Sabbatical Report
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TITLE OF PROJECT: A Study of Critical Elements in Exemplary Graduate Programs for Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach Leading to the Redesign of Advanced Certification Programs in the Department of Reading and Language Arts and the Creation of a Literacy Coaching Academy

Abstract of Sabbatical Project

This project was, a study of critical elements in exemplary graduate programs for Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach leading to the Redesign of Advanced Certification Programs in the Department of Reading and Language Arts and the Creation of a Literacy Coaching Academy:

Project Goal (1) I developed an extensive repertoire of research literature on the roles and responsibilities, leadership qualities and dispositions of Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach; critical elements of exemplary graduate reading programs for Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach, and issues, concerns, and challenges of Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach in the field;

Project Goal (2) I used data to inform the redesign of our Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach program.

Project Goal (3) I designed a pilot Literacy Coaching Academy (for Summer 2011) Continuing Development of Professional Knowledge and Dispositions of Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach in the field.

The Ultimate Goal of the Project is to make CCSU an Exemplary Advanced Certification Program for Reading Specialists/Literacy Coaches.

Goals Accomplished:

The goals of this sabbatical proposal were: (1) to develop an extensive repertoire of research literature on the roles and responsibilities, leadership qualities and dispositions of Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach; critical elements of exemplary graduate reading programs for Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach as defined by the International Reading Association Standards for Reading Professionals (2003), specifically, critical elements of exemplary field, clinical and practicum experiences for Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach; and issues, concerns, and challenges of Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach in the field;

(2) To use data to inform changes in the redesign of our Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach program, in general, and our field, clinical and practicum experiences, in particular;

and (3) (to be in effect Summer 2011) to establish and pilot a Literacy Coaching Academy, which will provide continuing development of professional knowledge and dispositions of Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach in the field.

Purpose of Project

Since 1968 the State of Connecticut Regulation of State Board of Education has two separate advanced certifications in reading and language arts—102-Remedial Reading and Language Arts (Reading Specialist), and 097-Reading and Language Arts Consultant
Certification (Literacy Coach). In response to the state regulations, the Department of Reading and Language Arts has been offering a master’s degree, leading to a certification in Remedial Reading and Language Arts, and a 6th year certificate program, leading to Reading and Language Arts Consultant Certification. At the time these programs were developed, also in 1968, until our initial NCATE/SPA accreditation in 2003, these two programs have been consistent with the International Reading Association (IRA) Standards for Reading Professionals two distinct categories—Remedial Reading Teacher and Reading Consultant. However, in 2003, the IRA revised its standards, which included changes in the categories of reading professionals from what used to be two distinct categories into simply one category, that is, Category 3: Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach. Meanwhile, the state of Connecticut maintained the distinction between the two categories, and as a result, our department also continued to offer the two advanced certifications separately. Recently, there has been ongoing conversation across the state focusing on anticipated changes in the state regulations for the advanced certification in reading and language arts in order to align with the IRA category of Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach, with target implementation in 2013. While specific interpretations of these new regulations are still in a proposal format and subject to change, the fact is that we needed to examined our advanced certification programs as early as when the International Reading Association published its 2003 Standards for Reading Professionals and to ensure alignment with the new revised 2010 Standards for Reading Professionals. The anticipated new state regulations for advanced certification in reading and language arts makes it urgent for our department to take a proactive stance by starting our own conversations around changes in the design of our advanced certification programs to align with the new regulations in the state of Connecticut and the IRA Standards for Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach. These conversations, and upon the urging of my department and support from our Advisory Board, encouraged me to initiate this project.

The following is an extensive qualitative analysis of onsite/phone interviews open-ended items which I conducted: (A) & (B)

A. I developed and conducted an extensive qualitative analysis (3) three sets of survey and interview instruments –

B. (a) Reading Specialists/Literacy Coaches, From October to November 2009 I surveyed 30 former CCSU graduates certified and employed teaching in the field as reading specialists/literacy coaches with the following findings:

Findings:
1. Respondents indentified five courses in particular which they felt had provided them with a rich and necessary knowledge base to handle the many challenges of being employed in the field as a reading specialist/literacy coach.
   - RDG 595 Remedial & Corrective Techniques in Reading & Language Arts (3cr)
     This course was indentified by 25 of the 30 as the first course that introduced them to the roles and responsibilities of being a reading specialist/literacy coach. Twenty-seven of thirty of the respondents report still using their textbooks from the course as resources for their current position.
   - RDG 596 Clinical Practices in Reading & Language Arts (6cr)
     This course was indentified by 24 of the 30 as the course that pulled all their assessment knowledge together, and most prepared them for delivering “Tier II
and Tier III support for students. The 6 of 30 who responded otherwise felt while it may have pulled their CCSU clinical sequence courses together this was already part of their work in the field.

