

Research-Based Practices Symposium
Literacy Facilitated Discussion Session
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Key Observations & Questions from David Chard's Presentation

- Not many programs represented on the list of programs with evidence of effectiveness
- Adolescent interventions are largely not evaluated
- Fidelity of implementation is critical, which requires professional development
- How do researchers measure student outcomes? How do those measures align with the ones we use?
- How do we assess our students? TAKS is summative assessment, so what diagnostics or formative assessments do we have?
- ESL training may be valuable for literacy programs
- How do we support ELL students struggling with literacy in their native language

Overall Key Points and Questions

“Use programs and embrace practices.”

Several times, participants stated the importance of focusing curriculum and instruction not on “programs,” but on “practices.” They agreed that one program is not the solution. Instead, districts need to focus on what they are going to teach and how they are going to teach it. An administrator from Pflugerville ISD discussed their efforts at implementing specific instructional initiatives across campuses to increase consistency and coherence of instruction across the district. In doing so, they have developed some common instructional terminology so that all teachers understand what is meant by a specific practice such as guided reading.

Role of research in district practices

There was considerable discussion about the responsibility of districts to conduct research in order to evaluate programs and practices. The consensus of the group was that it is not districts' role to research programs, but to instead focus on the success of students. They agreed that it is important to identify effective programs and to use evidence from research to do so, but saw that task as interfering with their ability to focus on students and student success.

Evaluating program effectiveness vs. monitoring student progress

A number of participants responded to questions about how they evaluate programs with discussions of student progress monitoring. They saw this task as somewhat equivalent to evaluating program effectiveness. For example, one participant described a district process of monitoring student progress toward certain objectives and benchmarks, and then using that information to identify potential changes to curriculum and instructional programs in order to improve student outcomes. Thus, conclusions about programs and

common practices were made based on student progress toward learning goals, but without systematic determination of how those programs influenced the outcomes.

Adolescent literacy

The group agreed that there is a deficit of research on adolescent reading programs. Participants described a number of strategies they are pursuing to address this issue: MAP assessments (a diagnostic and prescriptive component designed for adolescent literacy), tools from the Florida Center for Reading Research (which provide specific targets for instruction), the Texas Middle School Fluency Assessment (TMSFA) screening tool, DRA, Aims web, Scholastic Reading Inventory as an initial screener, and the Qualitative Reading Inventory. A participant from Round Rock ISD described the district's adolescent literacy approach as "balanced literacy on steroids," incorporating appropriate reading materials, fluency-building strategies, and reading literacy stations. Challenges in this area include lack of information about students' reading levels, students' lack of global knowledge as a barrier to comprehension, and secondary teachers' lack of training in reading instruction.

Triangulation

During a discussion on the difficulties of using teachers' testimonies and anecdotes to determine program effectiveness, one participant brought up the usefulness to districts of triangulating multiple data sources. In this procedure, different types of data that address a program or practice (although in different ways, such as qualitative and quantitative) are compared and contrasted to identify connections between the program/practice and outcomes of interest. The group agreed that this method could be useful to districts that have many sources of information, but may not have the capacity to conduct research that more directly addresses causal relationships between programs and outcomes.

Job-Alike Forums

This was discussed as a high-priority action strategy that could be facilitated by E³ Alliance. Forums for people at similar positions (i.e., teachers, principals) on a particular issue, such as adolescent literacy, can integrate core subject areas. They can also provide professional learning community, perspectives on instructional rigor, and provide opportunities to share best practices that will inform others.

Action Research Projects

This was another high-priority area for action that could be facilitated by E³ Alliance. The group agreed that teachers must be involved in identifying effective practices in order to improve student achievement. Action research could take the form of teacher evaluations (appraisal by collaboration) or evaluating student work. This is a useful area for collaboration with higher education to assist teachers in conducting research.

Parking Lot Issues

Participants discussed the need for teachers to collaborate and share their practice in order to help each other identify and develop effective practices. Issues such as content expertise, knowledge of literacy instruction (especially among secondary teachers), and trust were discussed as impediments. They also discussed the need for better diagnostic

and formative student assessments such as screening tools and growth measures. The need for higher-quality multicultural texts and curricula was also mentioned to provide students with more relevant materials. The creation of a repository of texts and materials was discussed as a possible area for district collaboration. Participants discussed the need to develop strategies to address new literacies, such as multimedia materials and online communication. The role of campus leadership in literacy improvement was also discussed. Are there opportunities for campus leaders to work together to improve adolescent literacy? Finally, the need to incorporate training in reading instruction into secondary teacher preparation was discussed. Some participants from universities mentioned that they are already working toward this.