency level on the other side. I then shared the data with them. We discussed the data through student-teacher conferences, and they highlighted two to three areas in which they felt they could achieve proficiency by the next scheduled testing. Students wrote out their goals, and we posted them. They enjoyed the time with me to discuss their progress, and I benefited greatly from listening to them talk about their strengths and weaknesses in math or in some cases language acquisition. Some of my students knew the math but were stymied by the language.

What evidence did I have that my research was effective?

Homeless and highly mobile students are quickly identified for the Title services they are automatically entitled to receive. I have collaborated with the staff to ensure mutual understanding of the FERPA regulations with respect to Title funding. Our newly hired principal, who will begin his first year with us in the fall, will have a staff meeting early in the year to address McKinney Vento and Title Funding/Services requirements so that no child is left without the services he needs. Eighty percent of my homeless and highly mobile students passed out of the Richardson Assessments, which is one of the most significant qualifiers for entry into the Title Math program. Students effectively use word walls to elucidate their explanations of math problems. Classroom teachers remarked on their increased engagement during math in the spring compared to the fall and winter. As a result of my research, our staff talks about data and assessments in more meaningful ways -- how the data is used and how it impacts student achievement. Personally, I have grown in my capacity as an educator through my willingness to admit my limitations and seek collaboration in the interest of all our students.

How did I modify the Title Math program?

As a result of this research, an overhaul of the assessment program took place. The needs of homeless and highly mobile language learners are being more fully met. Bilingual students receive the Kathy Richardson assessments in the language of instruction, Spanish. Students have math lab folders, which include assessments that demonstrate their progress toward meeting district/state math standards. Now when a student moves, the folder, along with a letter explaining the program and its services, is sent to the next school, complied with new state regulations about math translations for high stakes testing for second language learners. One of my H/HM students moved just before the start of these exams, I was able to mail the necessary paperwork to the new teacher so that the testing was not disrupted. In addition, students are given pre and post tests every four to six weeks for standards proficiency. They are part of the process when it comes to goal setting and reflecting about the learning taking place. The staff, particularly the classroom teachers, have become knowledgeable about FERPA regulations and the Title Math program as a whole. Therefore, classroom teachers assist the math program by providing data to support the observations they make in the short group time, and the math lab teachers support the classroom teachers with data to fine tune math instruction. Staff seems more aware of how having basic needs met, such as students being adequately supplied, can impact the amount of learning that takes place.

Significance of my research?

I partly accomplished what I set out to do. I wanted to see how I could adjust my practice to best meet the needs of my H/HM students. H/HM students, I observed, need to connect to the program in a way that is meaningful to them, yet I need more tools and strategies to help them see how math is relevant to their life experiences. In this way, they may be open to new ways of learning math and have a better chance to succeed even as they move from school to school. In addition, I discovered that H/HM students, who are also English Language Learners, may not have had exposure to the background knowledge that they need to show proficiency on grade level assessments. It is important that we not assume that their lack of proficiency is attributed to a lack of intelligence. However, as action research is prone to do, it took me down an unexpected path. I needed to understand the new program, of which I was a part, before I could start to examine my own practice. I assumed that the math assessments that the program used would be reliable indicators of student knowledge and progress toward

content standards. I also assumed that the assessments would be designed to accurately and adequately identify bilingual students for the program, and that homeless and highly mobile data would not be difficult to attain. These assumptions did not hold up. I struggled to “do good work” with my students while constantly doubting whether the data I was supposed to use was reliable. Instead of getting frustrated and becoming passive, I quickly identified positive steps that I could take, in concert with others, to make changes that would help the program, the students, and educators as a whole. The biggest lesson was patience. Making changes in myself is easier than trying to make changes in an organization. Yet, through patience and action, positive change can and will happen over time.

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Chapter 6

HOMELESS AND HIGHLY MOBILE STUDENTS, AT RISK FACTORS, AND EDUCATIONAL STRUGGLES IN NORTHEASTERN COLORADO

By

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Abstract: Considers the challenges teachers face in balancing standardized reading instruction with student engagement. Includes discussion of risk factors that impact academic achievement of homeless and highly mobile students and offers practical information to enhance educational practices.

