Roundup 1

2018-01-29

Here is the first research roundup. I'm calling these research roundups, but sometimes they will include articles from non-peer reviewed sources.

The Social Side Of Capability: Improving Educational Performance By Attending To Teachers' And School Leaders' Interactions About Instruction | Shanker Institute

http://www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/social-side-capability-improving-educational-performance-attending-teachers%E2%80%99-and-school-leaders

In this post the two authors describe their research into what makes for better interactions and relationships amongst staff in schools. The authors contend that what really matters is "the educational and physical infrastructures of schools and school systems", more so than individual characteristics like race or gender. "In other words, holding formal (leadership) positions, participation in professional development, and grade-level assignments influence school staff interactions more strongly than individual attributes like gender, race, or years of experience." The authors state that interactions matter, and when people in a school or system have a position, like a coach, or have attended a PD on a specific topic, "are more likely to be sought out for advice and information about instruction by their colleagues than teachers who receive less professional development." These authors also find that teachers who teach across grade levels have less chance for interaction and are sought out less than those who teach on the same grade level. Physical proximity is another feature discussed. Maybe this is some research to back up the bullpen idea in Ossining? My favorite quote from this piece: "Unfortunately, the dominant operating approach in U.S. education is often the silver bullet strategy, a decidedly un-systemic approach to creating a thoughtful educational infrastructure. Our work suggests that it is time to take a more comprehensive approach and build systems at the school and district levels that support meaningful interactions about instruction, the development of social capital, and the improvement of educational performance."

How to Structure a Coaching Conversation - The Art of Coaching Teachers - Education Week Teacher

http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/coaching_teachers/2018/01/how_to_structure_a_coaching_co.html

In this blog post the author discusses the importance of structuring coaching conversations and planning these discussions. Too often coaches go in to observe and then have an unplanned discussion which meanders and does not really get anywhere. The suggested basic structure:

Open: Get warmed up, talk about your week or weekend, small talk etc... (5 minutes)

Transition: The author says this best: "I say,"So let's talk about our session today. I have a couple of things I thought we could talk about, but I really want to hear if there's anything you want to make sure we talk about or if you have any hopes or goals for our time."""

Conversation: Focus on goals of the conversation, don't get distracted, make the conversation meaningful.

Close: Leave 5 minutes for a wrap-up at the end and plan for next time/summarize next steps for the teacher.

Teaching Introverted Students: How a 'Quiet Revolution' Is Changing Classroom Practice - Education Week

https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/12/27/teaching-introverted-students-how-a-quiet-revolution.html?cmp=soc-edit-tw

This post discusses an idea called the "Quiet Revolution" which urges teachers to not reward only the extroverts. The biggest take away for me was the importance of think pair share, which we always want to use with ELLs and SWD, this gives time for processing and planning their response. This also brought to mind the importance of non-volunteers in the classroom. See Anita Archer and John Hollingsworth for more on this.

Education research: let failure light the way to success

https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-views/dont-leave-failure-shadows-it-can-light-your-way-success

In this short article from TES Ann Mroz argues that teachers need to fail to find what works. Education, and leaders, can not be paternalistic when helping teachers find and use evidence based practices. Teachers need to use data and evidence to find out what works for them in their specific situation. "It is teachers who have to translate education research into practice in the classroom. We need to leave them to decide how best to do that. They need to be empowered to use it and, if necessary, to call out a finding as unworkable in the real world – in their messy world, in their own context."

The Three Essentials: Improving Schools Requires District Vision, District and State Support, and Principal Leadership

https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/10v16_three_essentials.pdf

This report from 2010 (64 pages) outlines seven strategies districts can use to support principals effectively in school improvement.

1. Establish a clear focus and a strategic framework of core beliefs, effective practices and goals for improving student achievement

2. Organize and engage the school board and district office in support of each school

3. Provide instructional coherence and support

4. Invest heavily in instruction-related professional learning for principals, teacher-leaders and district staff

5. Provide high-quality data that link student achievement to school and classroom practices, and assist schools to use data effectively

6. Optimize the use of resources to improve student learning

7. Use open, credible processes to involve key school and community leaders in shaping a vision for improving schools

For this report the Southern Regional Education Board studied seven diverse school systems across three states. They found that there are three essential elements that must be put in place for improvement of struggling high schools (the focus of this report).

- State capacity building

- District Vision

- Principal leadership

They also found that "these elements are rarely all present and working in sync." So, what is missing? The authors are blunt, districts fail to create the conditions for principals to be successful. Some district leaders micromanage and some provide no vision and guidance.

