

Education Research as a Catalyst for Improving Policy and Practice



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ERC Presents Spring Seminar for 2012-2013

The final ERC seminar for 2012-2013, *What Influences Student Success in Developmental Education? An Analysis Based on Student Experiences in Selected Texas Community Colleges*, was presented on April 23rd by Dr. Lori Taylor and the Bush School Capstone Team. Andrew Bobo, a member of the capstone team, described the capstone research project that was designed to explore several potential solutions for improving success rates of community college students enrolled in developmental education (DE) courses.

The Capstone Team used fuzzy regression discontinuity analysis (RD) to compare the experiences and opinions of students required to take DE course(s) with those who were not required to take DE courses. Five hypotheses for increasing likelihood of student success were explored: greater classroom engagement, higher quality advising, greater connection to school community, higher than average "grit" scores, and influence of outside factors.

Provisional results indicate that only outside financial factors and higher than

average "grit" scores were significant and important predictors of DE students' success. Contrary to conventional belief, classroom engagement had a statistically significant positive relationship with success for all non-DE students, but the relationship was not significant for DE students. Another interesting finding that emerged from focus groups was that miscommunication about the importance of the placement tests and the nature of DE is a substantial hurdle for DE students.

Other members of the Bush School Capstone Team include Cherrelle Duncan, Cameron Goodman, Jennifer Harris, Thanasis Kombos, Torey McDaniel, Jena Overall, Sarina Rapini, Jye Shafer, Silvia Xing, Helen Zhang, and Staci Zugaro.



Dr. Lori Taylor presents at the seminar

Education Research Center Awarded Grant to Evaluate Professional Development Curriculum for Early Childhood Program

The Education Research Center (ERC) at Texas A&M University (TAMU) is pleased to announce it has been awarded a grant from United Way of Greater Houston's Bright Beginnings program for the purpose of evaluating the program's professional development (PD) curriculum for the directors and staff at each of its 25 childcare centers. Beverly Alford, assistant director of the ERC, and Kayla Rollins, assistant research scientist in the ERC, are Co-PIs of the project.

Located in Houston, United Way Bright Beginnings is an innovative early childhood program designed to help children from lower income families achieve social, emotional, physical, and cognitive milestones and enter school ready to succeed. Since its inception in 2002, United Way Bright Beginnings has supported and strengthened the education of children, birth through age five. Conceived and funded by leadership from ExxonMobil and United Way of Greater Houston, the program funds 25 childcare centers annually.

"This evaluation will assist United Way Bright Beginnings in its goal of providing strong and continuing professional development for childcare center directors and staff," said Alford. "The Bright Beginnings vision is an extension of the United Way Vision 20:20, and Bright Beginnings is poised to become the foundation of United Way's Education Initiative—a project that is also currently being evaluated by the ERC."

As part of the evaluation, ERC researchers will implement a mixed-methods approach for both formative and summative purposes, to include (a) exploring PD offerings, teachers/directors PD perceptions, and PD attendance; (b) reviewing current literature regarding PD efficacy and how Bright Beginnings aligns with the five key features of PD; (c) offering recommendations regarding how Bright Beginnings could effectively employ fewer third-party trainers while maintaining current program integrity and standards; and (d) providing cost efficiency recommendations.

ERC Welcomes New Business Coordinator

As the business coordinator for the Education Research Center, Tracy Eppers processes travel reimbursements, pays invoices, assists with budget development, and addresses account expense inquiries. She also provides administrative support for ERC events, meetings, and other specialized activities. Eppers joined the ERC in January with over 5 years of experience working at TAMU in business-related positions. Previously she worked for the Office of Sponsored Research Services and Mays Business School, as well as the dean's office for the College of Science. Eppers is currently pursuing a Business Administration Management degree at Blinn College.



