The Latham Way: Implications

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Abstract

This paper is a case study of the impact of a community-based, collaborative, mentoring intervention on the academic and personal success of a group of 32 students who were enrolled in Rowland Hill Latham Elementary School in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools during the year that the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction identified Latham as a "School of Distinction", 2001-2002. In the spring of 2011, approximately 30% of those 32 students had dropped out of school, approximately 25% had left the system, and approximately 53% (17) persisted in school. The paper goes on to discuss how schools and their stakeholders can make the "Latham Way" a reality in their communities. The "Latham Way" logic model is based on collaborative planning, data-based decision making, and transformational leadership. These variables support collaboration among teachers, students, families, the community, Project CHILD, and the administration to improve student performance. The mentoring intervention was a creation of a community organization in this logic model.

Introduction

This article is a case study of the impact of an intervention on the academic and personal success of a group of 32 students who were enrolled in Rowland Hill Latham Elementary School during the 2001-2002 school year that the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction identified Latham Elementary School as a "School of Distinction" and the long-term implications of the intervention.

Background

During the 2001-2002 school year, Rowland Hill Latham Elementary School, a Title I School in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County system in North Carolina, demonstrated remarkable academic growth and achievement. Latham Elementary was classified as one of the 10 best schools in North Carolina (Powell, Fields, Bell, & Johnson, 2007). The administrators, community members, parents, and teachers called the collaborative partnership that led to this success the "Latham Way" (Powell, Fields, Bell, & Johnson, 2007). A major element of that partnership was the use of mentors from the Omega Psi Phi fraternity with a group of 32 students who were performing well below grade level (Powell, Fields, Bell, & Johnson, 2007). Bronfenbrenner (1986) argues that one of the ways to provide a caring curriculum for young people was to provide mentors who would take the time to make a commitment to the young people.

Area of Focus

The area of focus of this action research case study is the long-term implications of the "Latham Way" on the 32 Level 1 students who received individual mentoring.

Mentoring

Rhodes' (2002) evaluation of the national Big Brothers Big Sisters program describes the tremendous potential of mentoring and the need for a deeper understanding of the process. "A Deeper understanding of nonparent adult relationships, combined with high quality programs and enriched settings, will better position us to harness the full potential of youth mentoring" (p. 128). In addition, there are strong indications in the research literature that school-based mentoring programs can have a positive impact on the behavior and attitudes of students at-risk of school failure (Karcher, 2008; Randolph & Johnson, 2008; Schmidt, McVaughn, & Jacobi, 2007; Dappen & Isernhagen, 2006; DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). Mentoring can have a positive impact on student academic performance (Karcher, 2008; Dappen & Isernhagen, 2006). This impact may be especially effective with poor elementary school boys (Karcher, 2008) who are especially at-risk of long-term school failure (Entwise, Alexander, & Olson, 2007). In addition, Davis (2007) reports that mentoring is an important resource in providing access to higher education for students of color. Not surprisingly, school-based mentoring programs are most effective when they follow research-based, best practices (Randolph & Johnson, 2008; DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). The nature and strength of the relationship between the mentor and the protégé is central to the effectiveness of the mentoring (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2006). Some researchers (Matthews & Williams, 2007; Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2004) caution about the importance of helping boys of color develop constructive prototypes of manhood that facilitate constructive relationships with their own communities. However, Dappen and Isernhagen, in their evaluation of a state-wide, student, mentoring program, went on to point out that "Urban school administrators who are considering a mentoring program should feel encouraged. Regardless of economic and demographic concerns, urban schools were able to implement quality student mentoring programs" (2006, p.

165).   The results of this research on mentoring is consistent the research on developmental assets and their impact on children and teenagers (Aspy, Oman, Vesley, McLeroy, Rodine, & Marshal, 2004; Vesley, et al., 2004; Search Institutue, 2003)

Developmental Assets

The Search Institute (2008) identifies 40 developmental assets. They classify the assets as external or internal. There are four subcategories within these two groups: external (support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time); internal (commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identify). These are the areas that Latham mentoring intervention in 2001-2002 attempted to address. The Search Institute (2003) argues that improving the developmental assets of young people can have a long-term impact on their positive academic performance. In addition, Patton (1998) describes the importance of relational support and positive early school experiences in reclaiming young men who had become "gangstas". This literature suggests that building effective developmental assets and positive school experiences in elementary school can have a long-term positive impact on young people.

