

An Examination of Conflicting Theoretical Perspectives in Learning & Teaching

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Abstract

The theoretical perspectives that inform educational policies are typically developed by lawmakers. However, the implementation of these legislative measures are seldom developed in conjunction with practicing educators. Thus, new paradigms are rooted on theoretically salient procedures as well as real-word applicability. This gap has created a significant number of educational practitioners that harbor conflicting theoretical perspectives regarding teaching and learning the curriculum as prescribed. However, many educators refrain from expressing their disagreement with existing policies. This research intends to highlight the presence of these conflicting perspectives as well as the underlying reasons prompting these disparaged notions. Through examination of existing literature, this study outlines the numerous educational theories that formulate the foundations of educational practice to create the theoretical framework used to analyze the data collected. A Likert-based survey was used to gather personal impressions from 415 in-service teachers in the U. S. of pre-kindergarten through 12th grade to determine the current theoretical perspectives shaping the curriculum. A majority of the respondents reported discord as it pertains to current policies and standards of practice.

Keywords: Conflicting educational theories, education, learning theories, teaching methods

Introduction

Early childhood education can be traced back to the time of the Puritans (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009). The Old Deluder Satan Law implemented in 17th century colonial America instilled the tenets of rudimentary education to teach students basic reading, writing, and arithmetic (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009). The subsequent progression of knowledge regarding the cognitive development of children has changed the way teachers are traditionally trained. The Kindergarten Movement, which occurred between 1837 and 1852, was an educational revolution that has been attributed to the theories and ideas of Friedrich Froebel, known as the 'Father of Kindergarten'. The Nursery School Movement, which occurred in the following years between 1911 and 1933, is credited to theorist John Dewey (Estes & Krogh, 2012). During these primary movements in the development of early childhood educational standards, a plethora of philosophers have contributed theoretical perspectives intended to aid in the comprehension of how children think, grow, and learn. It is important to consider that these thoughts serve as the basis for educational theorists in the modern setting and continue to affect how educators implement their practices today.

During the Progressive Movement, many theorists presented behavioral, biological, contextual, mechanistic, organismic, psychological, and psychosexual explanations to describe the phenomenon that allows infants to cognitively develop into adulthood (Leonard, Noh, & Orey, 2010; Morrison, 2009). The major educational philosophies and theories include Behaviorism, Constructivism, Critical theory, Essentialism, Existentialism, Idealism, Perennialism, Post-modernism, Pragmatism, Progressivism, Psychodynamic, Psychosexual, and Realism (Bayla, 2007; Leonard, Noh, & Orey, 2010; Morrison, 2009). These theories have provided the foundation that western educators have used to develop curricular models to facilitate learning in children and have also been expanded to assist in adult learning contexts. Many education professionals have learned of these theorists during their formal training and continue to learn about them throughout their professional development. These theorists have pioneered the way educators think about their trade and have prompted a more significant scientific understanding of how children learn and what educators can do to help children with different learning needs.

The dynamic changes resulting from increased understanding regarding how children learn has prompted educational leaders in the U. S. to make repeated changes intended to increase the educational benefits for each student (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). These educational reforms are intended to improve student achievement, particularly in regards to culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). However, there is not much qualitative evidence to support the efficacy of these educational reforms in regards to how they improve the educational experiences of the students as well as the teachers (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). A majority of previous and current research studies that were read are primarily quantitative in nature because they consider trends on the basis of test scores and grades. However, this type of information does not allow teachers to understand what will help children learn. Instead, it creates a focus on data when instead, there needs to be an emphasis placed on individualized learning.

Educational policy is problematic because it is seldom created by actual educators. This is unfortunate because it is the teachers who have the most comprehensive understanding of their

students. Specifically, studies that help education administrators understand the connection between curriculum presentation and learning should involve the experience of teachers who have viewed the successes and failures of their students firsthand (Miretzky, 2010). To increase student achievement, district leaders and school personnel must collaborate to foster learning environments that encourage the development of high levels of self-efficacy in students (Anderson, et al., 2001). The relationship between educator and student self-efficacy is vital to academic progress, instructional performance, and the development of a positive learning environments (Decker, Decker, Freeman, & Knopf, 2009). It is therefore valuable to gain a greater understanding of how educators can help administrators develop relevant curricula in the modern setting. It is also important for public and private education to reach different types of students; incorporating teacher involvement will allow this goal to become more achievable. Teacher beliefs, attitudes, and their ability to respond appropriately to students' needs determine how well they are able to remember information presented in the curriculum and incorporate this information in practice (Fairbanks, et al., 2010). Studies have identified the personal beliefs of educators as vital elements regarding how teachers make decisions in the classroom (Gay, 2010). Essentially, teachers use their knowledge as a lens through which they view learning, which allows them to filter additional pedagogical knowledge, helping experience become acquired or rejected (Fairbanks, et al., 2010). When the teacher's beliefs or theoretical perspectives conflict with a curricular agenda they perceive as fixed, rigid, or not negotiable, they may grow to mirror this disposition and become inclined to resist responding to students to provide the instructional support needed (Fairbanks, et al., 2010). Teachers are heavily influenced by education policy makers and others around them. Therefore, it is important for individuals with education experience to become directly involved in the conversation regarding curriculum development. It is beneficial to hear unadulterated opinions of education and enhancing learning of diverse students. In this manner, education researchers can best contribute to the development of curricula to help students learn.

Research Questions

As knowledge regarding childhood learning experiences has increased, policies have drastically changed the expectations of mainstream teachers and the institutions they work for. It has been found that these individual experiences can be disengaged from the language, culture, and approaches to learning that facilitate student achievement (Williams, 2013). The purpose of this project is to examine the dynamics regarding the conflicting theoretical perspectives involved in language and teaching. It is important to determine the conflicting theories utilized in education to determine which can be most successfully applied to facilitate student achievement. This research will examine the topic of conflicting educational perspectives by seeking to analyze the following research questions:

Research Question 1 Which theoretical principles do educators support in the underlying curriculum they teach?

Research Question 2 How do teachers perceive the theoretical perspectives regarding education and learning that conflict with the actions necessary to comply with the implementation of educational policies?