Keywords: Academic Achievement, Assessment, Elementary School, English Language Learner, Flexible Instructional Strategies; Literature Review, Reading, and Student Surveys

Situation and Context

The best way to describe the community in which I live may be to use your senses. If traveling to Fort Morgan during the fall, your nose will alert you to your destination a few miles before your eyes will be of assistance. All of a sudden your brain will be asking you, “What IS that smell?” The answer: The sugar beet factory. However, there may be other times during the year you find yourself asking the same question as you approach Fort Morgan on I-76, but the answer might be the meat packing plant this time. If you are lucky, you may be traveling along the Colorado Plains with the mountains in your rearview mirror and the only indication that you’ve reached Fort Morgan is the exit sign at mile marker 80.

Fort Morgan is a smaller rural town of about 12,000 people located about 80 miles northeast of Denver. It has a strong agricultural base that includes farming, several food processing plants, and feed lots. The community does attract some migrant workers, but there are other employment opportunities here once the seasonal work is done. Over the past decade the make-up of the community has changed. Fort Morgan has seen a large increase in poverty levels, the number of second language students, the amount of mobility and a drop in the overall education level of parents.

As the ELL (English language Learners) teacher at Columbine Elementary for the past 11 years I have seen the changes first hand in the school. There are approximately 340 students in grades 1st through 4th. The ethnic breakdown is 65% Hispanic, 45% Anglo. Sixty-five percent of the students qualify for free and reduced lunches. Over 100 of the students are second language learners and in the 2005-2006 school year, the school averaged 25 Homeless and Highly Mobile (H&HM) students at any given point during the year. For the sake of this study highly mobile was defined as two or more changes in school enrollment in the last calendar year due to economic insecurity, not due to the structure of the school district. The guidelines of the McKinney-Vento Act were used to identify students as homeless. These changes in student population are all factors that can spell trouble for schools and education.

Columbine Elementary and Fort Morgan are currently experiencing struggles with student achievement related to the changes in the student population. Hart-Shegos (1999) found that school-age H&HM students may demonstrate health problems, academic problems and behavior problems. Rumberger and Larson (1999) determined that mobility was related to SES (socio-economic status) but not to ethnicity. Mobility was also shown to negatively impact the classrooms and schools that have large amounts of student mobility including non-mobile students. This research would suggest a connection between the changes in student population and the decline of our student achievement.

This Web-Based Professional Development action research project is the second one I have participated in around the topic of H&HM students. My first project centered around learning what H&HM students looked like at my school, what resources were available, and using those resources to keep a HM (highly mobile) student in the same school for the majority of the school year. This time I was a participant in the Web-Based Professional Development Action Research Project as part of a three-person team. I worked with my principal and an active community member, who is also a business owner and parent, using the three domain framework (James, 2004). The domains are 1) Access to educational services; 2) Welcoming school culture; and 3) Flexible instructional strategies. The community member focused on the access to educational services. My principal concentrated his efforts on the welcoming school culture, and I chose to put my efforts into the flexible instructional strategies arena.

Literature Background

Many educators can tell story after story of students they have taught (or maybe even personally) who had strike after strike against them, yet found a way to not only to succeed at school, but possibly even excel. Why is it they have this success? How have they overcome all the risk factors and proven researchers wrong? What risk factors do H&HM students face? How can I as a classroom teacher address these risk factors?

The research on Homeless and Highly Mobile students shows that their needs and situations can have an impact on their school achievement many times before they even reach school age. Homeless children are less likely to attend preschool (Stern & Nunez, 1999). Even when homeless children are in a caring environment, their educational needs can take a back seat to the parents' need to provide for the basics such as food and shelter (Better Homes Fund, 1999).