- RDG 692 Specialized Diagnosis and Remedial Techniques (3cr).
  This course was identified by 22 of the 30 respondents as the least informative course in their program. Many respondents felt this course was repetitive, and clearly dealt with existing knowledge. Seven respondents thought this course could be embedded in the consultant practicum. Fifteen respondents felt a specialized case study could embed as part of the clinical sequence.

- RDG 694 Organization, Administration, and Supervision of Reading and Language Arts Programs (3cr)
  30 of the 30 respondents identified this course as best preparing to assume leadership roles in their respective positions. Respondents indicated this course provided them authentic/practical knowledge on aligning curriculum, preparing school improvement plans, creating school assessment surveys, and dealing with Connecticut policy on Reading To Intervention policies.

- RDG 696 Practicum for Reading and Language Arts Consultants (6cr)
  Thirty of thirty respondents identified this course as the course that prepared them to realize the complexities of actually being employed as a reading specialist/literacy coach. Twenty-seven of 30 respondents indicated this course provided their first real professional development delivery experience.

Twenty-seven of the 30 respondents indicated they could benefit from further professional development opportunities provided by CCSU for professionals in the field. No respondents indicated taking future courses, but thought there could be a role for professional coaching.

C. I conducted 10 telephone interviews with employers of reading specialists/literacy coaches who graduated from our program.

- All ten employers felt our graduates were knowledgeable, capable, and valuable assets to their schools in their current positions.
- Six of the 10 employers reported the positions at their respective schools required their specialists/literacy coaches to work directly with children, and participate in the development of IEP(s) and collaborate with other staff for PPT(s).
- Ten of ten indicated our graduates are key personnel in planning and developing curriculum, data analysis, planning and responding to states and federal mandates.

I visited or directly interviewed clinical leaders at six exemplary NCATE approved institutions in the country with graduate programs leading to Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach.

**Site visits:**
University of Indiana, Bloomington Indiana July 2 to 6, 2010
Bowie State University, (Maryland), August 20-24, 2010
American University, (Washington DC, August 30-September 3, 2010

**Telephone interviews:**
University of Arizona, October 15, 2009
Findings:
All sites indicate the measure of being an exemplary program begins with NCATE accreditation. All six programs indicated that state accreditation is now linked with NCATE accreditation. While each program is unique and aligned to their individual state regulations for certification for reading specialists/literacy coaches no program is non-NCATE approved. All respondents indicated they felt NCATE approval is now a precursor to state approval for their programs.

The Connecticut State Department of Higher Education and the Connecticut verifies this finding for our state as well. Association for Reading Research (CARR) to identify first-year reading specialists/literacy coaches across the state of Connecticut, who will be the potential participants in the survey and interview. Jean Klein, CARR, (Connecticut Association for Reading Research) senior researcher, also verifies this finding. All schools seeking to prepare advance certificates for reading specialists/ literacy coaches must earn NCATE approval.

D. Literacy Coach Academy
The findings of my sabbatical indicate a summer coaching academy could have the potential to provide professional development for coaches in the field, and to recruit new graduate students into our sixth-year program in Reading and Language Arts. I will seek curriculum and research grants to pilot our first coaching academy for summer 2011. This portion of my sabbatical work continues, and The Department of Reading & Language Arts will offer the first Coaching Institute in the summer of 2011.

At this point the data had been analyzed and the job of integrating qualitative and quantitative data continues annually. This involved considering how the information interfaced in order to make sense of the findings. I summarized our respective results. Given the nature of qualitative analysis, this was a major undertaking. I then looked at our results in detail in order to see how the data converged and diverged. From this analysis I wrote a discussion of findings and recommendations. This entailed going back to the professional literature and making connections between what I found and what other researchers found. Based on this analysis the clinical faculty will begin planning for our first Coaching Institute for 2011.

The full report of the project is not yet complete because I still have to revisit and refine the literature review to better integrate the research in this section, however the Summary Report is completed.

This sabbatical provided an important learning experience for me and addressed many areas at once:
1) It served as professional development incubator for a clinical coaching institute project
2) It helped design and program the Literacy Coaching Academy, which will be presented to the department faculty at the faculty retreat and the Advisory Board meeting in fall 2010. I will also introduce the Literacy Coaching Academy at the 4th Literacy Essentials Conference in March 2011, and recruit members for the 2011 summer institute.
3) The time that CCSU provided for this project allowed me to further the Research Agenda for Department of Reading & Language Arts and The Central Connecticut State University Literacy Center.

Although the work on this project was labor intensive and was done prior to, during and well beyond the sabbatical time frame into this current semester, it was satisfying work. I thank CCSU for granting me the time to work on this important project.

REFERENCES

Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse
http://www.literacycoachingonline.org/