The analysis of these research questions will provide additional insight into the nature of the difficulties educators face due to augmentations to existing policies and procedures absent

the relevant input of practicing educational professionals. Furthermore, it will allow the education community to gain a greater understanding of the theories that educators apply on a regular basis that directly contribute to efficacy in learning.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the presence of conflicting theoretical perspectives amongst teachers and pedagogical educators in regards to established educational policies developed through legislative, or other, measures. Furthermore, it is necessary to determine which theoretical perspectives educators use preferentially to aid in the success of student learning. The identification of this particular issue is of grave importance to educational professionals since teacher perceptions have a deterministic influence on how curricular material is presented. Likewise, the presentation of curricular material at the administrative level impacts how teachers present it to the students. This research aims to add new information to this field that will help educators and administrators understand the connection between theoretical perspectives and the implementation of curricula from both the educator and administrative standpoint.

This research relies upon a foundation a literature that discusses the progression of early childhood educational perspectives and expounds upon the theoretical framework of this research through an examination of the numerous learning theories that influence education. The next section will discuss the research methods followed by the results and discussion of the research findings. Key findings and inferences will be summarized in the conclusion section.

Literature Review

The development of teaching and learning paradigms are rooted in the historic development of the compulsory educational system. To gain an understanding of the theoretical perspectives used to format educational curricular mandates, this literature review will present the theoretical framework that will support the subsequent research into the presence of conflicting academic perspective in learning and teaching.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research includes concepts relative to the propensity of theoretical perspectives but also addresses the typical top-down nature of the legislated large-scale educational reforms that occur in the United States (Smith & Southerland, 2007). Since these reforms are often mandated by the courts and/or sponsored through government agencies or other special interest organizations, personnel who are actually engaged in educational professions typically do not actually play a role in creating the policies and procedures that follow the enactment of new legislation (Smith & Southerland, 2007).

Nonetheless, lawfully mandated educational reform endeavors demand extensive changes within schools that originate from external sources that may not consider the actual demands on personnel and students such changes will accord. Teachers are often resentful of these mandates that are usually disseminated through the public school system in the form of policy reports or other publications that outline specific curricula, practices, and programs teachers must follow based on hypothetical/theoretical assumptions rather than real-world practices involving actual children (Smith & Southerland, 2007). The numerous learning and teaching theories that

constitute the basis of educational policies will construct the background for this research since these ideals are essential to influences in childhood educational practices. Furthermore, they also form the criterion for the conflicting perspectives teachers form in opposition to legislated policies.

Cognitive Learning Theories

Cognitive learning theories intend to help educators and psychologists comprehend how the mind functions with regards to organizing new knowledge. In particular, these theories help us understand how learning environments impact the ability to absorb and retain information in addition to the process in which knowledge is constructed and recalled through the process of learning and thinking (Macy, 2007). These theories provide a common language for instructors and instructional designers that has been the basis for the development of educational strategies (Macy, 2007).

The Information Processing (IP) theory explains how the mind functions using a computer as an analogy that breaks cognition and memory into three components, including short-term memory, sensory register, and long-term memory (Bayla, 2007). The five senses, echoic (hearing), iconic (seeing), tactile (touch), olfactory (smell), and gustatory (taste), are capable of triggering the sensory register, which stimulates the processing of new information that is stored in the short-term memory (Berk, 2008). New details stored in the short-term memory can be combined with existing long-term memory information and enhanced through elaboration and repetition (Berk, 2008).

Psychologist Jean Piaget developed what is known as the constructivist learning theory, which identifies three processes associated with learning (Bayla, 2007). These mechanisms enable the learner to organize new knowledge according to schemas or mental representations of tangible or intangible objects that can be applied to any situation or event (Kosslyn, 2009). When new schemas are developed, assimilation allows new knowledge to be processed and added to previously existing schemas (Bayla, 2007). Accommodation is an adaptation process that occurs when existing schemas are insufficient to incorporate new information and equilibration occurs when assimilation and accommodation reach a balance in the mental structures (Kosslyn, 2009). This research provided educators with a basic understanding of how to provide children with new experiences that can help them learn or rectify incorrect understandings. Further research allowed educators to refine this understanding, contributing to the acquisition of knowledge in finer detail.

Bloom and a group of education professionals developed what is commonly known as Bloom's Taxonomy (Huitt, 2011). The original version of Bloom's Taxonomy had six levels of understanding: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Wilson, 2006). In 2003, the hierarchy was reinvented to indicate the necessity for action within the taxonomy (Anderson, et al., 2001). The reformation of the taxonomy divided the cognitive domain into six sequential levels of thinking with the first three levels or lower order skills including remembering, understanding, and applying, while the last three levels or higher-order skills include analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Huitt, 2011). The taxonomy was created to help curriculum builders plan learning experiences and prepare relevant evaluation tools, clarify the meaning of a learning objective based on the level of 'understanding' trying to be achieved,

and provide a framework for research regarding teaching and learning in terms of how well the student remembers, thinks, and problem solves (Wilson, 2006).

Constructivist Learning Theories

Vygotsky is credited with advancement of the constructivist perspective of developmental psychology, which is based on the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition (Berk, 2008). The primary elements of Vygotsky's theories are based on the more knowledgeable other (MKO), which describes a peer with more knowledge about a particular subject and can scaffold the educational experience of another student with less knowledge (Decker, Decker, Freeman, & Knopf, 2009). As a consequence of this theory, educators have been able to incorporate group learning in the scaffolding process, contributing to a greater understanding of information for some types of learners. Vygotsky also defines the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which describes the gap between what the learner can or cannot do, even with assistance (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009). Thus, it is apparent that some individuals are not capable of learning the same information as others or even in the same manner. The development of constructivist learning theories contributed to the development of learner-centered theories, which emphasized the necessity for educators to more greatly personalize the learning experience.

Learner-Centered Theories

Learner-centered theories emphasize the relevance of the learner's existing knowledge and offer instructional techniques that permit an educator to consider each student's individual characteristics (Leonard, Noh, & Orey, 2010). This includes theories regarding individual motivation, which attempts to explain what extrinsic or intrinsic factors inspire people to participate in any activity (Boachie-Mensah & Dogbe, 2011). The motivational theory specifies that extrinsic motivation indicates external factors such as the desire for greater earning potential or avoiding punishment, while intrinsic motivation relates to internal elements like curiosity or personal achievement (Sacbusiness.org, 2007). Whether extrinsic or intrinsic, motivation requires defined goals to direct behavior towards realizing certain performance levels, such as earning excellent grades or becoming skilled in the learning concept and encouraging feedback or expert assistance that produces successful experiences can improve motivation (Silvia, McCord, & Gendolla, 2010).