So what are the issues that can be addressed in the classroom to increase the academic achievement of H&HM students? Some researchers believe that resiliency may be a characteristic that H&HM students develop in order to beat the odds. Werner and Smith (2001) determined that resilient people tend to demonstrate some common characteristics: caring, competent, communicative, good at problem solving, and optimistic. Werner and Smith defined resiliency as an interaction between the individual, the environment, and situational factors. While as an educator I don't have much control over the individual that appears in my classroom, I can have an impact on the environment and situational factors that occur in my school and my classroom. Werner and Smith identified ten factors which they fostered resiliency, most of which I believe can be addressed within a school setting. These factors include ability to read, high expectations, strong role models, bonding with adults, family role model of the same gender, a sense of helpfulness, faith, making and keeping friends, connecting with school, and meaningful participation in the community. Although Werner and Smith's work studied a general population of at risk people, I think their findings are also appropriate for H&HM students.

In addition, researcher Bonny Bernard, (2004) has studied resiliency in relation to education. She found that a mix of caring and respectful relationships, high expectations, and

involvement of the student in decisions making within the school can increase the health, behavior, and academics areas that Hart- Shegos, (1999) noted were areas of concern for H&HM students. She goes onto suggest that when schools and classrooms work hard to foster a welcoming community and value relationships between peers and staff, that students will have the opportunity to develop resiliency. Putnam, (2001) agrees with Bernard in that H&HM children lack the sense of community that would allow them to experience the 10 factors that lead to resiliency. It is up to them to piece their various relationships and role models together to try and develop their own community.

After reviewing some of the literature on resiliency, I can conclude that a key component of success for H&HM students is community support; whether it be the school community or the larger community. Bernard suggests that schools that focus on the social well being of their students can come out ahead academically. This area of research intrigued me and was the starting point for my action research project. How can my school and my classroom community provide my students with as many of the factors as possible that are proven to increase resiliency?

Cycle 1

Cycle 1 consisted of finding a focus for my research question, identifying the H&HM students in the school and my classroom, and determining the risk factors my H&HM students faced.

The first task was to determine the focus of my research question. I had decided I needed to develop a classroom community that would foster academic success, high expectations, solid peer and staff relationships, a sense of helpfulness, meaningful participation, and the ability for students to make connections, especially with the curriculum. I determined that the purpose of this study would be to facilitate a welcoming classroom through the use of flexible instructional strategies to promote connections between the teacher, student, and curriculum to increase academic performance in reading. I was really hoping to get my students not only involved, but also engaged in their learning.

I next identified the H&HM students in first through fourth grades that I had contact with throughout the day. That number varied from six to nine students throughout the 2005-2006

school year with representation at all four grade levels at any given time. I worked with a total of 18 H&HM students throughout the year.

As I continued to learn about resiliency I came across information that addressed risk factors correlated to dropping out. These factors included: poor attendance, repetition of one or more grades, low self-esteem, low academic achievement, second language learner, attendance of schools in large cities, low SES, highly mobile, friends or family members who had dropped out, minority status, illness or disability, and pregnancy. (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Burgeson, & Heuschel, 2003). From the previous research I had learned what areas I wanted to focus on in my classroom, but after seeing this information, I decided it would be helpful to look at other risk factors my students might have before coming up with a plan. There were a few of the risk factors that were easy to identify. Obviously the students I was concentrating on already had four of the risk factors. They were highly mobile, minority, they were second language learners, and as a result they had lower academic achievement – at least to start.

I felt safe in eliminating the pregnancy factor since the majority of the students are 10-11 years old when they leave the building. However, I did try to keep in mind older siblings that may have faced pregnancy at a young age. Within my group I was able to determine that all of them qualified for free lunch and none had attended schools in large cities. Three of the 15 students had been retained at some point. All of the students had parents with a low level of education- none with a high school diploma and most had become parents at a fairly young age (16-23 yrs of age for the moms). There were three students in the group with an identified learning disability, and another student who most likely has one, but this had not been determined at the time of this report. This data was attained through the district computer data base, information in student files, and conversations with students and the school secretary.

After looking at this set of risk factors it became even more clear to me how important my role as an educator who can foster resiliency really is.

Cycle 2

Cycle 2 was about data collection. I collected data from the students to find out where my students were in their sense of school community and how they felt about their peer and staff relationships. Additionally I collected some data on what instructional strategies my students found effective.

The first step was to determine where the H&HM students were on the continuum of sense of community in their school. This was achieved by giving student surveys. I ended up developing two surveys because I felt the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th graders were capable of filling out a more open-ended survey, but the 1st graders needed a different format that required no writing. (See Appendices 1 and 2).