Method

This study used Documentation (Yin, 2009) because of the strengths of that data sources, i.e. it is stable, unobtrusive, exact and broad coverage, to answer to our research question.

Research Question

What impact did the tutoring experience at Latham Elementary school have the participating students' educational experience in the Forsyth County School System?

Sample

The sample for the case was really the records of the 32 Level 1 students 2001-2002 academic year at Rowland H. Latham Elementary school, which is now Diggs-Latham Elementary School after a merger with Diggs Elementary School, who worked with tutors from the Omega Psi Fraternity, Inc during that academic year.

Intervention

Logic model. The logic model – the relationship among the key variables in the intervention – is illustrated in *Figure* 1. This research-based initiative changed the normative culture of the school in six ways: (a) continually evaluating the instructional strategies, (b) providing personal educational programs for every child that are collaboratively developed and monitored by groups of teachers, (c) committing to the continual growth and education of (c) committing to the continual growth and education of staff and parents with the constant focus on the improvement of student performance, (d) using frequent assessment and data analysis to guide instruction and to focus on problem areas, (e) maintaining continual two-way communication with all stakeholders, and (f) redesigning the structure and flow of the delivery of the curriculum.
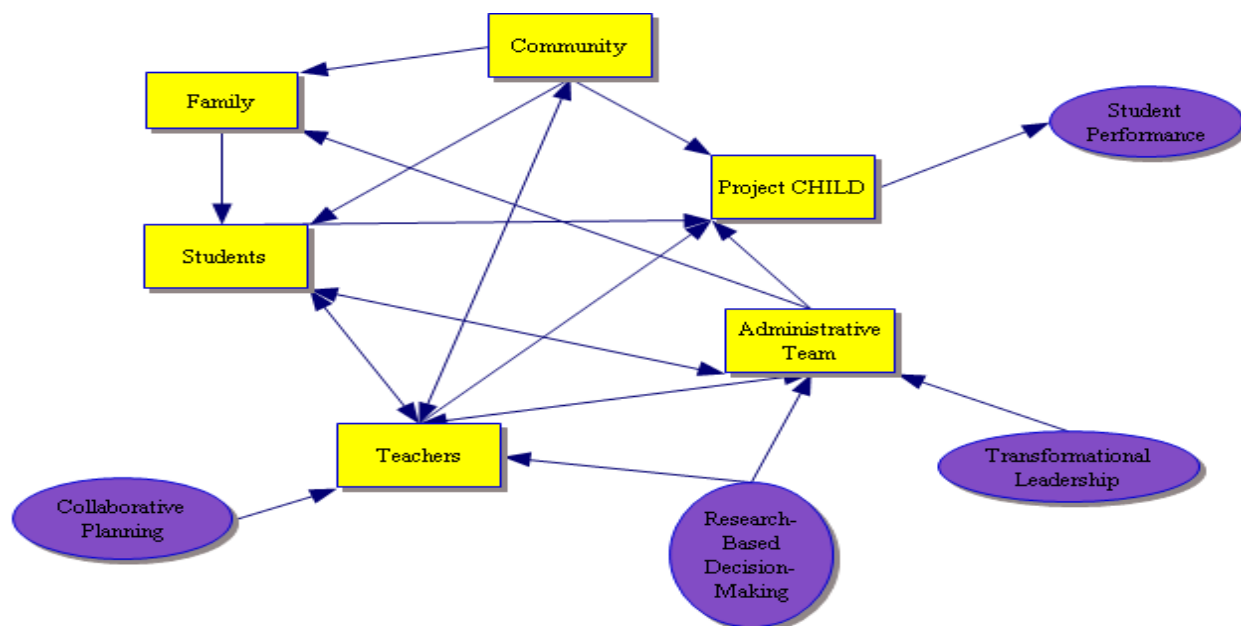
Figure 1. Latham Way Logic Model

The "Latham Way" used Project CHILD – Computers Helping Instruction and Learning

Development.

> This instructional model was pilot tested in Florida in 1991 (Butzin,
> 1992). It has developed a record of effectiveness (Butzin, 1997). The Center
> for Educational Performance and Accountability (2005) reports that Project
> CHILD is considered an effective instructional model. Project CHILD
> seeks to modify the school structure and create classroom conditions conducive
> for learning with technology, create cohesive units of work that foster
> strategies for thinking, and realign curriculum for reading, language
> arts, and mathematics. It provides a system for fully integrating technology
> into reading, math, language arts, and classroom management techniques
> for using computers and hands-on learning. It also offers strategies for
> teaming, cooperative learning, and parent involvement (National Diffusion
> Network, 1995). (Powell, Fields, Bell, & Johnson, 2007, p. 302)

This instructional innovation was used to help differentiate and individualize instruction for the

students. The community through the PTA and the tutors interacted with Project CHILD, the

teachers, students, and the students' families.

