Middle School Mathematics Teacher Evaluation

Teacher evaluation is one hot topic, with much emphasis on what kind of information should be used to assess effectiveness and improve instruction. Chrsiey Trinter has tackled one aspect of teacher evaluation in her newly released MERC study, Middle School Mathematics Teacher Evaluation. Her study focuses on the relationship between the subject matter knowledge of observers and the type of feedback that is provided to mathematics teachers, examining the nature of post-observation feedback given to teachers from observers with different subject matter expertise and teacher and observer perceptions of post-instruction observation feedback. This qualitative study included four or three person teacher/administrator teams from three different MERC middle schools. The administrators completed surveys detailing their level of mathematics education or experience prior to the start of the study. Researchers observed teacher instruction alongside each administrator. Following instruction and the administrator/teacher post-observation conference, the researcher interviewed each administrator and teacher individually. Teachers also shared the written evaluation that was provided by the administrator during post-observation conference.

Preliminary findings support the feedback literature, confirming that concrete examples and suggestions are perceived to be the most effective forms of feedback: observers with math content backgrounds provided this form of specific feedback with an emphasis on task complexity, conceptual and procedural knowledge, and connections between and within mathematical topics. Observers without formal math content background or experience often provided specific suggestions with regard to behavior and instructional strategies. There was lack of clarity on the goals of the teacher evaluation system among participants, and the way in which the system was used seemed to influence teachers’ perceptions of the goals of the observation/feedback cycle. Teachers and administrators expressed credibility as an issue for observers without math content expertise. The findings from this study suggest that mathematics specialists or coaches are instrumental in providing feedback for improving instruction, and pairing observers who have different discipline and pedagogical expertise has the potential for providing a well-rounded evaluation. For more details on this important study see the MERC website.

Congratulations to Jesse Senechal

MERC’s Associate Director for Research and Evaluation, Jesse Senechal, recently received the Outstanding Professional Faculty Award from VCU School of Education for his work with MERC and the school. He is described as having boundless energy, a great collaborator and colleague, and he is deeply committed to urban schools and urban education.
MERC’s Work in Research . . .

Currently MERC has four full studies in progress.

Middle School Mathematics Teacher Evaluation

Chrissy Trinter, will present her final report at the May, 2015 Policy and Planning Council meeting.

Response to Intervention Needs Assessment

The Response to Intervention Needs Assessment study, directed by Valerie Robnolt and Jim McMillan, was presented to the Policy and Planning Council at the March meeting. The PowerPoint used in the presentation is available on the MERC website. The final report will be available in June.

Ten Point Grading System

Data will be collected from school divisions this summer for The Effect of 10-Point Grading System on College Admissions, directed by Donna Gibson. Results will be presented this fall.

Improving Teacher Morale

The MERC Teacher Morale Study, directed by Jesse Senechal and a cross-division study team, has identified the need for a new initiative. Preliminary reports based on existing secondary data will be developed this Spring and Summer. Primary data collection will occur in the Fall of 2015.

MERC’s Recent Released Studies . . .

Academic Rigor for All: A Research Report by Dr. Gabriel A. Reich, Dr. Volkan Sevim, and Amanda B. Turner. This report defines rigor and presents case study findings. The complete report will be available on MERC’s website.

Rethinking School Improvement: The Case for Networked Improvement Communities by Jesse Senechal. This white paper, produced for Bridging Richmond, examines the principles and strategies of the Networked Improvement Community model of school improvement and presents recommendations for implementation.

Pass the word along…. MERC is now on Facebook!

www.facebook.com/MERCRichmond

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Action Research

Become an Action Researcher in your classroom or school!

MERC is sponsoring an Action Research Initiative for teachers and instructional staff from the seven MERC school divisions and needs participants for the fifth cohort. The initiative has several goals:

- To train teachers and staff from MERC school divisions in methods of action research.
- To support teachers as they design and conduct action research projects in their classrooms and schools.
- To help with the dissemination of action research within schools, divisions and the broader educational research community.
- To build a network of teacher action researchers within the consortium.

Application deadline

June 19, 2015

For more information about the program or how to apply, contact Dr. Jesse Senechal at senechaljt@vcu.edu

Welcome New Members . . .

We are pleased to announce our newest MERC Policy and Planning Council member. We welcome you to MERC and appreciate your participation and support!

Dr. Krishan Agrawal

Colonial Heights City Public Schools

Dr. Agrawal was born in India and took a position in 1999 at Virginia State University after finishing his PhD in mathematics and computer science at the University of Windsor. He has been a professor at Virginia State University for 45 years and recently was appointed school board member of Colonial Heights. In 2009, he started the Author Visitaton Program, which allows for students to interact with scientists and mathematicians by inviting them to host a discussion in the community, and has acted as a tutor and mentor for many pre-college students over the past 11 years.

MERC Seminar

Response to Intervention Needs Assessment

June 17, 2015

MERC conducted survey research with elementary personnel related to experiences with implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) in their schools. Several key points will be discussed and shared in this seminar and what the results mean for RTI implementation in your school. For more information and registration, please refer to MERC’s website. www.merc.soe.vcu.edu

We would like to thank . . .

Mike Yates from Colonial Heights City Public Schools for serving on the MERC Policy and Planning Council. MERC appreciates your hard work and continued support!

Ongoing Evaluation Projects

MERC currently is evaluating several projects:

- Bridging RVA: Gallup Student Poll
- Community of Caring of Richmond
- UVA, Developing Grades 6-12 Science Teacher-Leaders’ Understanding of Electricity, Magnetism, and Light through Modeling and Inquiry Instruction (UVA J-Lab)
- Longwood University, Proportional Reasoning Enrichment Program (PRPE)
- Sweet Briar College, Expanding Inquiry Teaching in STEM Across Central VA (EIT-STEM)
- VCU Department of Mathematics, Interactive Mathematics Institute for Richmond Middle School Teachers (IMIRMST)
- Longwood University, Problem-based Interdisciplinary STEM Learning (PISTEM)

To learn more about MERC’s evaluation services please refer to MERC’s website at www.merc.soe.vcu.edu/evaluation-services or contact Jesse Senechal at senechaljt@vcu.edu.

2015 Annual MERC Conference

Evidence-Based Best Practices That Improve Teaching and Learning

MERC held its 12th Annual Conference on March 10, 2015. Over 80 educators from area school divisions and VCU attended. The keynote speaker was Jason Kissoon from Richmond City Public Schools, Richmond 2014 Teacher of the Year. The plenary session was followed by fifteen breakout sessions featuring presentations from VCU faculty and doctoral students, MERC school division teachers, as well as students from Henrico and Richmond school divisions. PowerPoint presentations and handouts from the breakout sessions are available on MERC’s website.
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MERC’s Work is published two times a year.

How to Contact MERC

If you would like to participate in a study group, attend a seminar, or receive MERC documents, please contact your school division representative or call or email Angela McGrath at 804-828-0478, almgrath@vcu.edu.

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