Participatory Action Research: An Examination of Equity for the Underrepresented Student During Response to Intervention Implementation

Chair: Richard Sawyer

The purpose of this participatory action research study is to examine how teaching staff and administration contribute to the planning, implementation and continuation of the Response to Intervention model as it is meant to create equity in learning environments for students. Using the action-learning theory, participants as co-researchers engaged in the examination of the following research questions: 1) How do administrators and teaching staff contribute to the planning, implementation, and continuation of an RTI model designed to address the needs of underrepresented student populations? 2) How do administrators and teaching staff engage in empathy toward underrepresented students and each other during the planning, implementation and continuation stages of the RTI model? 3) How do administrators and teaching staff engage in reflective practice as part of an action-learning model involving the planning, implementation and continuation of RTI?

This study contributes to the literature a meaningful relationship between collaboration as an essential component to RTI, empathy, and the reflective practice. The results of this study better defines the influence social status has on collaborative practices by exploring how social dominance orientations and reciprocal empathy levels influence the direction of staff teaming and instructional decision-making to better serve underrepresented students. And ultimately, this research contributes to our understanding from where and how the RTI initiative, as a national policy, begins to fragment at a local level, and provides insight for districts seeking to mitigate risks of policy fragmentation.

While empathy has been theorized in teacher preparation programs and in teacher standards literature to improve a teacher's ability to teach children, there is little empirical understanding in education literature about how staff empathy plays a role in improving student learning and learning environments. This study provides a basis for discussion about the role empathy plays in shaping decisions about instructional practice. However, more research should continue regarding the relationship between empathy, social orientation and the reflective practice if we believe equity-minded collaboration produces effective instructional practice, and if we are to coordinate better our pursuit of closing persistent achievement gaps. This study serves as a call for more research.

All three studies discuss implications for practice and future research.