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2013

Abstract

A Utilization-Focused Program Evaluation of a Supplemental Educational Services

Third-Party Tutoring Model

by

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MA, University of Phoenix, 2007

BS, University of Phoenix, 2000

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Administrative Leadership for Teacher Learning

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Abstract

Under the mandates of No Child Left Behind, supplemental educational services (SES) in the form of tutoring are provided to eligible students who attend schools in the 3rd year of program improvement status. A local suburban school district in southern California currently uses a 3rd party tutoring model to provide tutoring services in both mathematics and language arts. State approved tutors are reimbursed by the school district using Title 1 funding up to a per-student revenue allocation that is determined by the amount of Federal funding each school district receives. A review of archival student data reflects that the current model is ineffective in increasing student test scores in mathematics and language arts on the California Standardized Test. An improvement-oriented formative program evaluation was proposed to investigate the current 3rd party tutoring model and to formulate revisions to the current SES tutoring program. The study was based on the constructivist theories of Vygotsky and Kolb, which emphasized the active role of learners in building understanding and making sense of information. A thematic analysis of data obtained from 10 interviews with state-approved tutors provided insight into the impact of the current 3rd party model on current stakeholders. Program evaluation findings outlined in the executive summary will include recommendations on how the current tutoring program may be augmented to improve learning outcomes for eligible students. The implementation of these recommendations for program improvement will serve as a catalyst for positive social change as student learning outcomes improve and schools emerge from under the academic sanctions of No Child Left Behind.

PREVIEW

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Dedication

This project study is dedicated to my beloved partner Bo and our two boys - Winston and Dexter. Your collective enduring support and love made the completion of this journey possible.

PREVIEW

Acknowledgements

First, I want to thank my parents Jane and Malcolm for teaching me at an early age that life-long learning was the responsibility of every human being. Your support, mentorship and kindness over the past four decades have meant more to me than you will ever know.

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Table of Contents

Section 1: The Problem.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Definition of the Problem	2
Rationale	5
Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level	5
Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature.....	6
Definitions.....	7
Significance.....	9
Guiding/Research Question	11
Theoretical and Conceptual frameworks	12
Review of the Literature	19
Implications.....	29
Summary	32
Section 2: The Methodology.....	33
Introduction.....	33
Research design and approach	34
Purpose of the study.....	40
Data Collection	47
Data Analysis	49
Limitations of the evaluation	53
Qualitative Results.....	55

Conclusions.....	74
Summary.....	78
Section 3: The Project.....	79
Introduction.....	79
Description and Goals.....	79
Rationale	80
Review of the Literature	81
Parent Involvement	82
Classroom teacher feedback and supervision	96
One-to-one tutoring.....	100
Location of tutoring services	103
Implementation	104
Potential Resources and Existing Supports.....	105
Potential Barriers	106
Proposal for Implementation and Timetable.....	107
Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others	107
Implications Including Social Change.....	107
Local Community	107
Far-Reaching.....	109
Conclusion	110
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	112
Introduction.....	112

Project Strengths	112
Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations.....	119
Scholarship.....	122
Project Development and Evaluation.....	125
Leadership and Change.....	126
Analysis of Self as Scholar	128
Analysis of Self as Practitioner.....	130
Analysis of Self as Project Developer	131
The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change.....	132
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research.....	134
Conclusion	136
References.....	138
Appendix A: Program Evaluation Executive Summary	156
Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in research.....	162
Appendix C: Informed Consent.....	163
Appendix D: Interview Protocol.....	166
Curriculum Vitae	168

Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson's administration enacted a plethora of legislation aimed at addressing pervasive situational and generational poverty across the United States. The legislation that had a profound impact on public education was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This federal legislation was far sweeping as it emphasized equal access to a high quality public education for all students and drew attention to widening achievement gaps between students emanating from poverty and their peers. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was a reauthorization of the ESEA that provided federal aid to disadvantaged students through its Title 1 funding arm. Given the current reauthorization of NCLB and the public scrutiny placed on educational spending it has never been more important to evaluate the effectiveness of academic interventions mandated under NCLB. As the United States Department of Education continues to develop policies to address the achievement gaps that exist between students from low-income backgrounds and their more privileged peers, local education authorities (LEAs) must take a proactive stance in ensuring that fiscal resources provided to students under Title 1 Part A are put to effective use in improving student learning outcomes.