The theory of multiple intelligences, established by Howard Gardner, identifies a taxonomy of nine intelligences as follows:

- 1) bodily/kinesthetic
- 2) existential
- 3) interpersonal
- 4) intrapersonal
- 5) logical/mathematical
- 6) musical
- 7) naturalistic
- 8) verbal/linguistic
- 9) visual/spatial (Brualdi, 1996; Gardner, 1993; Berk, 2008)

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences attributes an integrated organizational approach with multiple points of intellectual stimulation an educator can target during the course of instruction to stimulate the learning process (Morrison, 2009). This theory also acknowledges that culture plays a major role in the development of these intelligences and that all students will enter the classroom with a different set of developed intelligences or intellectual strengths/weaknesses. Therefore or as a result educators should structure presentations in a manner that will engage numerous intelligences simultaneously (Brualdi, 1996). It is important for educators to consider the different learning styles of each student in order to maximize learning.

Overall, it is valuable for educators to determine how to incorporate a variety of learning theories into their educational practices to ensure that their students are able to master the curriculum. Often, it is important for teachers to incorporate these teaching elements in a manner that has not been specified to them by their administrators or regulatory body. However, in other cases, differentiation is specified in a manner that prevents educators from extending their expertise into practice. It is necessary to determine how the implementation of curriculum relates to the use of these techniques in addition to how teachers cope with the development of curriculum without their consideration. Doing so will provide information necessary to help direct education policy in the future.

Research Methods

This section will discuss the research methodology that was employed in this research with a justification for the use of this method based on the attributes of the research objectives. The research design elucidates the strategy used to integrate the various facets of the research project in a coherent and cohesive manner (Flick, 2011).

Literature Review

The literature review was conducted utilizing a variety of peer-reviewed educational journals. Studies included both systematic reviews and experimental studies. Primary focus was placed on researchers who have assessed the efficacy of classical educational theorists, as these individuals were likely studied by a majority of educators during the course of their training. These theorists help educators understand how students learn, so emphasis on them is an important focus to gain a comprehensive background understanding of the types of information that teachers attempt to implement in their presentation of the curriculum. Google Scholar was used to identify the primary sources used for this component of the research project. A majority of articles were selected from within the past ten years to draw a more current understanding of the problem being discussed, but older articles remained in the search criteria if these articles were based on original research and are considered to be pioneering studies of particular theorists. Search criteria included the names of the theorists, such as "Vygotsky", "Piaget", "Erickson", and the word "theory".

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research consists of several procedures based on of various systemic questions relative to the selected topic designed to assist the researcher in gaining an in-depth understanding about the particular issue (Graziano & Raulin, 2009). According to theorists, qualitative research is not bound by the necessity to adhere to pre-specified methods or a static

hypothesis (Willis, 2008). Adapting the qualitative methodology present the greatest measure of clarity for the statistical analyses representing the data collected. This study uses a qualitative design to help determine the impressions teachers have regarding the underlying theoretical guidelines that shape curriculum. In this research, there are elements that quantitative methods cannot provide answers to, necessitating the use of qualitative methods. Based on the requisite for personal impressions in the research questions, the qualitative approach provides a better understanding of the research problem. Furthermore, the qualitative method is used because it enables the researcher to examine the opinions, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of the research subjects through statistical quantification of the collected data. This qualitative approach will incorporate the findings within existing research and literature to formulate a conceptual theoretical framework in which the research will be formatted.

Data Collection

A total of 500 in-service public school teachers were contacted in 2013 and 2014 in Texas and Michigan via e-mail and invited to take a brief 21 question survey that would hopefully take them less than ten minutes to complete. All individuals are teachers in the public school system in the local community and their e-mail addresses were found online through Google and Bing search engines, which identified school websites containing their names and respective contact information. Although the search was targeted, the selection of research participants can be considered somewhat randomized. Every three links (every third teacher listed) were examined for contact information, and teachers were contacted on this basis. The survey was completely anonymous and only asked for basic demographic information that would not compromise their identity. To avoid biases in the respondent base, purposive sampling was used, so there was no instructor grade preference and approximately 35-40 teachers of each grade, levels pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. Eligible individuals were invited to participate in the study by completing and returning the survey within the allotted three week timeframe (Patton, 2008).

The participants were asked to complete a 21-question survey (see Appendix A Section A) that presented questions adapted from Chen (2008) that focused on the following aspects: (a) teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, (b) teachers' ideal instructional approach, and (c) factors preventing teachers from implementing their ideal instructional methods and instructed to return the survey via e-mail. As recommended by Babbie (2007), negative or biased terminologies were excluded from the questionnaire to avoid misinterpretations or biased results. The first part of the survey consisted of several demographic questions. The investigational aspect consisted of 15 Likert style questions that used a scale ranging from totally disagree (0) to totally agree (4), and each participant was instructed to report his or her agreement on each constructivist statement (Chen, 2008). The final investigational question was open-ended and allowed the respondents to record their individual impressions.

A total of 419 individuals returned the survey by the indicated deadline with only four being incomplete and therefore excluded as data points from the study. Of the 415 remaining surveys, the compiled results are recorded in Table 1 in Appendix A, detailing the constructive statements that composed the survey (Chen, 2008).

Ethical Considerations

The current research has complied with all relevant codes of ethics during the course of gathering the primary and secondary data (Graziano & Raulin, 2009). The primary ethical considerations faced in conducting this research involved ensuring participants were fully informed of all pertinent details of the study. The respondents in the primary investigation were truthfully acquainted with the purpose, nature, and mode of execution of the study, as well as how the findings would be processed and reported. This complete disclosure allowed informed consent of the participants to be granted.

Participant privacy was respected and subjective data interpretations were avoided to maintain the integrity of the participant/researcher relationship (Flick, 2011). The collection, treatment and disclosure of the accumulated data or information was performed according to all relevant statutes, with careful consideration given to research ethical implications with regard to the economic, political, communal, and psychological consequences of this work. The welfare and interest of all directly or implicitly associated respondents and the professional establishment of the researcher was taken into consideration.

Participant Demography

The first five questions of the survey were designed to capture anonymous demographic details of the participants, such as age, gender, teaching experience, current grade levels taught, and the subject(s) taught. The participants' age demography is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows that the majority of those surveyed (51%) were between 36-45 years of age. Very few of the teachers were near retirement age (9%), while the median age of those in the study was 26 to 35 years old (40%) and hence at the beginning of their careers.

