

WWG Organizational Change Research Summaries 01/31/06 Page 1
QUESTION ONE: GRADE ORGANIZATIONS & GRADE GROUPINGS

Feb. 3rd, 2006

Tina Anderson Richards

Are certain grade organizations more supportive of student academic and social success than other age groupings?

No particular sequence of grade spans is perfect or in itself guarantees student achievement. With thought and effort effectiveness practices can be implemented in a variety of grade configurations. What is important is to be aware of the potential benefits and difficulties of different configurations and to make each configuration, whether it comes about from choice or necessity, work as well as possible for all students.

Did some looking on alternative schools and ELL. Should put the data out there, we maybe have too traditional school to move and look in that direction. It is worth some work to have half grades .

Listening to some talk - discipline is a challenge, because different teachers have different programs and for the young students the room size creates a discipline problem in itself.

Also looked at some at-risk sites and alternative schools. Most are more relaxed than a normal school, a few have gone the hard core boot camp. Didn't look much further.

Most of my work on number 1 was spoken to at the meeting. No data supports a 5th grade pull out. Either run a K-4 or a K-5. The middle school can be 5-8 or 6-8. It will work either way. No data speaks for a K-6 program and a 7-12. Data clearly uses a 4-4-4 or 5-3-4 . The new rage is to do a K-8 program run as an elementary. Tests show the students do well testing , but does not go into their high school years. This seems to be the down fall in the testing - Tests would reflect how the student did in the certain program the article was looking at but not how the student did in the next phase of education. Each group makes it's points for the programs strengths weather it is test scores, older students working with younger or separate wings of the building to confine learning.

Again the strength is in the people behind the program, and the parents belief in the program.

Student drop out rate happens in all the programs. A big factor is how students are viewed or valued in the school.

Anytime a student is in a school for only 2 years it is not good for education. The fewer the transitions the better.

No data collected on how parents feel about how close to home their children are educated. One found was metro and the parents were complaining about 7 miles, doesn't work for us. The local is still very important too the parent of younger children.

Feb. 3rd, 2006

Shelley Merrick

Summary of Relevant Educational Research

In almost every article, the research ending with the summation that the grade structure is not as important as the quality of teaching.

1. Elementary School Grade Span Configuration: by Kathy Gregg
<http://phkhome.northstarnet.org/ikepto/gradecenterreport.htm>

SUMMARY: Smaller schools with broader grade spans are better. There is a loss of student achievement levels every time students transfer school. There does not appear to be an easing of this trend with repetition. Not only is there a greater achievement loss but a larger drop out rate when students transfer to a lot of schools within a district.

2. NMSA Research Summary: 1996, <http://www.nmsa.org/research/researchsummaries/summary8/tabid/261/default.aspx>

SUMMARY: fifth grade students are better off in a 5-8 middle school, because their needs can be better met. Elementary settings are "nurturing and child-centered" while the middle school concept is more challenging. A fifth in this setting should be more self contained than the sixth, or seventh grade. Middle schools are set to address the movement and physical needs of preadolescents, the social setting focuses on the needs of peers, and the influx of different teachers can be mentally stimulating. This article also looked at transitions to new schools. It also found the associated negative effects. This effects is year long and is independent of the age that the transitions takes effect.

3. Principal's Partnership 7-12 configuration
<http://www.principalspartnership.com>

SUMMARY: 7-12 structure. positives. few transitions resulting in less loss of educational time. More consistency in curriculum, more possibilities for lower level class offerings, more opportunities for students to be role models

Negatives; programs are developed for high school aged needs, not preadolescents, teachers are not as well trained in preadolescents.

4. Grade Configuration: Who Goes Where
<Http://www.nwrel.org/request/july97/oregon.html>

SUMMARY: 5-8 school where that 5 and 6 are in an elementary setting and the 7-8 are in a more middle school concept. This allows for a blending of grades (5-6) and (7-8) the 5th grade has 3 days of class instruction and 2 days of heterogeneous group work. Outcomes have been that 8th grade exhibits less negative behavior. IN specific teacher guided groups the younger students gain better role models from the older students.

QUESTION TWO: Brain Based Teaching and Learning

Connie Knott:

As we consider making changes in the physical configuration of our two schools' makeup, we have been asked to look at the larger picture of improving our school and the job we do as educators.

We have been asked the larger question of ***“Are there ways we as educators could improve and change our teaching to help our students achieve more success?”***

For at least 20 years, educators have been made aware of the importance of understanding how the brain works, and the conditions under which students learn best.

If we are going to strive for improvement in our WWG schools in the 21st century we need to take a critical look at ourselves as a staff and ask if we are current in our understanding of how children best learn and are employing strategies to enhance their learning.