What I was able to determine from my survey was that there was some reason that students liked school. I have suspected most kids liked to come to school for a social reason. The surveys confirmed my suspicions and results were varied. For some it was recess time that motivated them. For others it was a certain game a teacher would play. For some it was a place to see a friend, and a few even suggested they liked their teacher. They seemed to have made some connection to an aspect of school. There were a few students that said they enjoyed the academic part of school which is why they come to school.

When students were asked what they don't like about school, there was a variety of answers. About half the group responded to getting up early and being tired at school. Some student answers suggested a breakdown in a relationship with a staff member (usually temporary) like missing recess, getting yelled at, or not getting homework done. The last set of answers suggested that the work that the teacher gives was too hard. I was very surprised at the number of students that listed being tired in the morning as the reason they didn't like to come to school. I had suspected their answers would either be issues with staff/peer relationships or academic difficulties.

The final part of the survey asked kids to identify what characteristics students liked about their teachers/peers and what characteristics they didn't like. It was no surprise to me that students valued the teachers for personal relationship reasons. For some it was because the teacher was nice. For others it was because the teachers played fun games or gave treats/let

them eat in class. Additional reasons were because the teacher gave them homework or didn't give them homework. That depended on whether the student liked homework or didn't. The same held true for reasons why students didn't like their teachers. They yelled, they gave homework, they had to miss recess. Those answers were not a surprise. The group of students I surveyed struggled with identifying overall negative teacher experiences. They all had days/parts of days where they may not have liked their teachers, but none of them could identify a teacher or characteristics of a teacher they didn't like. Was this because they were younger students and had access to a limited number of teachers? Was this because some of these kids were younger and they couldn't remember what happened back in first grade? Was this because our school has a good staff and kids feel comfortable and welcome? Was this because they weren't going to rat out another teacher to me? Or was this because I was asking for information that was developmentally beyond them? My guess would be the latter, but on the other hand, many of us are capable of remembering the really negative experiences in our lives and some can go back to ages fours and five. Therefore, I might also conclude that the students I surveyed had mostly positive experiences with teachers.

However, when I asked the students to tell me what makes the good students good and the bad students bad they had an easier time answering that one. I assumed their answers would be on an academic level, (good reader, good at math, knows all the answers, etc.) but once again I was surprised by their responses. The majority of their answers lead to social reasons. They help me, they listen, they turn in their homework, they are nice to me, and they are funny and make me laugh.

As I was giving the survey I asked the kids to be honest in their responses and I explained the research project. Now it is possible some of the answers were given just to please "the teacher", but I saw my name mentioned more than once on a few of the questions getting at the negative aspects of the school environment which lead me to believe that a least some of the students were being honest.

As I reviewed the surveys and thought back to my research question, I realized that I had addressed classroom/ school community, peer and staff relationships, but the first survey had not accessed any data on instructional strategies. I had some idea of what instructional

strategies I felt would work well with these students, but I wanted to see where they were coming from. I ended up giving an additional set of survey questions to address instructional strategies.

What I found out was that the 1st graders liked everything suggesting that the line of questioning was beyond them. Most 2nd graders preferred group work and hands-on activities. The 3rd and 4th graders showed a real split between kids who prefer independent work and kids who prefer group work. However, the majority of them did prefer hands-on activities to seat work. Although most were not able to identify themselves as auditory, visual, kinesthetic, or tactile learners; my observations suggested that most of them used an auditory/visual combination of learning style. Since the students I worked with on a daily basis struggled significantly with reading and writing, visual and tactile learning strategies in and of themselves were not as useful. Kinesthetic activities seemed to work well, but were not used as often. This will be discussed further in Cycle 3.

Overall, the surveys were quite positive which lead me to believe that the students felt a connection with school community and their classroom communities.

Cycle 3

Once I had administered the surveys, my next step was to consider the next two factors for resiliency: high expectations and connections to the curriculum. In this section, you will learn of my struggle dealing with the Reading First grant our school implemented this year and my work with Web-Based Professional Development Action Research Project.