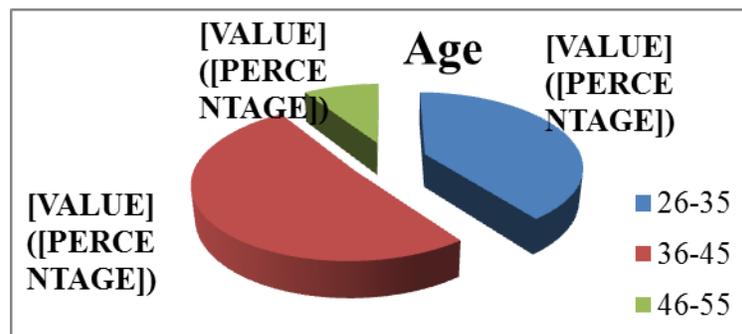


Figure 1: Participant Age Demography

The results of the second survey question, which asked participants to identify their gender, are illustrated in Figure 2. More than three quarters of the participants were male: thus, the results represent a primarily female perspective.

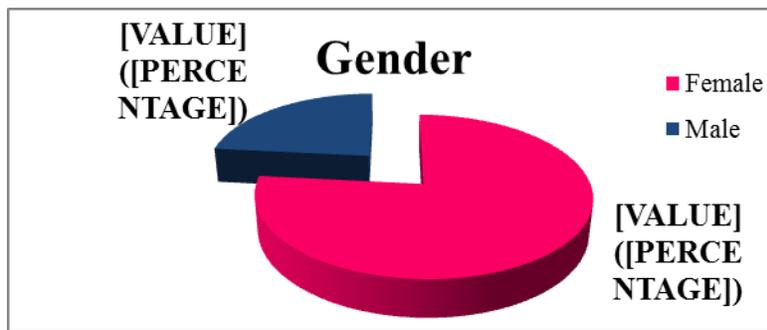


Figure 2: Participant Gender Demography

The results of the next survey question are illustrated in Figure 3, showing the level of experience ranging from novice teacher (0 to 5 years) to seasoned veteran (26+ years).

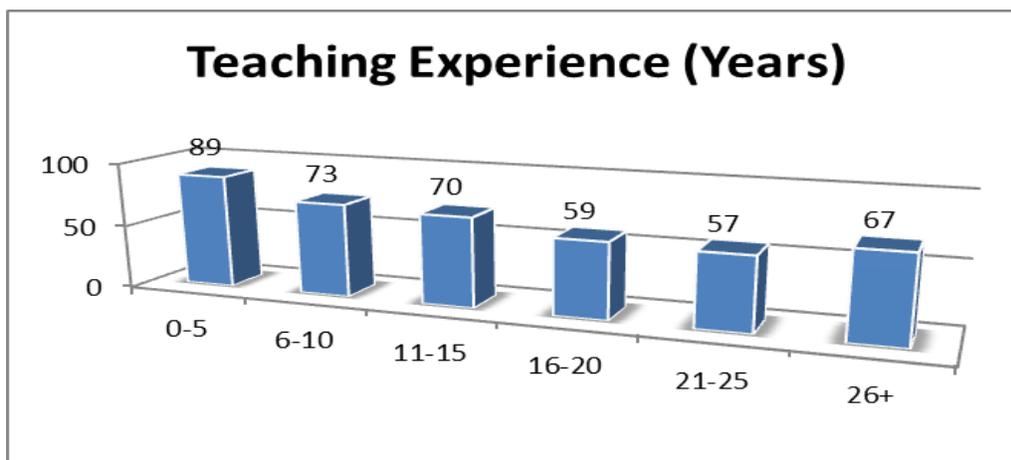


Figure 3: Participant Teaching Experience

The results indicate that the level of teaching experience varied amongst the participants, with the largest number of teachers (89 or 21.45%) having only 0-5 years of experience, and the smallest group of participants (57 or 13.73%) having 21-25 years of experience.

The fourth survey question asked participants to specify the grade level that they taught, and the responses were correlated according to teachers that taught pre-kindergarten to first grades, second to fifth grades, sixth to eighth grades, and ninth to twelfth grades. As a consequence, the grade level representation of the participants is quite even.

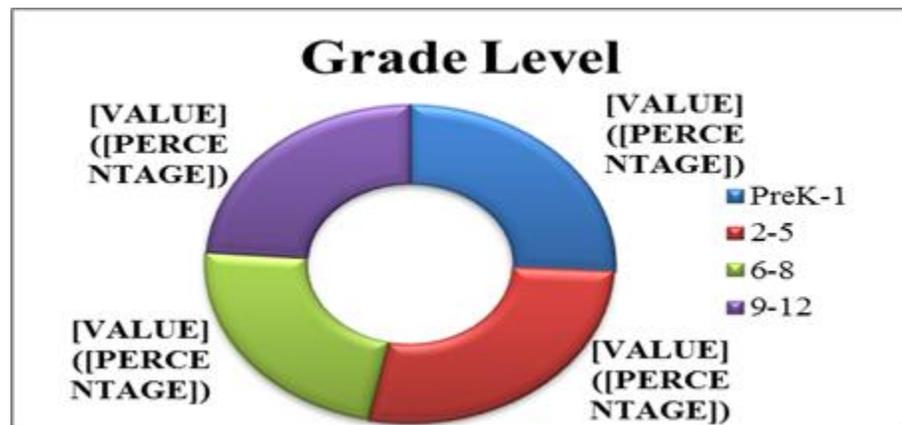


Figure 4: Grade Level Taught by Participant

The illustration in Figure 4 shows that the participants were almost evenly disbursed amongst the four grade level groupings, with most teachers in the second to fifth grade grouping (114 or 27%) and the smallest group (95 or 23%) teaching sixth to eighth grades.

The final demographic question asked participants to specify what subject they taught, and the results are presented in Figure 5, which shows that the majority of participants (211 or 53.25%) taught elementary grades pre-kindergarten to the fifth grades.

