Middle School Teachers’ Perception of Project Based Learning as it Impacts First Year Implementation

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ABSTRACT

Current education expectations require teachers to meet federal and state standards as well as develop 21st century skills like collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving. Preparing students for state testing while also preparing them to be successful in a global society can present an instructional dilemma. Project-based learning has been identified as a possible solution to this problem. Although researchers agree that integrating 21st century skills in daily instruction is necessary, many teachers and administrators have shied away from implementing a project-based learning curriculum (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, & Chinn, 2007). The identified problem of practice for this present action research study centers on the perceptions of four teachers as they implement a project-based learning curriculum at a high poverty, middle school in central South Carolina. Data was collected over a 10 week period during the first year of a newly developed, project-based learning magnet program. The data collected from two administrations of the Stages of Concern Questionnaire, classroom observations and semi-structured interviews indicate that although teachers had positive perceptions of project-based learning, implementation was hindered by factors beyond teacher control. The action plan developed as a result of this study suggest changes to planning time, assessment expectations, as well as embedded and ongoing professional development.