The 2005-2006 school year started with some big changes in the way my school was addressing reading instruction. This was our first year as participants in a Reading First grant. The grant had some specific requirements that shaped reading instruction. The first was that all students would be taught with grade level text. This raised the level of expectations for some of the lower achieving students. Another requirement was that all students would spend 90 minutes a day in uninterrupted reading instruction. No grammar, spelling, writing, etc. allowed during this time. This also helped to raise the level of expectations for both teachers and students. In addition, all students performing below grade level were to receive 30-45

additional minutes of reading instruction in smaller groups to help pinpoint difficulties and give students extra instructional time to get caught up. This insured sufficient time with the curriculum. There was a pacing requirement that was added to the mix so that all children would be exposed to the entire curriculum ensuring that students would not develop gaps because some parts of the curriculum were not taught. At this point in time I felt very confident that the level of expectations for both the students and myself were high. However at the same time, I wondered if maybe they were too high.

As I moved into making connections to the curriculum I knew I faced a challenge. Due to some of the risk factors my students face (second language learners, low level of education, lack of background knowledge due to lack of experiences which cycles back to issues of poverty) finding connections to the curriculum is always a challenge, but a necessity. However, I have found ways to do it in the past and felt confident I would find ways to succeed again. What I soon discovered was the pacing of the curriculum (grant required) was making it a challenge to find time to make the connections for my students. I didn't have enough time to even cover the curriculum, let alone pull in additional resources to help students make those connections. My next thought was instead of trying to add to the curriculum I would replace parts of it to make it more relevant to my students. I also believed that by addressing some of my instructional strategies I could access the curriculum at a different level for my students. This led me into my fourth cycle. I knew expectations were high for my students, I knew they felt a connection to the school and their classrooms, but could I make the connection to the curriculum for them? I still had faith that I could be flexible with my instructional strategies in order to make the curriculum accessible to my students.

Cycle 4

My intent for Cycle 4 was to focus on my use of flexible instructional strategies, but as it turned out I struggled with the lack of flexible instructional strategies I was able to use and saw additional signs that I wasn't connecting the curriculum with my students' backgrounds

Cycle 4 started as the first semester was coming to a close. As with any change there had been ups and downs. I had struggled with some of the pacing for a while, but I was feeling

more comfortable with it. I questioned whether the expectations the grant held for my students were too high. I watched some of my students get frustrated because while they were exposed to more of the curriculum than in the past, they were mastering less of it. However, I still had hope that as a professional I had the necessary skills to reach my students. It was going to require some additional effort and energy on my part. I had the second half the year to focus on my instructional strategies and I could use my surveys to match the curriculum to the learning needs of my students.

However, that is when the Reading First grant threw a curve ball into this research project. We attended training in January which outlined what we would teach and for all intent and purpose how we would teach it. The message came across loud and clear that the only way these kids (school wide, district wide, state wide) could show the necessary growth was if we followed their standardized way of instruction. Their required ways of instruction were teacher directed and had limited student interaction. The theory behind the instructional practices from Reading First was the more explicit and direct the teaching the more curriculum the students will be exposed to. However, with the student population I have contact with daily, including the H&HM students, they need the discussion time. They need time to practice oral language. They need different experiences to develop a context for activating background knowledge and connecting them to the curriculum. Finally they need activities which require them to interact with their peers, not just listen to the teacher talk. While Reading First was requiring choral responses, some tactile activities, and lots of teacher directed teaching to keep the pace up, the emphasis was on reading skills, not on interacting with the curriculum, which was the focus of part of this Web-Based Professional Development project

While I tried to implement the grant as required, I also consciously made an effort to use a little variety from time to time. As the rest of the year progressed, I informally asked students to rate what they thought of a particular day's activities. What I found was that my students were very polite to me. Although they didn't say they loved most of the strategies, they didn't say they hated them either. Each grade level had their favorite, but those tended to be the activities that were more interactive and had more direct student involvement. There were two areas I found most interesting and had nothing to do with what my students could

verbalize to me. It was their behaviors and the comments I *didn't* hear, which gave me a more accurate picture than my surveys and informal questioning.