As the researcher group (step 1 of the process) we were posed the following question: Does current research on brain compatible learning indicate any changes in the method or content of instruction or the organization of the learning environment to improve student success? In other words to improve student success - Should there be changes in

- a. Methods of instruction?
- b. Context of instruction?
- c. The organization of the learning environment?

“Who dares to teach must never cease to learn.” by John Cotton Dana

I have read large portions of the book “How the Brain Learns” by Dr. David S. Sousa, and there are a couple of key points that come through:

Key Statement: Knowing how the human brain seems to process information and learn can help the teachers plan lessons that students are more likely to understand and remember.

Key Statement: For information to be stored, the working memory asks 2 questions: **Does this make sense?**
Does this have meaning?

(therefore it behooves us as teachers to have our lessons make sense, and have meaning for students)

Key Statement: The good news is that the more we discover about how the brain learns, the more successful teaching and learning can be.

Key Statement: Teachers need to **continually update** their knowledge base focusing on research -based strategies.

1. Helping children remember
2. Helping them understand, remember more

3. Helping them focus
4. Helping them see meaning
5. Helping them transfer powerful principle of learning

What came through in this book is that

1. YES there has to be changes in methods of instruction to improve students success
2. NO there does not have to be changes in the content of instruction
3. NO there does not have to be major changes in the organization of learning environment

Further reading on the subject of brain -based teaching in learning highlighted the following conclusions:

1. The **need for new teaching strategies** means that educators across America are increasingly influenced by neuroscientific data.
2. There has to be renewed dedication to improving our teaching skills in the classroom. This requires teacher enlightenment and training to make changes in teaching style and methods.
3. Neuroscience research is the starting point for thinking in new ways about the classroom.
4. The concepts that many of us have already learned are still important and included, but new understanding of how the brain learns and functions needs to be utilized by teachers. The following precepts are still very much a part of the brain-based teaching dialogue:
 - multiple intelligence
 - left brain / right brain differences
 - learning styles

Conclusion: The following are recommendations I would make:

In- service time, and common planning time for the school year 2006-2007 should be devoted to teacher training in brain - based teaching strategies.

The school could order the video by Dr. David Sousa, order a group discount number of books by this author, and have an account available for teachers who might want to order additional books on this topic.

Speakers could be hired, or teachers of our own staff could become “local experts” on particular aspects of brain-based learning and teaching. The latter would actually be preferable.

I believe that many on our staff could improve their teaching and the learning of our students by employing brain-based strategies.

03 -04 QUESTION THREE & FOUR DIVERSE LEARNERS AND ELL CONSIDERATIONS

Tina Richards

Feb. 03,2006

Purpose :to look at what Ell programs instructional methods produce the best results at different age levels and are any of them beneficial to all students.

Beginning problem: NCLB requires English proficiency within 3 years of entering a program. Research and data collected confer that a student new to English needs 5-7 years to obtain some level of proficiency.

Teachers:

- 1.A degree in ELL, this is an additional 21 credits. (no data that says this will make a better ELL teacher)
2. Make every effort to have hire at least one teacher proficient in the languages used.
3. Provide an environment that reduces stress and anxiety.

Students:

1. High anxiety with a feeling of ignorance-Language shock
2. Students are caught in a **daily battle**, at home they are expected to speak in their native language and at school they are expected to use English. They get the feedback that to continue to use their native language works against them in school. This leads to many taking American names.
3. Chomsky(1969) children between 5 and 10 are still acquiring the structures of their first language.

Methods; (a very short paraphrase for the” Northwest Regional Educational Educational laboratory” May 2003)

1. Trans Bilingual- native language is used to help students keep up in academic content, but the focus is on phasing students into English-only instruction.
2. Developmental programs- differ in the length, usually lasts through elementary program.
3. 2-way immersion- the goal is to create proficiency in both languages. Start at 90/10 and move to a 50/50.
4. Newcomer programs- designed to meet the needs of incoming ELL students. these programs vary widely.

An ELL students goes through 5 stages of English language changes as they learn.

stage 1: Lasts 10 hours to 6 months. students have up to 500 receptive words. this is also a silent stage for the student.

stage 2: The early production stage. An additional 6 months. close to 1000 words receptive. students usually speak in 2 word phrases. Can answer who, what , where questions.

stage 3: the speech Emergence stage. This will take another year. Now the student may have developed 3000 words to use. Begin to use simple questions.

stage 4: the intermediate language proficiency stage. May take up to another year. Now up to to 6000 words. They begin to make complex statements,state opinions. Share thoughts and speak at greater length.

stage 5: this can take from 2-4 years. The student has developed some specialized content-area vocabulary and can participate fully in grade-level classroom activities.

Knowing this we can help predict and accept student's current stages, while modifying their instruction to encourage progression to the next stage.