The intent of Title 1, Part A was to meet the educational needs of low-achieving students enrolled in the highest poverty schools. Current researchers posit that education is integral to breaking the cycle of poverty experienced by millions of students and their families across the United States (Payne, 2008). Working from this premise, Title 1

provides fiscal resources to schools that have high concentrations of students from low-income families (Chamberlin, 2009). Fiscal resources must be used to supplement, not supplant existing interventions offered during the regular school day (No Child Left Behind [NCLB] 2002). Supplemental educational services (SES) in the form of tutoring is an example of one such intervention available to students that qualify.

As a site administrator currently working for a large suburban unified school district in the southwestern United States, I have had the responsibility of working with third-party tutoring providers to develop individualized learning goals in either mathematics or language arts for qualifying students. This experience has thrown into question the efficacy and efficiency of the current SES provider model in its ability to improve the academic outcomes of qualifying students. These concerns motivated me to investigate formally the current SES model utilized by Unified School District (USD). Using program evaluation I examined the current SES third-party tutoring model to determine its worth and to make recommendations for programmatic refinement and future success (Spaulding, 2008). As a researcher, I was not interested in generalizing findings to a wider audience, or discussing how my study's findings relate back to the literature. Instead, I was focused on the functionality of the SES tutoring model used by my current district, and for this reason program evaluation was an ideal investigative approach.

Definition of the Problem

The school district under study currently apportions approximately \$1.1 million annually to fund its supplemental educational services (SES) (Unified School District,

2012). Under the mandates of No Child Left Behind (2001), the SES program provides no-cost tutoring services in either mathematics or language arts to students that qualify. The California Department of Education outlines the qualifying criteria for third-party tutoring providers to contract with different school districts. Once approved, these providers are then permitted to charge a maximum hourly rate (\$92) to school districts for the services they provide to students and their families. Last year each eligible tutoring provider received \$1,152 for each qualifying student, which was paid directly to the tutoring provider to compensate them for their rendered tutoring services (School District, 2012).

Over the past 4 years, a database was created to house pertinent information pertaining to any student that received SES reimbursed tutoring services. This information included: (a) the student's first, middle, and surname; (b) the student's district identification number; (c) the start and end dates of tutoring services for each year; (d) the number of tutoring sessions each student received; (e) the content area the student received services in; (f) the name and contact information for the approved tutoring provider; (g) the tutoring modality provided for each student; and (h) the mathematics and language arts standardized test scores for each year the student received SES tutoring services. Student scores on the mathematics and language sections of the California Standardized Test (CST) were then analyzed to determine if the tutoring services provided from January through April increased each student's achievement on the state assessment administered to all students in late April. During the 2010-11 school year (from January to April), a total of 3,278 students received SES tutoring services,

1,578 in mathematics and 1,700 in language arts and reading (Unified School District, 2012).

Student performance on the California Standardized Test in mathematics is measured using proficiency bands. Student's numeric scores fall into five different proficiency bands of performance. As noted by the California Department of Education (2012), the five bands are far below basic (score of 200-250); below basic (score of 251-299); basic (score of 300-350); proficient (score of 351-399); and advanced (score of 400+). An analysis of USD quantitative archival data reflected that of the 1,578 students that received SES tutoring services in mathematics, 32% (504) improved one or more proficiency bands on the CST; 36% (552) remained at the same proficiency band on the CST; and 32% (504) declined one or more proficiency bands on the CST (Unified School District, 2012). Of the 1,700 students that received tutoring services in language arts and reading, 23% (391) improved one or more proficiency bands on the CST; 42% (714) remained at the same proficiency band; and 35% (595) declined one or more proficiency bands on the CST (Unified School District, 2012).