"Five of the seven districts studied fell into one of these two categories. In the two highly supportive districts, however, district and school board leaders exhibited a clear vision of what constitutes a good school and have created a framework in which the principal has autonomy to work with faculty on an improvement agenda with collaborative support from the district."

"Few principals have the capacity to rise above a school district's lack of vision and clear purpose."

This report also emphasizes the important role State ed departments play in this work. " State departments of education must build capacity, helping local districts develop a coherent vision for the future of their schools, as well as the knowledge and skills to support principals and teachers as they create their own vision and goals at the school level — and then hold themselves accountable for results." The report calls on state departments to look at systems change

(think Senge) and fix the systems, individual schools being broken are simply a symptom of a broken system. If you don't fix the system nothing will truly be fixed.

The Impact of Providing Performance Feedback to Teachers and Principals (314 pages including appendices and references)

https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20184001/pdf/20184001.pdf

This report from IES and the American Institutes for Research discusses a study on the impact of specific, frequent feedback on teacher performance and student achievement. The study was completed in 2012-13 and 2013-14 (published December 2017) and used an experimental design (random assignment to experimental and control groups). This is the second report and reports on the two year impact and implementation in both years.

Eight districts were provided resources and support to implement three performance measures in sample schools:

1. Classroom practice measure: A measure of teacher classroom practice with subsequent feedback sessions conducted four times per year based on a classroom observation rubric.

2. Student growth measure: A measure of teacher contributions to student achievement growth (i.e., value-added scores) provided to teachers and their principals once per year.

3. Principal leadership measure: A measure of principal leadership with subsequent feedback sessions conducted twice per year. (ES-1)

Significant findings:

- When printed, student growth reports were viewed by all principals and given to 98% of teachers, vs just 39% of teachers accessing reports online.

- The intervention had a positive impact on teacher-principal trust in Year 1 and on both instructional leadership and teacher-principal trust in Year 2

- The intervention had a positive impact on students' mathematics achievement in Year 1, and had a cumulative impact similar in magnitude but not statistically significant ($p = 0.055$) in Year 2. The intervention did not have an impact on students' reading/English language arts achievement in either year

Overview of the intervention:

The intervention consisted of three types of performance measures that were implemented in tandem, providing feedback to those being evaluated and their supervisors. The intervention was intended to have many of the features promoted by research, specifically:

- Multiple measures of teacher and principal performance, including classroom observations and student growth.

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- Measures that provide meaningful information about differences in educator performance (i.e., measures that vary across individuals and are reliable).

- Measures that provide clear and useful feedback at multiple times during each year.

In each of the eight participating districts, the intervention was implemented in a group of elementary and middle schools. A group of control schools in each district participated in the normal district evaluation processes only.

Overall the intervention had some positive impacts but did not do everything the researchers had hoped. If you have some time take a read of the full report, its pretty interesting.

Public Education Funding Inequity in an Era of Increasing Concentration of Poverty and Resegregation

http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/2018-01-10-Education-Inequity.pdf

This was the big one for me this week. This report is newly released by the US Commission on Civil Rights and discusses, as the title suggests, inequality in school funding and a new era of school segregation, though not because of legal barriers this time. Here are the major findings:

- Although the United States Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that public education is a right that should be available to all on equal terms, the longstanding and persistent reality is that vast funding inequities in our state public education systems render the education available to millions of American public school students profoundly unequal.

- The U.S. Department of Education reported that more than 40 percent of Title I schools spent less on personnel per-pupil that non-Title I schools at the same grade level and that are within the same school district.

- These school finance inequities cause harm to students subject to them. In addition, as data on school spending become more accurate, some scholars believe there is concrete empirical evidence that funding is critical to positive student outcomes.

- Low-income students and students of color are often relegated to low-quality school facilities that lack equitable access to teachers, instructional materials, technology and technology support, critical facilities, and physical maintenance. These absences can negatively impact a student's health and ability to be attentive and can exacerbate existing inequities in student outcomes.

- Many students in the U.S. living in segregated neighborhoods and concentrations of poverty do not have access to high-quality schools simply because of where they live, and there is potential for housing policy to help provide better educational opportunities for these students.

- The reality of American schooling is fundamentally inconsistent with the American ideal of public education operating as a means to equalize life opportunity, regardless of zip code, race, economic status, or life circumstance.

This report is really worth the read if you are interested. It is 158 pages with opinions attached (some of the dissenting opinions are interesting).

I intended to read this article *How to re-skill a workforce? Experimental evidence of in-service teacher training and coaching*, but didn't have a chance before I wrote this. I'll include it next time.