Look up the SIOP program.

Use technology to support LEP students learning Experiences-Northwest Central Regional Educational Laboratory

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/methods/technlgy/te900.htm>

Feb. 3,2006

Tina Anderson Richards

What does current research tell us about educational adjustments needed to maintain and increase student learning under the influence of a shift from a relatively homogeneous to a culturally diverse student population?

Many things to change and do in the Classroom:

1. Pay attention to how you run your classroom.
2. Reduce the cognitive load, of the lessons, understand the educational history of ELL students, rely on student prior knowledge.
3. Reduce the cultural load. Treat ELL students with language and culture respect.
4. Reduce the language load. May need to rewrite for students and not talk in run on expressive sentences.
5. Parents and teachers work as a team.
6. Learn to pronounce your ELL student names properly.
7. Offer one-on-one assistance when possible.
8. Assign a peer partner.
9. Post daily schedules, in high school weekly lesson plans build for students.
10. Use a an interpreter to help smooth out misunderstandings.
11. Invite your students culture into the classroom.
12. Use materials related to your ELL's culture.
13. Label classroom objects in both languages.
14. Have high expectations for all students.
15. Maximize opportunities for language use.
- 16. Change, this is a different type of classroom.**
- 17. You can't do it all at once, but you can do something.**

WWG Organizational Change Research Summaries 01/31/06 Page 7
06 WORKING WITH AT RISK STUDENTS

Mr. Loy Woelber:

From the conversations that I had with the 11 ALC directors and from my own experiences as an ALC teacher and small school administrator I offer a few comments for our school district. There may be times when we see a real need to send a student to an ALC due to extreme circumstances. Yet I believe that there is no reason that we cannot think of our own situation as a very large "school for children at risk". We are dealing with poverty, family dysfunction, multicultural issues, and the continued economic decline of our rural communities to name a few. I believe that well over 60% of our kids are at risk:

1. Risk of not getting the right nutrition at the right time to help them learn.
2. Risk of not getting the proper parental support at home for academics and other "assumed" parental responsibilities. (Social skills, values, work ethic, diversity, justice, morals, coping etc.).
3. Risk of having a family in conflict.
4. Risk of letting the media and pop culture be the primary factor to shape their lives.
5. Risk of more access to more dangerous chemicals and riskier social activities.
6. Risk of the "perfect family" being too darn busy to give kids the attention they crave.

As a school we can cling to the "old days" of academic/standards/testing, structured day, 9 months a year. Or should we be a school that is an "alternative learning center" for everyone? When I look at the characteristics listed on the previous page, I see the traits that I want for all my coworkers and our kids. We do many of these things but do we have a philosophy in which we "all" should adhere to instead of just a few of us. How will we prioritize some of the extras such as daycare, extended school in our budget vs. the traditional wants? What kind of structure is best when trying to identify students as early as possible before we lose them at 16? What's more important in the big picture? Do we push academics or focus more on a well adjusted kid? It's quite easy to see that we are having fewer counselors than ever for an ever increasing troubled group of kids. Is a middle school better suited to addressing this age group of children vs. a 7-12?

Basic needs must be met in order for a young person to move up the ladder academically. We can blame the families and wring our hands or we can tackle these issues and not get so consumed with the Govt. and their academic mandates.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Noit Awl

07. QUESTION SEVEN TEACHER RENEWAL

Jane Haas. In talking to Tina, Marvin, Shelly we put it this way:

TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

When there is negative communication and or gossiping it seems to be for two reasons:

1. The teacher is perceived as not doing his/her job, or not pulling his/her weight. This eventually impacts everyone
2. The teacher is perceived as one who does not work well with others, is not cooperative and/or helpful.

What is needed? Avenues for handling concerns about a colleague

STUDENTS DISSATISFIED WITH A TEACHER'S PERFORMANCE

What are they supposed to do?

1. What should teacher's response be if a student complains about another teacher in front of students in the classroom?
2. What should students do if they are unhappy over a teacher's performance?

What is needed? Avenues for students to handle concerns about teachers

Loy's Continuation of Jane's #7 on Teacher renewal strategies

I have been thinking about many of the things that Bill Richards and others have shared in the past few years as well as recently visiting with Bruce Miles of The Big River Consulting Group. I am trying to summarize the process of teacher renewal strategies. Jane had highlighted a few things that are done in WWG regarding the staff development / renewal strategies.

> CPT time, Monday night planning & integration trips, wellness clinic, mentoring, student teachers, teacher recognition, and lots of food before conferences and meetings!

I have heard it mentioned before by Bill and was reaffirmed with my conversation with Bruce Miles that it is very important to keep "feelings" out of finding a solution.