I will focus on their behaviors first. I, like most teachers, have informal ways of measuring my effectiveness in the classroom. Although I am a modest person and don't like the spotlight, (and my co-workers would agree) I would say that one of my strengths as an educator is the ability to motivate and engage my students in their learning on a regular basis. While I have my fair share of complainers, I can usually keep kids on task with a limited amount of effort and class time would just fly by. I knew this year I was not being as effective when by February I was spending more and more of my energy and class time trying to get my students motivated and engaged. I started to have more difficulty keeping kids on task. I was expending way more energy on basic classroom management issues than ever before. Time would drag on for both me and my students. I had students who would complain of being sick everyday when it was time for reading. In the 10 years of teaching prior to the 2005-2006 school year, I had maybe four students exhibit this behavior. Three of them were in various stages of culture shock and the fourth student had difficulty when I was out on a maternity leave. This year alone I had six students who complained on a daily basis. I found that by the end of the day and especially the end of the week I was emotionally and physically exhausted. I found my frustration level rising as well and my student's level of frustration as the second half the year continued.

I was also getting feedback on my effectiveness by listening to the comments or lack of comments my students made. Kids started asking why we weren't doing things they way we did last year (not the H&HM students, obviously). Some of my older students were able to articulate that learning was easier last year because of some of the activities we had done in the past. My ultimate measure of effectiveness came from the students themselves. Kids talk to other kids and they are frank with each other. In all previous years of my teaching I would have a handful of students (Anglo and English-speaking only) who would approach me and beg me to let them be in my group. During the 2005-2006 school year I had no one approach me. The children had spoken by not saying anything at all.

When parent/teacher conferences rolled around at the beginning of March, I was a little worried. I knew I was going to have some tough conversations with a few parents about lack of motivation and effort. While there are always students who have motivation issues, I was now seeing trouble with students who would not have these issues had the school not been involved with the Reading First grant. In most cases the parents were first to bring the topic up. They were having some of the same issues at home. Students who normally wanted to go to school were complaining about having to come. There were new battles over getting homework done that had not been which had not occurred in years past. I knew some of the parents had legitimate concerns because by the nature of my job I work with students for more than one year. I had seen the same changes. I think the two most difficult conferences were with two of the first grade parents. They were very concerned about the dramatic change that had occurred in their child's attitude towards school during the school year. It broke my heart to hear them tell me how excited they were to go to school in preschool and kindergarten and how that excitement had diminished over the year and by Spring it was a daily battle to get them to come to school.

By April, I was totally frustrated and wanted to quit. When these frustrations were expressed on a school wide level, we were told to hold the course and wait for end of the year testing results. I was disappointed in my performance as a teacher and frustrated with the limited instructional strategies available to me. I think even worse, I felt I was letting my students down because I was capable of better, but honestly I was so emotionally drained from plowing through the curriculum, battling attitudes, lack of student motivation and engagement that I had very little energy left to focus on adjusting the strategies I could.

Results

As the year came to a close I was completely discouraged. We then started to complete our end of the year testing. Our 3rd grade state reading assessment results arrived. Our students scored the highest ever in the 10 years we've been giving the assessment. We even beat the state average. Although this was excellent news, I wanted to analyze some building level data. One of the assessments we use is DIBELS. It is a reading assessment that is administered to students individually three times a year. It was developed by the University of Oregon. (More information is available through their website <http://dibels.uoregon.edu>.)

They have determined that by the end of 1st grade and on up through other grades, the most accurate indicator of reading success is oral reading fluency (how many words per minute a student can read.) The University of Oregon has set minimum benchmark levels for each grade level. Essentially this means that in order to be a successful reader the students need to be able to read a certain number of words per minute. Students who do not reach the benchmark are then labeled “at risk.” These “at risk” students are then targeted for additional reading instruction to help raise their fluency and increase their success as readers. The lower the number of students “at risk” in the school, the more effective the instruction is according to Reading First. This is a required assessment for the Reading First grant we were participating in and it is data we used at the building level on a regular basis. The 2005-2006 was the 2nd year we had used this assessment. I looked at building level numbers first so I could compare my students to the building results, then I separated out my H&HM students.