New Graduate Researchers in the ERC



Tracey Hodges is a graduate assistant in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture, where she teaches both field-based and writing-intensive education courses. Hodges received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in reading education from Texas A&M University, and prior to returning to Texas A&M to pursue her PhD in Curriculum and Instruction, she was a middle and high school English teacher in the Bryan/College Station area. Her research interests include interventions for struggling readers and writers, technology integration in K-12 classrooms, and teacher education.

Nancy Weber is a graduate assistant in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture, pursuing a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Culture and Curriculum. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology and a Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Texas A&M University. Prior to returning to school full-time, Weber spent six years teaching high school English and service learning through the Peer Assistance and Leadership (PALS) program in Cypress-Fairbanks ISD in the Houston area. Her research interests include teacher education field experiences and how they help preservice teachers develop a connection between theory and practice.



Recent ERC Conference Presentations

- Brown, D. B., Waxman, H. C., Boriack, A. W., Taylor, L. L., Stillisano, J. R., & Padrón, Y. N. (2012, November). *School climate and learning environment differences between effective/efficient and ineffective/inefficient Texas urban middle level schools*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Middle Level Education, Portland, OR.
- Alford, B. L., Brown, D. B., Rollins, K. B., Stillisano, J. R., & Waxman, H. C. (2013, February). *Incorporating college and career readiness standards into a teacher preparation program*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, Atlanta, GA.
- Brown, D. B., Alford, B. L., Rollins, K. B., Stillisano, J. R., & Waxman, H. C. (2013, February). *Implementing college and career readiness standards in mathematics, science, technology teacher academies*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, Atlanta, GA.
- Franco-Fuenmayor, S. E., & Padrón, Y. N. (2013, February). *Investigating bilingual/ESL teachers' knowledge, professional development experiences, and perceptions about bilingual programs in a large suburban school district*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Bilingual Education, Orlando, FL.
- Padrón, Y. N. (2013, February). *Principals' understanding of programs for English Language Learners*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Bilingual Education, Orlando, FL.
- Rollins, K. B., Alford, B. L., Brown, D. B., Waxman, H. C., & Stillisano, J. R. (2013, February). *Preparing teacher educators to implement college and career readiness standards*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, Atlanta, GA.
- Franco-Fuenmayor, S. E., & Padrón, Y. N. (2013, March). *Investigating bilingual/ESL teachers' knowledge, professional development experiences, and perceptions about bilingual programs*. Paper presented at the TESOL 2013 International Convention & Language Expo Doctoral Forum, Dallas, TX.
- Gronberg, T.J., Jansen, D.W., & Taylor, L. L. (2013, March). *Are charters the best alternative? A cost frontier analysis of alternative education campuses in Texas*. Paper presented at the 38th annual meeting of the Association for Education Finance and Policy, New Orleans, LA.
- Padrón, Y. N., Waxman, H. C., & Franco-Fuenmayor, S. E. (2013, March). *Beyond value-added assessments: Alternative methods for evaluating teachers and improving student learning*. Paper presented at the TESOL 2013 International Convention & Language Expo Doctoral Forum, Dallas, TX.

Recent ERC Publications

- Baker, B.D., Taylor, L. L., Levin, J., Chambers, J., & Blankenship, C. (in press). Adjusted poverty measures and the distribution of Title I aid: Does Title I really make the rich states richer? *Education Finance and Policy*.
- Lee, Y-H., Waxman, H. C., Wu, J-Y, Michko, G., & Linn, G. (2013). Revisit the effect of teaching and learning with technology. *Educational Technology and Society*, 16(1), 133-146.
- Taylor, L. L., & Paige, C. P. (2012). Alternative strategies for identifying high-performing charter schools in Texas. *Journal of Applied Research on Children*, 3(2), Article 8.
- Valle, M. C., Waxman, H. C., Diaz, Z., & Padrón, Y. N. (2013). Classroom instruction and the mathematics achievement of non-English learners and English learners. *Journal of Educational Research*, 106, 173-182.