Overall, only 32% of the students who received SES tutoring services district-wide in mathematics made any performance gains according to their performance on the CST. The remaining 68% either made no gains or dropped in proficiency. With a wide discrepancy in student achievement gains or losses following the administration of SES tutoring services, an investigation was proposed to evaluate the current SES model. A review of the literature pertaining to the predominant nationwide SES modes of instruction indicated that there were four primary modes of instruction implemented by

SES programs (Chappell, Nunnery, Pribesh, & Hager, 2011; Heinrich, Meyer, & Whitten, 2010; Burch, Steinberg, & Donovan, 2007; Harding, Harrison-Jones, & Rebach, 2012). These are: (a) face-to-face instruction; (b) computer-based learning including one-to-one, small group, instructor led and self-paced; (c) small group instruction; and (d) mixed model, incorporating two or more of the learning modes.

Due to the fact that I am primarily interested in the impact of the current SES model on different stakeholders (students, tutoring providers, and parents), a participatory-oriented program evaluation approach (Spaulding, 2008) was employed to investigate different characteristics of the current SES model. Using this approach, I involved third-party tutoring providers in the evaluation of the current model in an attempt to comprehend the effectiveness of the current third-party tutoring system in improving student outcomes from the perspective of these stakeholders. Findings from the program evaluation will be used to make recommendations for programmatic refinement and future success.

Rationale

Since the inception of SES, there has been a rapid increase in the number of local state approved tutoring services available to eligible students and their families (Heinrich, Meyer, & Whitten, 2010). Supplemental education services are available to students from low-income families that are enrolled in Title 1 schools and districts that have not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for 3 years or more (Burch, Steinberg, & Donovan, 2007). Of significant note, has been the rapid increase in the number of providers that offer tutoring services exclusively on line to students. As digital natives, students have

incorporated technology into their day-to-day lives with the rapid proliferation of computer technology and hand-held devices (Wagoner, 2008). Students demonstrate the technological proficiencies necessary to use a digital platform to interact with their tutor and communicate via email. A natural assumption might be that students might gravitate towards SES tutoring services that allow them to use these technology and communication skills. Of the 32 providers that offered services to students last school year, eight of them offered online instruction. This year, according to preliminary estimates obtained from USD, 16 providers will be offering online instruction to students. One of the major incentives for families in selecting an online provider as opposed to a face-to-face individual or small group provider is the incentive of a free mini notebook computer, provided to the family at no cost to them by the provider. Students use this computer to interact with their tutors via the internet but are welcome to keep the computer free of charge once the services have terminated.

As outlined in the *Supplemental Educational Services (SES) 2012-13 Free Tutoring Services Student Enrollment Booklet* published by Unified School District in October 2012, 59 third-party tutoring providers are approved to provide tutoring services to eligible students in either mathematics or language arts and one provider is approved to provide tutoring services in language arts only. According to the booklet, hourly tutoring rates range from \$36 per hour to \$80 per hour. This equates to 25.70 and 11.56 hours of tutoring services respectively, given the maximum allocation of \$925.16 per student that each tutoring provider is reimbursed. As noted in the publication, tutor-to-student ratios

ranged from one to three students per tutor, and all of the 60 approved providers offered tutoring services to students with disabilities and to English learners.

Given the wide range of services provided by third-party providers and the fact that current archival data reflects that there were no significant academic gains made by students that participated in SES tutoring services, I conducted an evaluation of the current SES model with the purpose of making recommendations for programmatic refinement and success. USD has a vested interest in the effectiveness of the current SES model for several reasons. First, in the 2011-12 fiscal year, USD spent approximately \$1million reimbursing SES tutoring providers for their services with no significant improvement in mathematics or language arts learning outcomes for students who received the tutoring services (Unified School District, 2012). Second, as USD deals with district sanctions imposed by the California Department of Education due to underperforming schools, it is imperative that research-based academic interventions have a positive impact on student achievement outcomes. Failure to improve student learning outcomes might result in further sanctions and possible district reorganization (United States Department of Education, 2012).

