

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This project will pilot the use of a valid and reliable commercially available instrument for evaluating teacher effectiveness as a means of assessing the learning outcomes of the Master of Arts in Education (MAED) program. Furthermore, the project will be used to extend my research on teacher development. The mission of the MAED is to support educators in successfully impacting their students' learning. Practicing teachers take courses in content knowledge and pedagogical approaches to teaching. Over the final year of the program teachers merge coursework into their classroom practices in a research based capstone project. I have taught the Capstone project since the program's inception. Teachers engage in our unique model of action research, in which they video their practice and collaboratively view their teaching with other teachers in an expanded reflection cycle. The videos provide means for teachers to analyze how they have integrated theories and techniques from graduate coursework into their daily practices. Each week the teachers engage in reflective dialogues over videos to identify goals for improving their teaching, develop action plans, and analyze the results of their actions once taken. At the end of the year, their research results are presented through written papers and presentations which are assessed academically. Their progress as educators, however, is directly evident in their teaching. This project will provide a valid, reliable means for evaluating actual teacher effectiveness and tracking development over the course of Capstone projects.

For the past seven years, data from student's projects have been collected and analyzed to determine how the Capstone project impacts teachers' practices. The results of the research have been published and also been used as evidence of meeting our claims for TEAC national accreditation.

This proposal seeks funding to extend the research on the effects of the Capstone on teachers' practices through the use of The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) with one cohort of MAED students.

STATEMENT OF THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

R & PD funding will be used for training and materials for CLASS, an evidence-based approach to defining and measuring effective interactions in K-12 classrooms. The CLASS instrument is a proven valid and reliable instrument that is being used nationwide to measure the effectiveness of teacher performance. Unlike other assessment systems, CLASS provides a measure of quality that directly correlates to student achievement (Graue, Rauscher, & Sherfinski, 2009). The use of CLASS would provide a common metric for understanding changes in classroom quality that directly impact student achievement. Observations of teaching performance using CLASS will be completed before and after the year-long Capstone project in order to assess change in teacher effectiveness as a result of participation in the Capstone. CLASS may also be used to monitor changes evident in teaching videos compiled over the course of the project.

Objectives of the Project:

- Measure changes in teacher effectiveness as a result of participation in the Capstone project in a pilot group of students.
- Pilot the CLASS instrument as a means of program assessment for accreditation purposes.

BACKGROUND WORK ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED

This project is part of on-going research on how our year-long Capstone project can connect master's level coursework with a teacher's practice to truly impact teacher effectiveness and their students' achievement. The positive impact of the Capstone project on teacher practice has been reported in peer reviewed articles (Lebak & Tinsley, 2010; Tinsley & Lebak, 2009) and numerous national and international presentations. Through the Capstone, teachers transformed their own identities as teachers and empowered themselves to control their own professional growth (Tinsley & Lebak, 2009). The intersection of video and collaborative reflection during our Capstone process has emerged as a catalyst for teacher development (Lebak & Tinsley, 2010). Building upon this research, the CLASS will provide another means for evaluating teacher development. Furthermore, CLASS will provide valid and reliable data that connects directly to student achievement in our teachers' classrooms.

The CLASS instrument is used to directly assess teacher effectiveness and yields data for three domains of classroom interactions: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. CLASS performance in those domains statistically correlates to student achievement.

PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY

Participants:

The MAED program has partnered with three area school districts identified as low performing. Through these partnerships, the MAED program offers courses for teachers at each district's site. Participants include 20 teachers from the Atlantic City School District, 21 teachers from the Pleasantville School District, and 27 teachers from the Camden County Technical School. The goal of these partnerships is to improve teacher effectiveness and as a result student achievement. All teachers have begun coursework and will participate in the Capstone project. The funds from this grant will be used to acquire training and purchase instruments to assess the effectiveness of teachers in the Atlantic City cohort who will undertake Capstone projects over the 2012-2013 academic year.

Data Collection and Analysis:

A pre-post experimental study design will be utilized for this research. CLASS evaluations will allow us to make inferences about the effects of the Capstone by comparing teachers' measured effectiveness before and after the project. The CLASS scores of teachers prior to beginning the Capstone will be compared to their scores at the end of the project. The results from CLASS will be triangulated with other data, including analyses of videos of teacher discussion groups, final written projects, and teacher fieldwork notes to provide a complete picture of the impact of the Capstone on teacher effectiveness and student performance.

IMPORTANCE OR VALUE

This research is part of a larger study aimed at studying the impact of the MAED program on teacher practice. The research is important for multiple reasons.

First, at the national level, the value of teachers obtaining master's degrees has been questioned in research and by government officials and the media. In a review of the 34 research studies by Hanushek and Rivkin (2006) found there was no relationship between a teacher earning a master's degree and student achievement. This research has been reported through the mainstream media. Yet, almost all

research conducted on the effectiveness of a master's degree has drawn upon nationally representative data that estimates the impact of master's degrees upon student achievement. The studies all draw upon one measure, student test scores, to evaluate the effectiveness of degree programs. This measure is problematic as student test scores only provide information on a narrow portion of student academic achievement, usually limited to basic skills in math and reading. The complexities of teaching are largely ignored by these studies. Furthermore, the studies have not delineated between types of master's programs, including differences between initial certification master's degree programs and master's degrees designed for practicing teachers. The proposed study will look specifically at a master's degree created for practicing teachers. The use of CLASS will provide a lens for viewing the complexities of teaching practice and allow us to further study the impact of the Capstone project on effectiveness.

Second, this proposed study will be instrumental in providing data for MAED's accreditation efforts. Reliable and valid assessment instruments are essential for demonstrating that we meet our claims. This pilot project will help determine if CLASS can be used program wide to measure change in teacher effectiveness as a result of the program and Capstone project.

Finally, this data will be important for analyzing whether the MAED program has effectively met its goal to improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement with partnering school districts.

FURTHER RESEARCH AND STUDY

The results of this research will also be used for publication in peer reviewed journals and international and national presentations. Furthermore, the results of this pilot will be used to collect data for program assessment. The Capstone project is a major component of the MAED's assessment system. A proven valid and reliable instrument for assessing the impact of the Capstone is important for triangulation with existing collected data.

OUTCOMES

Preliminary discussions are in process with Teachstone (creator of the CLASS system) for possible grant opportunities to utilize CLASS for data collection at both Pleasantville School District and Camden County Technical School. This pilot will be important for collecting preliminary data for pursuing funding opportunities. Positive valid and reliable results will also help the MAED to attract more partner school districts and help validate the positive effects of earning an MAED at Stockton.

Resources:

Graue, E., Rauscher, E., & Sherfinski, M. (2009). The synergy of class size reduction and classroom quality. *The Elementary School Journal*, 110(2), 178–201.

Hanushek, E., and Rivkin, S. (2006). Teacher quality. In *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, edited by Eric A. Hanushek and Finis Welch. Amsterdam: North Holland:1051-1078.

Lebak, K. & Tinsley, R. (2010). Can inquiry and reflection be contagious? Science teachers, students, and action research. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 21(8).

Tinsley, R. & Lebak, K. (2009). Expanding the Zone of Reflective Capacity: Taking Separate Journeys Together. *Networks: An On-Line Journal for Teacher Research*, 11 (2).