

Title:

A Mixed Methods Analysis of the Role of Administration and the Effects of Principal Accountability on Teacher Implementation Fidelity of an Evidence Based Writing Intervention

Authors and Affiliations:

Julie Owens, Ph.D. Candidate, Texas A&M University

Debra McKeown, Ph.D., Texas A&M University

Kay Wijekumar, Ph.D., Texas A&M University

Background:

The writing deficits in the nation and the lack of evidence-based practices (EBP) being implemented in schools is a problem in dire need of solutions. Principals have the potential to have practical significance and meaningful effects on the implementation EBPs in writing within schools. Although writing is an essential skill, in the U.S. two-thirds of 8th-12th grade students score at or below the basic level on the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) writing test data (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). Similar to the medical field, educational stakeholders need to make transformational decisions and demand research to find solutions (Graham, Harris, & Chambers 2016). Yet currently in our nation; Students are not learning to write effectively; teachers are not taught to teach writing effectively; and administrators are not trained to directly affect change in writing instruction within their schools (Graham, 2019; Brindle, Harris, Graham, & Hebert, 2016).

Evidenced-based writing interventions are limited, but Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) is recognized by What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) as an EBP in writing (What Works Clearinghouse, 2012). Despite the research supporting the success of SRSD, (Gilespe & Graham, 2014; Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, & Harris, 2012) there has yet to be a research study to measure its efficacy and the implementation process at a larger scale (Graham et al., 2016).

Little research exists measuring how administrators' content knowledge and level of support in writing directly affects teachers (McGhee & Lew, 2007). Yet the scant research does provide evidence "that principals who have strong knowledge of and belief in effective writing practices organize the school and act in ways that help teachers to do their best work," (McGhee & Lew, 2007, p. 372). If change is going to occur in schools, then research needs to identify the factors that prevent good writing instruction, and help schools build ownership of the practice in order to increase the chances of the EBPs sustainability in schools (Graham, 2019; Klingner, Boardman, & McMaster, 2013). While leadership cannot solve every problem in schools, most educational reform success stories are rarely accomplished without instructional, intentional principals and teachers (Hallinger, Wang, & Chen, 2013; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Principals need a stronger knowledge about effective writing instruction and a deeper understanding of what their teachers need to implement new EBPs in writing (Graham, 2019; McGhee & Lew, 2007). A major gap in the research exists on scaling up professional development for writing instruction as well as testing methods of ways to assist administrators in writing content knowledge and effective writing instruction (Graham, 2019).

When conducting randomized control trials in educational research there are a multitude of factors affecting the intervention's success or failure. This study aims to focus on the administrator's role in the implementation of the efficacy trial of the We Write Intervention combining SRSD teacher led lessons with a web-based intelligent tutoring system (Wijkeumar, Graham, Harris, McKeown, Lei, & Meyer, 2018).

Research Questions:

1. Will providing a professional development (PD) for administrators impact the leadership content knowledge of the principals in terms of effective writing instruction?
2. What is the congruency between principals' perceptions of their level of support for writing and teachers' perceptions of principal support for writing before and after providing a PD for principals?
3. What leader level characteristics act as moderators and mediators of fidelity of implementation (FOI) of an EBP in writing?

4. To what extent does principal training on the We Write Intervention + diffusion of innovations theory+ continued support and accountability measures have on the FOI as measured by teacher FOI measures.
 - a. If such an impact exists, to what degree does the experience of the principal impact the teachers' level of FOI?
 - b. If such an impact exists, to what degree does the experience of the teacher impact the level of the FOI?

Participants

Using a delayed treatment design, nineteen schools were randomly assigned to an early start group (We Write Teacher Led + We Write Intelligent Tutor) or a late start group (Revise & Editing Software) within schools. This study will focus on the ten principals and seventy 3rd and 4th grade teachers assigned to the early start group.

Research Design

The We Write intervention includes nine teacher led lessons including: seven lessons focusing on SRSD strategies for the persuasive genre, a prequel lesson reviewing all writing genres, and one lesson focused on the transfer of the SRSD writing strategies to the Texas state writing assessment. The We Write intervention also includes nine web-based intelligent tutoring lessons reinforcing the skills and strategies for the students with a variety of videos, interactive activities, and opportunities to write and receive feedback. The We Write computer program also provides the teacher with formative assessments of each lesson and an assessment platform to aid in data based instructional decisions.

Principals from the early start group received a PD on the We Write program prior to implementation, one session with researchers to create goals for supporting teachers throughout implementation, and three accountability follow-up sessions on the goals in order to increase the FOI for their teachers of the We Write program.

Mixed methods of both quantitative and qualitative measures will be used to answer the research questions. Quantitative measures include a teacher and principal pre/post survey adapted from the Principal Support for Writing Instrument (McGhee & Lew, 2007), teacher FOI measures for teachers of the We Write teacher led lessons, teacher/student participation and interaction with the intelligent tutor (# of logins, time on task), and a principal fidelity of leadership implementation measurement tool. Qualitative approaches include principal interviews, open-ended writing content knowledge questions/scenarios, observation of intervention implementation, field notes, and artifacts.

Data Analysis

Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) accounting for principal level and teacher level variables combined with the qualitative analysis using a grounded theory methodology (Corbin, 1990) will be conducted to answer our research questions.

Preliminary Results

Optional for proposal purposes, but will be presented at time of conference.

[Word count: 986]

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