Evidence-based decision making in Manitoba Schools: A critical race theory perspective

Abstract

There is a growing body of literature that describes how the use of educational data to inform the decision-making process is gaining traction in education (Benefield & Evans, 2001; Davis, 1999; Espeland, 2007; Moran & Mallot, 2004; Wellman & Lipton, 2004). Beneath the rise in the use of data is a belief that empirical evidence is an efficient indicator of knowledge and learning. In response to the evidence-based shift, an emerging group of scholars (for example: Atkinson, 2000; Chang, 2002; Gillborn, 2010; Oakley, 2002) are beginning to discuss the data-driven movement using theoretical frameworks that hold power relations at its core. With an interest in the Manitoba context, the M.Ed. thesis presented will focus on the ways in which, and to what degree, the decisions in Manitoba schools are data-driven. Drawing attention to the ways in which evidence-based practices in education are not neutral acts, the aim of this study is to contribute to the growing research area of data-driven decision making viewed under a critical theory framework.

Purpose of the study:

Evidence-based educational policymaking has not just nationally, but globally become a phenomenon. Various types of assessment tools which produce data on student performance provide a basis for generating information to be used for policymaking and to motivate change in education. Knowledge about the various ways in which data are used by authorities, school leaders, and teachers is therefore important for understanding possible developments and outcomes in terms of educational decision-making and educational practices. Knowledge about how school data are used by educators and policymakers will provide insight into the
characteristics of educational evidence-based decision making (EDM), and furthermore, address the potential for learning and development that can take place. Despite an abundance of international research in this area, there has been limited research on the topic of data-driven decision making in the Canadian educational context. With the aim of contributing to knowledge and practice, the M.Ed. study presented will examine the topic using the unique perspectives of Manitoban superintendents and school administrators, therefore building on previous studies in the area of localized EDM (Atkinson, 2000; Earl, & Katz, 2006; Hamilton, Marsh, & Pane, 2006; Hargreaves, 1997; Johnson, & Street, 2012; Layde, Christiansen, Peterson, Guse, Maurana, & Brandenburg, 2012). Further discussion will explore the ways in which current EDM practices may be implicated in maintaining and securing the privileges of certain groups.

**Perspective(s) or theoretical framework:**

With an interest in exploring power relations as they relate to the EDM process, the theoretical framework selected for this particular study is, critical race theory (CRT). EDM viewed through a CRT lens highlights the ways in which standardized performance measures claim to measure the abilities of a country, province, city, or school, as an oppressive structure that serves to maintain the power structures and white privilege of those who are often their authors and advocates (Eisenhart & Towne, 2003).

**Methods and/or techniques:**

In order to gain a better understanding of the current use of data in Manitoba school divisions the research model chosen for this study is based on a qualitative collective case study approach. One-on-one semi-structured interviews will be used for gaining insight into divisional and school level processes that involve the use of educational data. The study outlined above is currently at the proposal stage, and results are expected in March/April 2016.
Data source(s):
The proposed sample group for this study is a stratified sample group (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) comprised of four to six superintendents or assistant superintendents; and four to six school administrators (principals or vice-principals) who work in urban and rural school divisions in Manitoba. A minimum of two participants from each sample group must come from rural and urban settings.

Results:
Results and conclusions are not available at this time but are expected by May 2016.

References