| 2004-2005 | | | 2005-2006 | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| | Students at risk | | Students at risk | |
| | <i>Beginning of year</i> | <i>End of year</i> | <i>Beginning of year</i> | <i>End of Year</i> |
| 1 st grade | No data | 53% | No data | 48% |
| 2 nd grade | 26% | 46% | 62% | 47% |
| 3 rd grade | 41% | 56% | 58% | 56% |
| 4 th grade | 63% | 70% | 64% | 65% |

When comparing student achievement from last year to this year using the DIBLES information, I noticed that school wide the students made much better growth. During the 2004-2005 school year the number of at-risk students had actually increased during the year at every grade level. During the 2005-2006 school year, several grade levels were able to decrease the number of at-risk students, however, the 4th grade showed a slight increase. In addition, when I compared the end of the 2004-2005 school year with the end of the 2005-2006 school year, we were successful in lowering the total overall number of kids at-risk at three of the four grade levels. Third grade had the same percentage of at-risk students for both years. Our school wide data showed some of the same successes as the state wide reading assessment.

As I looked at the data for my students I hoped I would find similar results. I figured the average growth in the number of words read per minute for each grade level. Then I compared that to both my overall group of students and then again with just my H&HM students.

2005-2006 Oral Reading Fluency measured in words per minute (wpm)

| | Columbine's average growth | Watson's group average growth | Watson's H&HM growth |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 st grade | 24.5 wpm | 17.3 wpm | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 students not tested-no reading skills in English • 2 students not here long enough to obtain growth data • 1 student growth 14 wpm |
| 2 nd grade | 54 wpm | 47.2 wpm | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 students not here long enough to obtain growth data • 1 student growth over part of year -22 wpm. School average for same time frame- 35.6 wpm • 1 student growth 42 wpm |
| 3 rd grade | 32.2 wpm | 37.5 wpm | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 students not tested-no reading skills in English • 2 students -29 wpm • -46 wpm |
| 4 th grade | 23.8 wpm | 25.1 wpm | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 student not here long enough to obtain growth data • 2 students -35 wpm • -40 wpm |

In some ways I was disappointed that only two grade levels of my students attained or beat the school average for growth. On the other hand, I think the results reflect that students did not make connections to curriculum, weren't engaged, and seemed frustrated for a large chunk of the year.

When I focused on my H&HM students I learned that the majority of them did not make the average growth, let alone blow the averages out of the water. From my perspective the 1st and 2nd graders struggled the most with the day-to-day instruction and the test results support that

finding. However the 3rd and 4th graders had a stronger foundation in reading so those H&HM students did beat the school average, but not by much. .

The data I collected showed mixed results. The surveys I administered toward the beginning of the year suggested that students had a solid relationship with peers and staff and a sense of belonging in the school community. My informal observations suggested that students achieved varying levels of involvement in their learning, but low levels of engagement. However, what disappointed me the most was the lack of connections I was able to form with the curriculum and the limited amount of flexible instructional strategies I was able to implement.

Conclusion

Although the outcome of this year's research project went in a completely different direction than I had hoped, there were still many things to be learned. First and foremost this year proved once again how resilient kids can be. This research project proved that kids can rise to high expectations. I found that because of some of the changes which occurred as a result of the grant. First, I used my instructional time more effectively. Not only was I better at managing my time, but our ongoing data assessment allowed me to be more focused on the instructional needs of my students.

While I feel I had success in some areas, it also highlighted areas that I will continue to work on improving. Student test scores were up, the data showed mixed results, but I strongly believe that the slip in attitudes, lack of engagement, and limited use of instructional strategies prevented the students from achieving their full potential of growth. Although limited by the requirements of Reading First, there are going to be some changes for the 2006-2007 school year to be implemented. The first is a curriculum change that will allow for my students to access grade level materials, but also spend part of the reading instructional time in curriculum that is more appropriate for them. This way the expectation will still be high but student frustration level will drop. This will allow a little flexibility in the pacing so there will be more time to find connections to text and redevelop the student's engagement in the learning environment while still pushing them to achieve more.