1. The employees must be able to specifically identify the problem(s) and issues. What is making them feel the way they do. "This boy drives me crazy" but what happens when the little boy leaves and the person is still unhappy?
2. Show me the data vs. how you feel about it. If the playground is a nightmare then how many fights are there and what else can be measured. The employees must be willing to look at the data and do a little research on what works and why.
3. The group must be willing to accept the process and make the changes needed.

I have found that a teacher has a much better outlook on current situations as well as ongoing changes if they know that they have an approachable administration. Teachers desire an administrator who is part of the team and is consistent and fair with decisions regarding them as well as the students. A teacher feels much more confident in the classroom and will go the extra mile if they know they have an administrator backing them up. I believe a low performing Principal will drag staff down faster than tough parents and / or students.

09 STUDENT SELF ESTEEM and AT- RISK

Loy Woelber

Student self esteem / character / leadership strategies survey

- Calls made to Lake City, Lake Crystal Welcome, Lake Superior, Mahtomedi, and Lakeville.
- Strong emphasis on student surveys and listening to the kids. Often more than listening to the current research.
- Many small groups focusing on psycho educational materials.
- Goal setting
- Reward group (Charger group) big quarterly party with pizza etc. for recognized kids.
- Postcards with accolades sent home.
- “Charger bolts” handed out to reward kids when they do well.
- Once a quarter there is a cookie party for kids doing well.
- 75% of kids in one school throughout the year are in clubs or sports.
- Many after school clubs in middle school (true middle school).
- Red slips for bad behavior and yellow slips for good behavior.
- Striver awards for improved G.P.A. from one quarter to the next (postcard and monster cookie).
- 6-8 grade advisory time every day for 25 minutes to address those issues.
- Lots of one on one time and might go back to advisory.
- Homeroom every day for 25 minutes. Monday is character activities, Tuesday is silent reading, Wednesday is teachers swapping kids for homework / meetings etc., Thursday is team activity day, and Friday is _____
- A lot of focus on growth groups majority of kids in 7-9th grade.
- “Prepare curriculum”

Shelly Merrick

1. Escalating Kindergarten Curriculum by Shepard and Smith

Summary: Retaining kindergarten students is detrimental to the students self-esteem regardless of label. Part of the problem is the expectation of the kindergarten and first grade teachers. Instead a flexible child centered classroom can be used instead of the fast paced education of the students.

Grade Level Configurations K-5 and 6-8 frequently Asked Questions

Summary- It is necessary to keep 6th grade separate from the older students. They have a separate set of needs and need to have these needs addressed.

The (Limited) Evidence regarding Effects of Grade-Span Configurations on Academic Achievement: What Rural Educators Should Know

By Coladaric, Theodore - Hancock, Julie

Summary- Proponents of the middle school are worried that the needs of middle school students will not be met in a K-8 school. The school is set up to meet the needs of the young children and the needs between the groups are not similar. The bigger fact in determining success is socioeconomic status. Proponents for a K- 8 school argue that there is a decline in attendance and more positive attitudes.

01. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Greg Madson.

www.projectappleseed.org/pledge.html

Suggests parents pledge:

1 - volunteering 5 hours each semester in the school

2 - minimum of 15 minutes each school night reading to; homework with; other educational/enrichment activity with child(ren)

www.projectappleseed.org/reportcard.html

Great online survey where parents rate their involvement in their child's education

www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr200.shtml

Family involvement is paramount to the success of the child. Concerns to be overcome:

Many parents say they feel unwelcome

Teachers often feel under attack by parents who are highly involved

Build a bridge- be sure 1st contact is always a positive one

communicate straightforwardly-no educational jargon

be sure parents have regular access to clear, concise, easily readable info

relationships are key-then parents can be helped to help their kids

Site lists 12 activities for parents to contribute to kids education in and out of school

Good example: invite parent to present talks and/or demonstrations about their specialized knowledge or skills

www.education-world.com/a_special/parent_involvement.shtml

LOTS of ideas-practical ways schools are involving parents.

Have systematized approach

www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/SAMPLE_PRACTICES/SamplePractices.htm

Details and sample practices including "workshop" ideas

Good idea: In-house Family Liaison/Parent Coordinator: assist parents in understanding

standards, grading, how they can support their children, help them study for tests,

understand what good student work looks like, find answers to parent questions/concerns, needed info, etc.

ex workshop: Health night to address wellness issues of both Child and Parent alike

www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa100.htm (When you click on this you may need to type in a dot before the htm in your address bar or it'll tell you page not found!)

Scroll down ~ half way for 50 ways parents can help in school including tutoring and mentoring

www.monroe.wednet.edu/

A school's website with "happening" info in user-friendly format

www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin/admin055.shtml Great article/rural case study to read

www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/betterschool.html

General info/common sense reminders