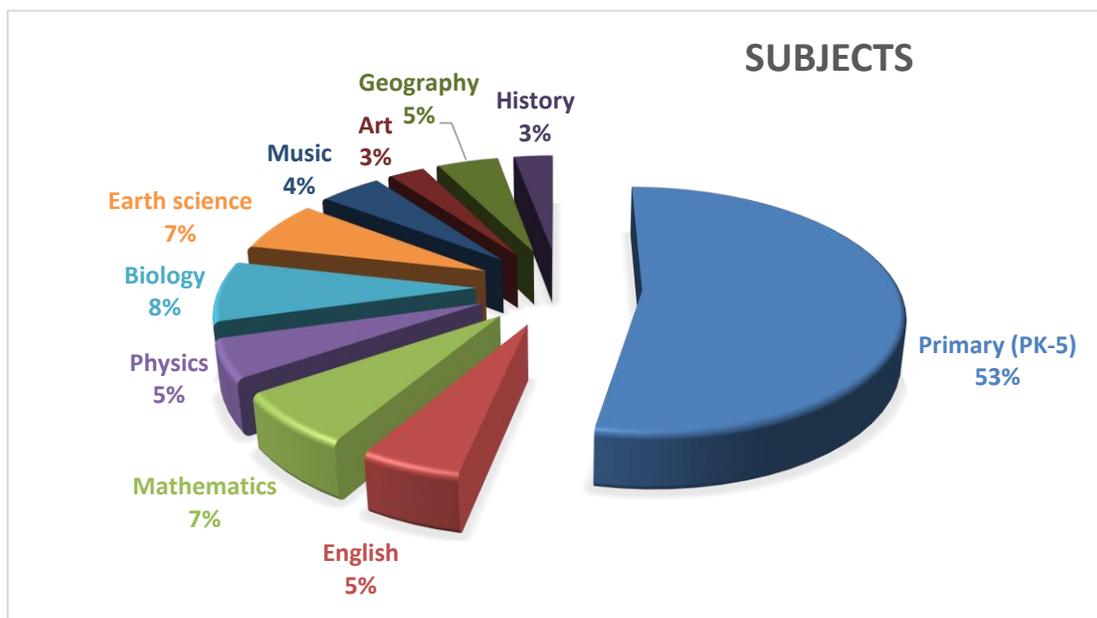


Figure 5: Subjects Taught by Participant

However, the remaining 47% of the participants ranged from 11 or 2.65% for art and 12 or 2.89% for history teachers to 33 or 7.95% for biology teachers with the remaining numbers ranging from 4.58% to 6.99% as illustrated in the graph.

Survey Results

Overall, the first five constructivist questions showed that the majority of the respondents agreed or totally agreed with the constructivist statements posited. In the first investigational statement posed, a total of 384 or 92.53% participants either agreed or totally agreed that active participation in learning was more important than the teachers' lectures while the remaining 31 teachers or 7.47% disagreed, totally, disagreed, or took a neutral stance.

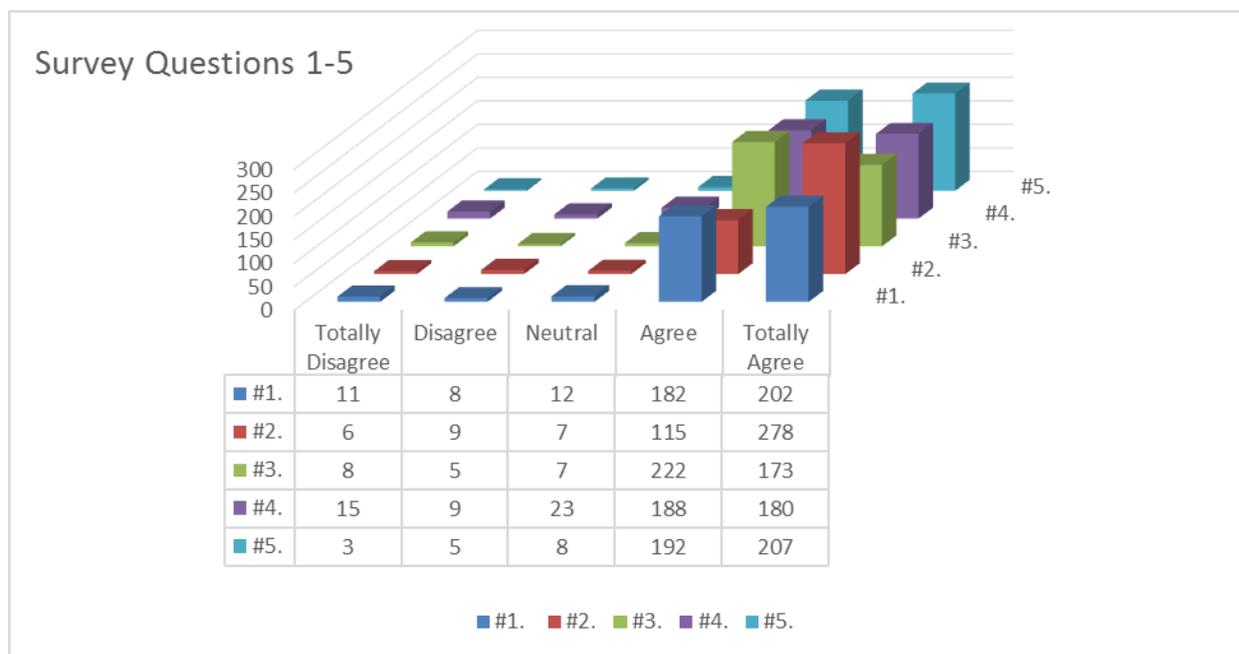


Figure 6: Participant Responses, Questions 1-5

The second survey question showed that a total of 393 or 94.7% teachers agreed or totally agreed with the position that students need to engage in problem-solving learning activities in order to achieve a deep understanding of the material, while the remaining 5.31% either disagreed totally, disagreed, or indicated a neutral response. The responses to the third question indicated that a total of 95.18% of the teachers surveyed either agreed or totally agreed that identification of students' prior learning experiences and abilities before instruction should be a preliminary activity while the remaining 4.82% either totally disagreed, disagreed, or gave a neutral response to the question.

The fourth survey question had fewer affirmative responses with 368 or 88.67% of the teachers totally agreeing or agreeing that the instructional design should account for multiple intelligence or individual students' learning styles, while the remaining 52 or 11.33% teachers totally disagreeing, disagreeing, or indicating a neutral response for this question. The final question in this series had the largest total affirmative response rate of 399 teachers or 96.15% or 399 totally agreeing or agreeing that learning tasks or assignments should challenge students' existing conceptions or abilities while the remaining 16 teachers or 3.85% totally disagreed, or took a neutral stance on this question.

Figure 7 presents the participant responses for questions 6-11, which focuses on instructional methods and student/teacher interactions and demonstrated a similar propensity for affirmative responses from the surveyed teachers.