As a person who always is looking for ways to make my teaching more effective, I believe that I can always do better. I am not against change, but I firmly believe that kids and their needs should be considered in any aspect of change. By treating them alike we are doing them a disservice. There needs to be a balance between having high expectations and fostering a sense of helpfulness, a sense of belonging, and meaningful participation in their education. I have learned that I can make kids learn, but I strongly believe, this year more than any year past, that without attending to all the risk factors I can not create life-long learners. For me this is the ultimate goal as an educator. There needs to be a balance that was lost this year in my classroom. Although there was good academic growth I can only wonder what the results might have been if my students had attained a higher level of engagement, a sense of helpfulness and been able to connect and participate in a more meaningful way. I believe the growth potential could be phenomenal!

Step by Step Process

After reflecting on my experience this year, I offer the following recommendations teachers hoping to conduct their own action research project.

1. Read research until you find an area that really strikes you and that believe can have a direct affect on your students.
2. Realize the more you learn, the more questions you have.
3. Kids can be a valuable source of data, but it can be a challenge to get that data from them at times. This is where I relied upon journaling in addition to my surveys and achievement data.

Suggested Steps to Enhance Educational Practices:

| Step | Who Involved | Tasks |
|--|---------------------|---|
| Find a way to connect with students | Teacher, Student | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time daily to listen to what your students want to share about their lives • Take time to learn what interests your students • Take time to learn about your students' families • Eat lunch with your students from time to time • Learn something about your student's culture and language if different than your • Let students have some input in classroom decisions |
| Make your classroom welcoming | Teacher | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decorate classroom with student work • Decorate classroom with décor that represents students' cultures and languages • Smile a lot • Be available to help students outside of class time • Have extra school supplies available for new students who arrive and don't have the means to get them right away |
| Use a variety of instructional strategies appropriate for student population and culture | Teacher | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey students to find out what learning styles are present in your classroom • Learn about differences in educational settings for the cultures that are present in your classroom • Use journaling or anecdotal records to give you additional information about how your students learn best |
| Find ways to connect curriculum to students' lives | Teacher | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find literature that matches cultural background of students • Chose topics for study that interests your students • Give students choices in what to study when appropriate |
| Have high expectations for students | Teacher, Student | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect that your students can achieve grade level skills • Give them plenty of practice with varying levels of support to build confidence |

Appendix 1

H&HM Research Survey 2005-2006

This survey was given to 2nd-4th graders. The survey administered to 1st graders is found in Appendix 2.

1. What makes you want to come to school?
2. What makes you not want to come to school?
3. What is easy for you at school?
4. Why?
5. What is hard for you at school?
6. Why?
7. Think about your favorite teacher. Why do you like them?
8. Think about a teacher you didn't like. Why didn't you like them?
9. Think of the best student you know. What makes them the best?
10. Think of the worst student you know. What makes them the worst?

The following questions were added as a follow up to the previous questions. Students answered the following questions by using either a happy face, a straight face, or a sad face.

1. How do you feel about working with a partner?
2. How do you feel about working by yourself?
3. How do you feel about doing worksheets?
4. How do you feel about listening to the teacher talk?
5. How do you feel about writing answers on paper?
6. How do you feel about saying the answers out loud in class?
7. How do you feel about doing activities or games?

Appendix 2

H&HM Research Survey 2005-2006

This survey was administered to 1st grade students. When answering the questions the students chose from 4 different cartoon faces, ranging from very happy, to smiling, to a bored face, and finally a sad/frustrated face.

1. How do you feel about school?
2. How do you feel about reading?
3. Do you think you are a good student?
4. How do you feel about homework?
5. Do you think you are a good reader?
6. How do you feel about your teachers?
7. How do you feel about answering your teacher's questions?
8. How do you feel about the activities your teachers do with you?
9. How do you feel when your teacher asks you to work with a partner?
10. How do you feel when your teachers ask you to do activities that let you move things with your hands?
11. How do you feel when your teacher asks you to listen to them teach?
12. How do you feel when your teacher asks you to write your answers on a piece of paper?
13. How do you feel when your teacher asks you to work by yourself?
14. How do you feel when your teacher asks you to do worksheets?