



Research UpDATE

.....DECEMBER 2005

Utah State University • College of Education and Human Services • Office of Research Services

From the Associate Dean for Research

This issue of Research UpDATE highlights two of the many research activities of faculty in the Department of Elementary Education. We hope you enjoy learning about what other College of Education and Human Services colleagues are involved in.

Jim Dorward

Congratulations undergraduate researchers!

The Vice President's Office for Research recently announced URCO (Undergraduate Research & Creative Opportunities) grant recipients. Four of the recipients are College of Education and Human Services students. They are: Jordan Singleton, Christian Monson, Robert Wright, and Mary Ann Baily. The deadline for the second round of URCO applicants is February 15.

Accepting nominations:

The Office of Research Services is accepting nominations for the Researcher/Scholar of the Year Award for the College of Education and Human Services. The deadline for nominations is January 23, 2006.



Advanced Readers at Risk

The Principle Investigator and Project Director of the Advanced Readers at Risk project is Scott L. Hunsaker, professor, Elementary Education. Acting as Co-Director and a District Liaison is Rebecca Odoardi of Davis School District. Other District Liaisons are Sue Sakashita of Salt Lake District, Joan Bramble of Granite District, Kay Erwin of Murray District, and Debbie May of Nebo School District. Both Ms. Odoardi and Ms. May are alumni of Utah State.

The *Advanced Readers at Risk* Project is a 3-year federal project funded under the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Student Program of the U.S. Department of Education. Grants awarded under the Javits Act are intended to increase a state's capacity to deliver services to gifted and talented students, especially to populations traditionally underserved by gifted and talented programs, such as those from culturally diverse, economically disadvantaged, English language learning populations. In Utah, this project is a cooperative venture among Utah State University, Davis School District, Salt Lake School District, Granite School District,

Murray School District, and Nebo School District.

The project is founded upon the four pronged World Class Reader Model (WCRM). Under each component, teachers learn strategies to address the needs of advanced readers they identify in their classrooms.

The project commenced during the 2004-2005 school year with 32 teachers drawn from the cooperating school districts. Nearly 2/3 of these are from Title I classrooms. This year (2005-2006) 29 teachers from throughout the state are receiving the intensive training the project provides. From among these two cohorts, demonstration teachers will be selected to assist with dissemination of the successful methods established through evaluation of the project.

The *Advanced Readers at Risk* Project has already had positive impacts in many teachers' classrooms. Preliminary data indicated that while advanced students make about one year's progress in reading level through the reading instruction generally available in the classroom, students in the classroom of teachers trained in the World Class Reader Model make about 1½ years progress. This is true in both Title I and non-Title I schools. In addition to improvement in reading level, student ability in analyzing reading material, and student attitude toward reading are also being assessed.

The impact of this project on teachers has been very positive, as indicated by their own words. One teacher stated, "My high-ability kids are finally all reading . . . Now they

see a purpose for it!" Another teacher remarked, "This is the first year I've felt good about reading instruction. I see the change in my students in how they use the strategies taught."

Teachers in the project feel so confident about what they have been learning that they have already begun dissemination. As noted by one teacher, "I have become so passionate about this project this year that I've now trained my student teacher in all that you taught us. Just wanted you to know . . . your knowledge is spreading!"



No Child Left Behind: Giving Voice to Teachers of Young Children

Co-researchers Martha Taylor Dever, professor, Elementary Education, and Gary Carlston, interim department head, Secondary Education, and associate professor, Elementary Education, investigated teachers' reactions to the No Child Left Behind act.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, signed on January 8,

2002 by President G.W. Bush, may be one of the most significant federal education policies ever enacted by the federal government. This bipartisan legislation is designed to hold schools accountable for defined levels of student achievement or provide options for families to educate their children.

NCLB has had both ardent supporters and critics. Supporters have hailed the notion that schools must be held accountable for the achievement of all students. Critics have called the law unrealistic, underfunded, and an unwarranted federal intrusion into public education.

The voice of teachers regarding this legislation is all but missing from educational literature. The purpose of this inquiry was to understand the lived experiences of teachers of young children since NCLB was signed into law. Through a social constructivist lens, this inquiry addressed the question: How do kindergarten and primary grade teachers in public schools experience teaching since the implementation of the NCLB act?

This inquiry followed the tradition of phenomenology, designed to understand how people experience a particular phenomenon. The data source was multiple focus group interviews with 39 K-3 teachers, from nine school districts in states located in the northwest, west, southwest, and southeast. Data were analyzed inductively; verification strategies were employed.

Three broad themes emerged from the data: *Feeling Disenfranchised*, *Focus on Tests*, and *Consider-*

ations Related to the Children. Sub-themes also emerged. The broad themes captured experiences across schools, although specific contextual issues varied.

Some districts mandated particular instructional programs and the time spent on those programs. One respondent exclaimed, "My biggest frustration is that people who have never taught six-year-olds how to read are telling me how to do my job!" Another teacher echoed the sentiment, "The district, in a knee-jerk effort to meet ayp [annual yearly progress] brings in stopgap measures and programs that they think are going to fix everything And I know from experience that it's not going to work, yet doing what I know will work has me feeling very insecure."

Some teachers lamented that they chose to address the high-stakes tests by simply teaching to the test. "We teach reading, writing, and math. What ever is on the test. That's all we have time to teach."

Kindergarten teachers were concerned about inappropriate expectations as the curriculum was being pushed down. One commented, "All the things [children] should be doing in kindergarten, they aren't getting in kindergarten because now they are focusing on first grade curriculum."

To a person, the participants felt the spirit of the NCLB law was admirable. Again, to a person, they felt the law was not achieving its intended goal.

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Think Research

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