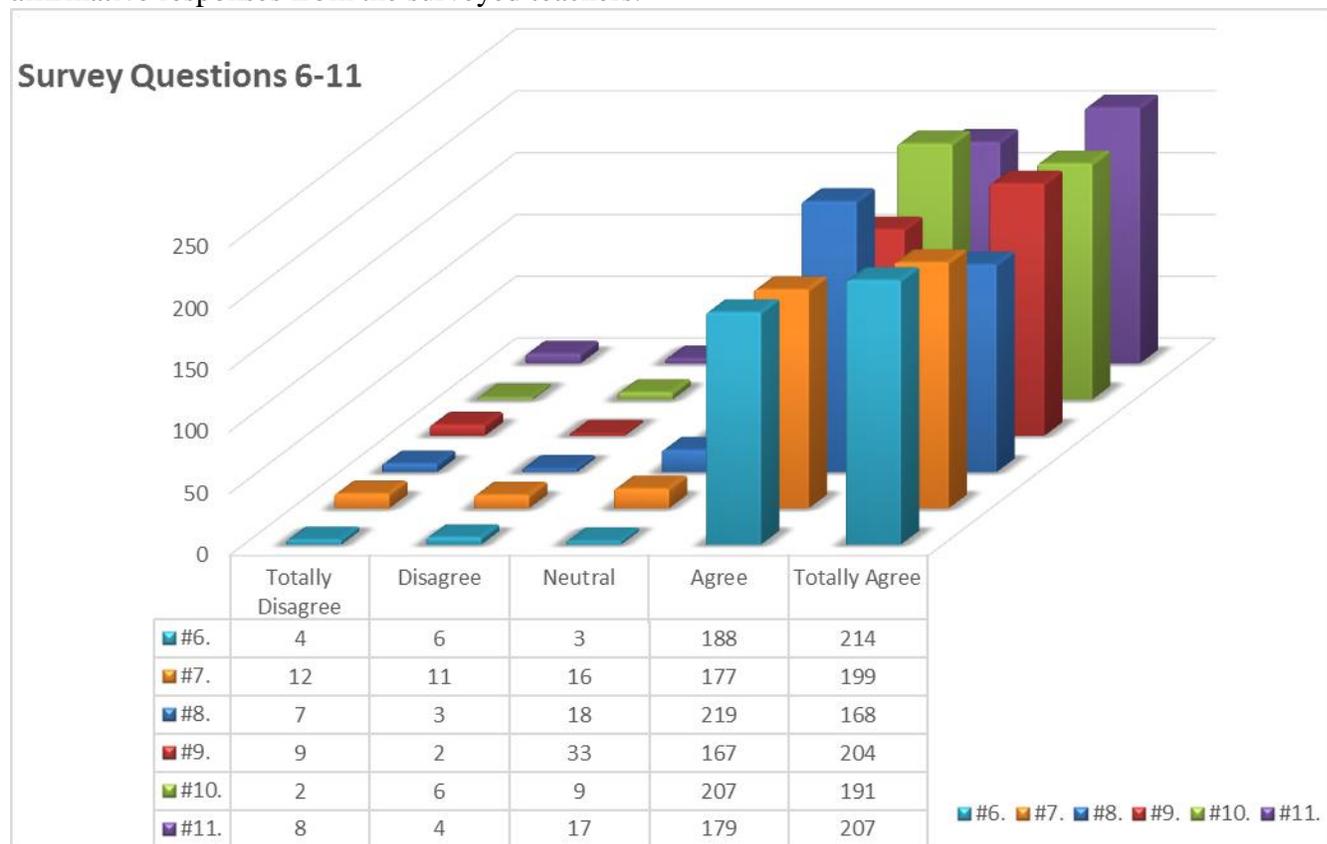


Figure 7: Participant Responses, Questions 6-11

For question six, an overwhelming 402 teachers or 96.87% totally agreed or agreed that instruction should foster students’ problem solving and learning abilities while a total of 3.13% totally disagreed or had neutral impressions regarding the question. Question seven had a significantly greater negative response with 39 teachers or 9.4% surveyed totally disagreed or indicated a neutral response while the remaining 376 participants or 90.6% totally agreed or agreed that educational instruction should encourage students’ abilities to monitor and evaluate their own learning experiences. Questions 8-11 had affirmative totally agree or agree responses totaling 387 or 3.25%; 371 or 89.4%; 398 or 95.9%; and 386 or 93.01%, respectively with the highest neutral/negative response totaling 44 or 10.6% to question nine regarding whether interactions within the learning environment should be encouraged.

The series of questions regarding teacher impressions of conflicting perspectives revealed the most dynamic collection of responses.