Definitions

The following were identified as special terms associated with the problem under study. A scholarly definition is provided for each of the terms with an accompanying citation from the literature.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): AYP is a series of annual academic performance goals established for each school, local education authorities (LEA), and the

state as a whole. Schools, LEAs, and the state are determined to have met AYP if they meet or exceed each year's goals. (California Department of Education, 2012).

Computer-based instruction: Students received individual instruction in reading or mathematics after school at an off campus location, online with a student-teacher ratio of about 1:6 (Harding, Harrison-Jones, & Rebach, 2012).

Eligible Students: Students from low income families that are enrolled in Title 1 schools and districts that have not made adequate year progress (AYP) for 3 years or more. (Burch, Steinberg, & Donovan, 2007).

Mixed-model instruction: Students received a combination of direct instruction in reading or mathematics after school at an off campus location using two or more of the three modes of instruction (small group, one-to-one, computer based). Student teacher ratios varied from 1:1 to 1:10 (Harding, Harrison-Jones, & Rebach, 2012).

One-to-one instruction: Each student received individual instruction in reading or mathematics, after school at an off campus location with a student teacher ratio of 1:1 (Harding, Harrison-Jones, & Rebach, 2012).

Program Improvement (PI): In California PI is the formal designation for Title I-funded schools and local education authorities (LEAs) that fail to make AYP for two consecutive years (California Department of Education, 2012).

SES mode of instruction: SES mode of instruction refers to the type of setting in which the student received tutoring services. Optional settings include: (a) small group; (b) one-to-one; (c) computer-based; and (d) mixed model (Harding, Harrison-Jones, & Rebach, 2012).

Small group instruction: Students received direct instruction in either reading or mathematics after school in an off campus location with one instructor and a small group of students ranging in size from 4 to 10 (Harding, Harrison-Jones, & Rebach, 2012).

Supplemental Education Services (SES): Supplemental education services are out-of-school tutoring services that are provided by state approved public or private agencies to students that qualify. The services may include tutoring and after-school services (Chappell, Nunnery, Pribesh, & Hager, 2011; Burch, Steinberg, & Donovan, 2007).

Title I: Title I, Part A is a federal categorical program contained in the Consolidated Application. Its purpose is to ensure that all children have a fair and equal opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on the state content standards and assessments. The intent of this funding is to meet the educational needs of low achieving students enrolled in the highest poverty schools (California Department of Education, 2012).

Significance

The recent reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (2001) has focused the public eye on the allocation and subsequent effectiveness of monies targeted for academic interventions (Chamberlin, 2009). According to Bonelli (2007), this increased scrutiny has placed pressure on local education authorities (LEAs) to ensure that federal tax dollars are spent on effective research-based academic interventions that are proven to increase student achievement in core subject areas. A review of the literature pertaining to the effectiveness of SES tutoring services in increasing student achievement yielded mixed findings. Preliminary analysis of the current third-party tutoring model employed

within Unified School District (USD) demonstrated significant shortcomings in its ability to increase student proficiency in either mathematics or language arts. Given these preliminary findings, an evaluation of the current SES model is prudent and timely.

Nationwide, billions of federal tax dollars are allocated to the SES programs annually with the intent of closing the achievement gap (Chappell, Nunnery, Pribesh, & Hager, 2011). Many of the third-party tutoring providers approved by each state are for-profit business entities. Each respective state determines what the maximum per hour tutoring rate is for approved providers (Bonelli, 2007). The hourly tutoring rate determines how many hours of tutoring services are provided to each student, as each school district allocates a set amount of Title 1 funding for each student (Chamberlin, 2009). The higher the hourly tutoring rate charged by the provider, the lower the number of service hours provided to the student. Conversely, the lower the hourly tutoring rate, the higher the number of service hours provided to the student.