The teachers at Latham worked in grade level teams subject teams, similar to the middle school concept of collaboration. They spent one hour a day collaboratively planning and developing personalized educational plans for all the students in their grade. The teachers met with the tutors and used the personalized plans to help the tutors to focus on the students needs for that week. The tutors worked with their students on a weekly basis on their academic curriculum and life lessons about how to become a responsible person.

Data Collection

The cased study used multiple documents (Yin, 2009) to answer the research question because of the strengths of this type of evidence, i.e., Documentation evidence is stable, unobtrusive, exact, and has broad coverage.   We used WS/FCS documentation from the 2001-2002 testing cycle and the WS/FCS electronic database from spring 2011

Data Analysis

The proximal results for the Latham Way intervention are summarized in Table 1.

Latham elementary school tested 120 students in end-of-grade tests in reading and mathematics in spring 2002. Given the ethnicity, poverty, and transitory nature of the student population, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction predicted that 45% of the student would be proficient in reading and mathematics. Despite these macro-systemic effects (including local resegregation), proficiency at Latham was as follows:

• Composite score of 67% for reading and math for 2000-2001.

• Composite score of 83% for reading and math for 2001-2002.

Table 1. *Proximal Results of the Latham Way – Students at or Above Grade level by Year*

	1999	2000	2001	2002
Grade 3	60.3	60.6	57.1	75.6
Grade 4	67.9	60.5	64.7	84.4
Grade 5	73.9	63.8	74.2	93.8

Over a 4-year period, student performance improved at every grade level at Latham. During the fall of 2002, the principal of Latham, Dr. Larry Fields, died suddenly. For a variety of reasons, the "Latham Way" was dismantled and within 5 years. Rowland H. Latham Elementary School went from one of the ten best elementary schools in North Carolina to one of the worst elementary schools in WS/FCS (Powell, Fields, Bell, and Johnson, 2007). However, what was the distal impact in the Spring of 2011 on those 32 Level 1 students who were involved in tutoring project in the 2001-2002 academic year.

During the Spring of 2011, the distal results for the intervention are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. *Distal Results for the 32 Level 1 Students Who Were Tutored During 2001-200*

No Data; Left WSFCS	Transferred to Another County	Graduated on Time	Dropped Out	12th Grade	11th Grade	10th Grade	9th	Persisting as of Spring 2011
5	3	2	7	7	2	2	4	17
15.63%	9.38%	6.25%	21.88%	21.88%	6.25%	6.25%	12.50%	53.13%

Table 2. *Distal Results for the 24 Level 1 Students Who Were Tutored During 2001-2001 and Stayed in the WS/FCS Schools.*

No Data; Left WSFCS	Transferred to Another County	Graduated on Time	Dropped Out	12th Grade	11th Grade	10th Grade	9th	Persisting as of Spring 2011
		2	7	7	2	2	4	17
		8.33%	29.17%	29.17%	8.33%	8.33%	16.67%	70.83%

For the N = 24, 8% graduated on time; 29% dropped out of school; 29% were on schedule to graduate in June 2011, 8% were in the 11th grade, 8% were in the 10th grade, and 17% were in the 9th grade. Seventy-one percent of the students, who were Level 1 students in 2001, received tutoring, and were still in WS/FCS, had completed or were persisting in school in the Spring of 2011. This is the distal impact of the Latham way on a population of students who were most at risk of school failure in the 2001-2002.

Research question. What impact did the tutoring experience at Latham Elementary school have the participating students' educational experience in the Forsyth County School System? During the spring of 2011, 71% of the students, who were most at-risk of school failure during the 2001-2002 academic year, persisted in school with no documented additional support since the 2001-2002 academic year.

Implications

What these data suggest is that well-planned, collaborative efforts among schools and their stakeholders can have a lasting beneficial impact on the students most at-risk of school failure. This result is consistent with the analysis of the research literature for this case study. Dappen and Isernhagen, in their evaluation of a state-wide, student, mentoring program, went on to point out that "Urban school administrators who are considering a mentoring program

should feel encouraged. Regardless of economic and demographic concerns, urban schools were able to implement quality student mentoring programs" (2006, p. 165).

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