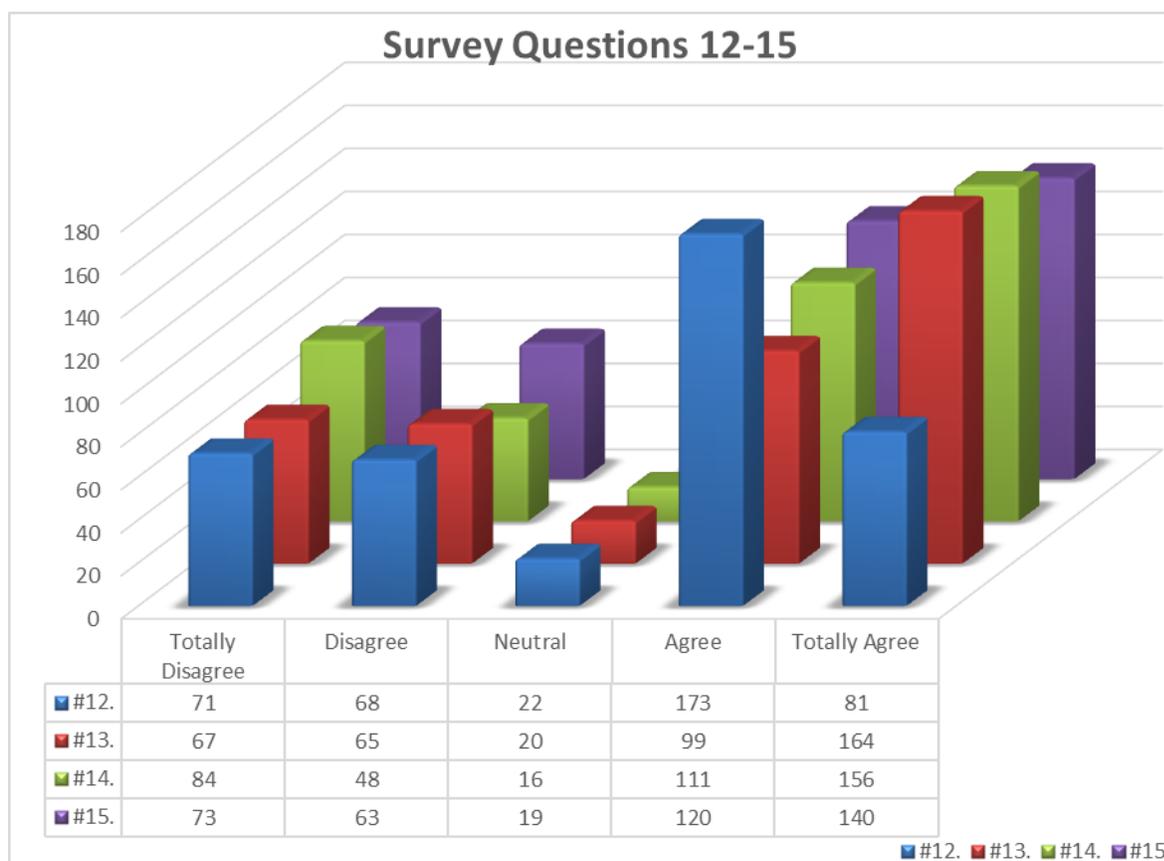


Figure 8: Participant Responses, Questions 12-15

Only 254 teachers or 61.21% indicated that they feel they are teaching a curriculum that reflects their theoretical beliefs about teaching and learning while 139 respondents or 33.5% totally disagreed and 22 or 5.3% chose a neutral response. The negative responses for question 13 totaled 132 teachers or 31.8% that totally disagreed or disagreed that the curriculum allowed for the integration of their personal instructional approach while 20 teachers or 4.82% indicated the neutral response leaving 263 teachers or 63.38% that totally agreed or agreed with the statement. For questions 14 and 15, 132 teachers or 31.81% and 136 teachers or 32.77% totally disagreed and disagreed that the theoretical perspectives in the taught curriculum facilitated students’ ability to problem solve, collaborate or cooperate during learning, or self-regulated learning and that the theoretical perspective conflicted with their personal pedagogical theoretical perspective, respectively.

The responses to the last survey question are illustrated in Figure 9, showing the participant responses to the open-ended query that allowed for multiple answers. The five most prominent responses detailing the factors teachers felt impeded their ability to implement their ideal instructional method are shown, with 388 or 93.49% indicating limited flexibility as the greatest impediment; 357 or 86.02% stating lack of supplies; 339 or 81.69% professing poor administrative support; 271 or 65.30% citing insufficient time for planning; and 237 or 57.11% declaring large class sizes to be the worst impediment.

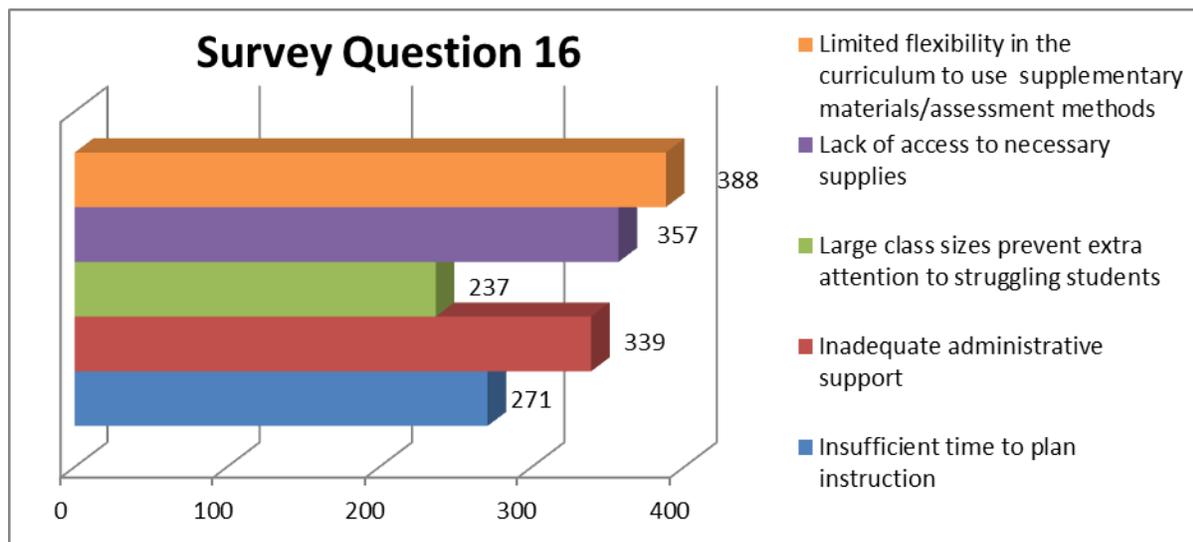


Figure 9: Participant Responses, Question 16

The results from this survey indicate diverse reasons teachers feel that the curricular model does not sufficiently reflect their preferred instructional method or theoretical beliefs.

Discussion

The majority of the respondents overwhelmingly agreed with the tenets presented in the constructivist instructional ideals forming the basis of the statements in the survey, but the questions identifying conflicting theoretical perspectives revealed discord with the current policies and standards of practice. This discussion will discuss the results of the survey in direct relation to the research questions to establish whether this study has satisfied the stated objectives of the research.

Research Question 1

Which theoretical principles do educators support in the underlying curriculum they teach?

While many of the surveyed teachers agreed that the school improvement models should address disparities in student achievement, as many as one-third of respondents did not feel that the curricular program they were teaching supported the theoretical perspectives they believed were most relevant to providing a cohesive educational experience. Despite the U. S. national school-wide initiatives, known as Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) endeavors, supported by policymakers and researchers, the curriculum many educators are teaching do not support the perspectives respondents indicated overwhelming support for in survey questions 1-11, which are also proposed by prominent theorists such as Bowlby, Bandura, and Vygotsky (Bayla, 2007). Overall, an average of less than 2% of the respondents disagreed or totally disagreed with the statements in questions 1-11 regarding the constructivist activities and routines that support student learning, but this average climbs to 32% totally disagreeing or disagreeing for questions 12-15.

If teachers do not believe in the theoretical standards they are using, it is important to consider that either their teaching is intrinsically flawed or that the current use of theory in education practice is not sufficient. It is important to determine which is the case in order to gain a greater understanding of how teachers can contribute to effective learning practices in the classroom.

It is reasonable that cultural differences and contextual divergences between classroom teachers and students of diverse nationalities or ethnic origins can further impede the realization of positive educational outcomes since teacher educators typically have limited contact with and knowledge of culturally diverse groups, cultures, and experiences (Gay, 2010). Inexperience with diverse cultures can produce unconsciously harbored beliefs that negatively correlate to increased student performance and the teacher must accept responsibility for implementing proven instructional strategies (Chen, 2008; Dai, 2010).