Each SES provider that enrolls with USD is required to notify the district of the different tutoring modalities that will be used to provide instruction in either mathematics or language arts. In addition, each tutoring provider indicates on its enrollment form if services are provided to special education students, their hourly tutoring rate, and the venues for tutoring services. This information is compiled into an SES database and the information is provided to parents in the form of a brochure. Each eligible family receives a copy of this brochure so that they have accurate information to facilitate their choice of SES provider. Toward the end of September each year, USD notifies the families of students eligible to receive free tutoring services of a series of SES provider

fairs. Hosted by different schools across the district, these fairs provide parents with the opportunity to meet the providers and question them about different aspects of their services. Once all the provider fairs are offered, USD sets a deadline for each student to enroll for services. As outlined in the *NCLB Supplemental Educational Services (SES) 2012-13 Free Tutoring Services Student Enrollment* booklet published by Unified School District (2012), by this deadline, parents must submit their enrollment form indicating which SES provider they have chosen to provide tutoring services for their child.

Of the 60 approved tutoring providers, 18 provide mini computers to students who enroll for tutoring services. At the conclusion of the tutoring services, students are welcome to keep the computers, and for this reason, many parents opt for providers that offer online tutoring services. This online learning modality offers several benefits to the student and provider. The student can communicate with his or her tutor online using any internet connection. These online interactions provide flexibility for both the student and provider regarding the time and location of services. In addition, one tutor can provide support for numerous students at the same time, effectively lowering facilities and labor costs for the provider. While online learning presents opportunities for maximized profits, is this learning modality increasing student achievement? This is just one of the many questions that will be investigated during the proposed program evaluation.

Guiding/Research Questions

The following research questions drove this proposed program evaluation to investigate the current third-party tutoring model provided by Unified School District in the form of supplemental educational services (SES):

1. What elements or characteristics of the current third-party tutoring program are effective in meeting the academic needs of current students?
2. What elements or characteristics of the current third-party tutoring program are not effective in meeting the academic needs of students?
3. What are some recommendations for the current third-party tutoring program to increase the overall success of the tutoring services provided to eligible students?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The investigation of this problem was justified through a careful analysis of related conceptual frameworks. Supplemental educational services (SES) are provided to students in the form of tutoring sessions delivered using different instructional modalities. In order for these services to have a positive impact on student achievement, careful analysis must be given to the manner in which students assimilate, process, and retain information in an attempt to maximize learning using different modes of instruction. Furthermore, according to Bolliger and Supanakorn (2011), adult tutors must recognize the importance of different learning styles and the role they play in knowledge transfer during tutoring sessions.

The literature is replete with learning theories that attempt to describe how information is managed during the learning process. These conceptual frameworks are categorized into the behaviorist, cognitivist, and constructivist paradigms. These different orientations to learning outline contrasting ideas regarding the processing of information during the learning process. Modes of instruction were analyzed through the

constructivist lens of Kolb's experiential learning and learning style theories, and Vygotsky's social development theory. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences will also be presented to underscore the important role learning styles play in the assimilation of knowledge leading to learning.

Social constructivists argue that experiences must be understood as complex entities that are inextricably bound up with the historic, socio economic, and cultural contexts in which they are embedded (Vygotsky, 1962). The constructivist paradigm views learning as a process in which the learner actively constructs new ideas or concepts based upon current and past knowledge or experiences. As such, constructivism is a paradigm that emphasizes the active role of the learner in building understanding and making sense of information (Vygotsky, 1929). Furthermore, constructivism describes knowledge not as truths to be transmitted or discovered, but as emergent explanations by learners engaged in discourse (Gupta, 2008). Constructivists view learning as a social process that is facilitated by the instructor as all stakeholders are seen as vital to the social learning experience. Conversation and academic discourse are embraced as integral components of this learning theory.

Computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) has emerged as a platform from which students can collaborate with their peers. This instructional strategy allows students to interact with their peers in an online environment, via the implementation of 21st century communication tools and skills. Social constructivists view academic discourse as being integral to effective learning. According to Mavrou, Lewis, and Douglas (2010), the computer is an important interactional agent in initiating and