Proposal for Education Student Graduate Symposium 2013

Proposal Submitted by: Cathryn Smith, Doctoral Candidate

Evolving Reflective and Dialogic Tools for Social Justice Leadership

Purpose: This presentation will outline the research process followed in developing the Social Justice Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment (SJTLSA). This tool has been designed for use within a larger qualitative participatory action research study on developing teacher leaders for social justice. The tool development process has been iterative, involving “a repeating sequence of modifications and assessments” (Peterson, 2000, p. 118). The resulting tool is designed to assist teachers to reflect critically on the dispositions, knowledge, and skills they possess as teacher leaders committed to social justice in their particular school context; and identify a focus for action research related to their area of leadership.

Theoretical Framework: We learn through dialogue with others, by reflecting on our personal experience, applying frameworks as lenses through which to view our practice and receiving feedback. This instrument contributes to the larger study’s theoretical framework of reflective practice (Kincheloe, 2004; York-Barr et al., 2006), critical constructivism (Kincheloe, 2005) and change theory (Fullan, 2008; Kelley & Shaw, 2009; Smith, 2011).

Method: Five sequential phases were used to develop, test and refine the SJTLSA: examining precedents, developing the prototype, establishing face validity, pilot testing, and final decision-making (Bourque & Fielder, 2002; De Vaus, 2002; Fink, 2003; Fowler, 2002; Peterson, 2000). After the initial exploration of the literature and existing tools on teacher leadership (Lambert, 1998, 2003; Crowther, Ferguson & Hann, 2009; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009), developing a prototype involved making decisions about the tool’s overall design, content, format and structure, as well as specific items to be included. Establishing validity for the tool included
conducting three homogeneous focus groups (Kreuger & Casey, 2009) with teacher leaders, school leaders and social justice advocates, to refine and improve upon the prototype. Pilot testing involved two different groups completing the tool and providing written and oral feedback. The final stage involved comparing the finished instrument with the prototype, to assess the degree of transformation and affirm the quality of the tool.

**Data Sources:** Data sources include the videotapes of the focus groups as well as written feedback submitted by focus group participants. For the pilot study, data sources included their completed self-assessments, the written feedback forms completed by piloters, and oral feedback expressed during the debriefing session. Data was analyzed both by content (Thomas, 2009) and theme (Hesse-Biber, 2006) to identify and describe suggested revisions.

**Results:** The SJTLSA is currently being used to assist teacher leaders with self-reflection and facilitate dialogue in a six month cohort study. The seventy-five item tool is divided into six sections of fifteen Likert response items, each addressing a different dimension of teacher leadership for social justice. Initial observations indicate the SJTLSA has strong potential to generate self-reflection and dialogue.

**Educational Importance of the Study:** Teacher leaders who advocate for social justice need to understand leadership, think critically about issues of equality, power, and privilege, and most importantly, be able to help others develop similar insights. The SJTLSA tool is designed to help teacher leaders progress on this journey by facilitating self-reflection, dialogue, and action around these important topics. The SJTLSA has the potential to be used in pre-service education programs with teacher candidates to develop notions of equity and leadership; by individual educators as tools for self-reflection, performance appraisal and goal setting; by schools or individuals to assess growth and stimulate dialogue around important issues of equity; and in
upper level educational leadership courses. The SJTLSA articulates research-based qualities associated with effective teacher leadership for social justice.

References