Research Question 2

How do teachers perceive the theoretical perspectives regarding education and learning that conflict with the actions necessary to comply with the implementation of educational policies?

While the determinations presented in the findings for the first research question partially address this second question, the finding relative to survey question 16 most aptly provides support for the finding that the teachers participating in this survey harbor conflicting theoretical perspectives regarding the implementation of educational policies. Overall, an average of 318 or 76.72% of respondents indicated there was at least one impediment hindering them from integrating their idea educational model that would support learning according to the tenets of constructivist educational principles, such as student engagement, teacher assessment of prior student knowledge, providing changing material, and development of autonomous self-monitoring abilities in students.

This research is limited in that the perspectives of the teacher respondents were not analyzed according to their tenure or experience, which could yield additional details to assist in bridging the gap between educator theoretical beliefs and the implementation of educational policies. Currently, lack of substantive research has limited the knowledge regarding the best techniques for educating students in a multicultural classroom, particularly what skills, knowledge, and dispositions best support classroom practice while challenging students to develop and grow in experience (Miretzky, 2010).

Conclusion

Throughout history, children were perceived as smaller forms of adults and not much significance was attached to the advancement of physical growth, language use, and cognitive abilities (Duncan, 2014). However, recent theories have outlined the developmental stages of children and identified the age groups in which such characteristics occur to assist educators in developing curricular standards that are proven beneficial based on tested theories (Duncan, 2014). Although the pedagogical paradigms are based on such reliable theories, the policies regarding early childhood cognition developed resulting from the changes in legislation have led to the engineering of curriculum and programs that do not always meet the needs of the students

and lead to stagnation in the implementation on the scholastic level. This research has demonstrated that some teachers disagree with the theoretical paradigms that they have been taught. It is therefore important to determine how to incorporate teachers into policy making in the education setting. It is with importance that administrators allow their teachers to grow with their students and provide them the necessary tools to aid in their students' learning. Administrators must share control and trust their teachers to build curricula. When given this opportunity to lead, teachers can provide the useful and needed data to their administrators to engineer curriculum and programs that students need to achieve scholastic levels of education. These individuals have the ability to effectively reflect on the education theories that are working effectively and those that are not. In this manner, incorporating teacher opinion on policy matters can potentially reshape practice.

More study is needed into the roles of administrators and teachers towards what curricula students are to learn and why as this could have dramatic impact upon students' educational outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix ATable 1: *Survey Results for all Participants*

		Survey Questions				
		0	1	2	3	4
		Totally Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Totally Agree
#1.	Instruction should focus on students' active participation in learning rather than teachers' lecture.	11	8	12	182	202
		2.65%	1.93%	2.89%	43.86%	48.67%
#2.	Without engaging in problem-solving learning activities, it is difficult for students to achieve deep understanding.	6	9	7	115	278
		1.45%	2.17%	1.69%	27.71%	66.99%
#3.	Teachers should identify students' prior learning experiences and abilities before instruction.	8	5	7	222	173
		1.93%	1.20%	1.69%	53.49%	41.69%
#4.	Instructional design should account for multiple intelligence or learning styles of individual students.	15	9	23	188	180
		3.61%	2.17%	5.54%	45.30%	43.37%
#5.	Learning tasks or assignments should challenge students' existing conceptions or abilities.	3	5	8	192	207

		0.72%	1.20%	1.93%	46.27%	49.88%
#6.	Instruction should foster students' abilities for solving problems and learning how to learn.	4	6	3	188	214
		0.96%	1.45%	0.72%	45.30%	51.57%
#7.	Instruction should foster students' abilities for monitoring and evaluating their own learning.	12	11	16	177	199
		2.89%	2.65%	3.86%	42.65%	47.95%
#8.	Instruction design should integrate students' real-life experiences and interests.	7	3	18	219	168
		1.69%	0.72%	4.34%	52.77%	40.48%
#9.	In class, interactions between the teacher and students, among students, and between students and the learning environments should be encouraged.	9	2	33	167	204
		2.17%	0.48%	7.95%	40.24%	49.16%
#10.	In class, students should be encouraged to collaborate or cooperate with each other and to respect each other's opinions.	2	6	9	207	191
		0.48%	1.45%	2.17%	49.88%	46.02%
#11.	Teachers should use multiple assessment methods to understand a student's learning status.	8	4	17	179	207
		1.93%	0.96%	4.10%	43.13%	49.88%
#12.	The curriculum I teach reflects my theoretical beliefs regarding teaching and learning.	71	68	22	173	81

		17.11%	16.39%	5.30%	41.69%	19.52%
#13.	The curriculum I teach allows me to integrate methods according to my ideal instructional approach.	67	65	20	99	164
		16.14%	15.66%	4.82%	23.86%	39.52%
#14.	The theoretical perspectives represented in the curriculum I teach enables me to instruct students in a manner that facilitates students' problem solving, collaborative or cooperative learning, and self-regulated learning.	84	48	16	111	156
		20.24%	11.57%	3.86%	26.75%	37.59%
#15.	The theoretical perspectives that support the curriculum I teach conflict with my personal pedagogical theoretical perspective.	73	63	19	120	140
		17.59%	15.18%	4.58%	28.92%	33.73%
#16.	Please list the factors you feel are impeding you from implementing your ideal instructional methods. (This question allowed for multiple responses so total is greater than 100%)	Insufficient time to plan instruction	Inadequate administrative support	Large class sizes prevent extra attention to struggling students	Lack of access to necessary supplies	Limited flexibility in the curriculum to use supplementary materials/assessment methods
		271	339	237	357	388
		65.30%	81.69%	57.11%	86.02%	93.49%

Appendix B

Table 2: Participant Age Demography

Age	
26-35	165

36-45	212
46-55	38

Appendix C*Table 3: Participant Gender Demography*

<i>Gender</i>	
Female	318
Male	97

Appendix D*Table 4: Participant Teaching Experience*

<i>Teaching Experience (Years)</i>	
0-5	89
6-10	73
11-15	70
16-20	59
21-25	57
26+	67

Appendix E*Table 5: Grade Level Taught by Participant*

<i>Grade Level</i>	
Pre-K	77
1-5	144
6-8	95
9-12	99

Appendix F*Table 6: Subject Taught by Participant*

<i>Subject</i>	
Primary (PK-5)	221
English	22
Mathematics	29
Physics	21
Biology	33
Earth science	28
Music	19
Art	11
Geography	19
History	12