



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

The Journal of Social Studies Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jssr

“They are so much more capable than what we really allow”: Inclusive beliefs, practices, and textbook use

Kathryn Hintz

Minot State University, 500 University Avenue West, Minot, ND 58707, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Accepted 25 June 2017

Keywords:
Social studies
Teacher beliefs
History instruction
Textbooks
Reading instruction
Special education

ABSTRACT

In this qualitative study I researched how five fifth-grade teachers' beliefs in student capabilities influenced their curricular decision-making in daily activities with the *History Alive!* textbook. Students in the classrooms had reading levels 4–5 grades above and below grade level and included students with mild high-incidence disabilities. For four teachers, their strong beliefs determined what they did on a daily basis and matched the stated goals of the *History Alive!* textbook. For one teacher, the relationship was less clear. Three areas of beliefs emerged from observations and interviews, including: 1) beliefs about students' capabilities in reading, 2) beliefs about students' individual differences in learning, and 3) beliefs about students' responsibility. Findings include when teachers believed and could articulate strong beliefs about the capability of students to read, write, and participate in collaborative activities, they designed classroom activities and assessments so that all students could learn from and participate in social studies activities. When teachers' beliefs about student capabilities aligned with Teachers' Curriculum Institute's principles for inclusive classrooms, classroom practices reflected those beliefs and textbooks supported their practices.

Copyright © 2017, The International Society for the Social Studies. Published by Elsevier, Inc.

Introduction

“Teaching begins with the learner.” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011, April). This focus reflects the attention teachers and the profession now give both to the diversity of ways in which students learn information and skills and to the importance of environments in which children respect each other. New InTASC standards formalize this trend, urging teachers to pay attention to patterns and differences in how students learn and to use that knowledge to design safe learning environments for all (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011, April). This research asked about teacher beliefs and how those beliefs shaped teachers' use of curricular materials to help students learn. Understanding teachers' beliefs helps us understand how they teach and learn in the classroom (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; Pajares, 1992; Smith & Lovat, 2005).

This study started with a passion for an engaging textbook, *History Alive! America's Past* (Bower & Lobdell, 2001) and with questions about how fifth grade teachers used the textbook in their social studies lessons. Teachers are curricular gate-keepers (Thornton, 1991) and make complex decisions with new curriculum, standards, and resources. Conklin (2010) proposed a number of key characteristics of good middle school social studies teachers, including a deep understanding of the subject matter, a clear guiding purpose, a good understanding of students, and belief in the capabilities of students (p. 51). In a previously published article I explored elementary social studies teachers' beliefs about social studies content and clear

E-mail address: Kathy.hintz@minotstateu.edu

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2017.06.005>

0885-985X/Copyright © 2017, The International Society for the Social Studies. Published by Elsevier, Inc.

Please cite this article as: Hintz, K. “They are so much more capable than what we really allow”: Inclusive beliefs, practices, and textbook use. *The Journal of Social Studies Research* (2017), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2017.06.005>

guiding purpose (Hintz, 2014). This article focuses on teachers' beliefs about the capabilities of students. Both articles drew on a larger study with the research question: how do teachers' beliefs influence their daily decisions when using an innovative textbook? This article presents findings that pertain to teachers' 1) beliefs about students' capabilities in reading, 2) beliefs about students' individual differences in learning, and 3) beliefs about students' responsibility.

Literature

Curricular decision-making

Grant (2003) proposes one model of categorizing influences on history teachers. Grant proposes three broad categories of these influences: personal, organizational, and policy (pp. 151–185). Personal influences include teachers' experiences as learners and teacher beliefs. Beliefs are based on teachers' values and experiences, their beliefs about teaching and learning in general, and their beliefs about the nature of history. Grant's second broad category, organizational influences, includes two major types. The first is the "influence of teachers' relationships with individuals and groups across a range of sites: classroom, school, and district. These people include students, teaching colleagues, principals, and district administrators" (Grant, 2003, p. 162). The second type of organizational influence "highlights the context of schooling. This context includes organizational norms and structures" (Grant, 2003, p. 162). Finally, policy influences such as textbooks, curriculum standards, and state-level testing affect teachers. While these policies are mandated at a district or state level, teachers choose how much or how little they will influence classroom practices.

This study is grounded in the idea that teachers are curricular decision-makers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) and serve as curricular gatekeepers (Thornton, 1991, 2005), who make decisions in complex climates (Cornbleth, 1990, 2002). Each day teachers make decisions about what to teach and how to teach the subject. Elementary teachers in particular are challenged to fit math, language arts, science, social studies, and sometimes art, music, health, and physical education into their day. The choices they make are formed by a complex array of influences that can often be identified but do not predict behavior (Grant, 2003). Some factors exert more influence over teachers than others and, particularly with elementary teachers, may exert more or less influence in different subjects. Personal, organizational, and policy influences constantly work together to influence teachers' curricular decision-making.

Teachers' beliefs about student capabilities

Teacher beliefs are difficult to study and pose challenges to researchers (Pajares, 1992), so pulling apart the influences is especially difficult. One aspect of many models of a good teacher is belief in the capability of students to learn (Conklin, 2010; Grant, 2003) but few studies spotlight elementary teachers' views of students' capabilities. When secondary pre-service and new teachers believed their students were less capable than they expected, teachers changed their beliefs about what students could accomplish (Chant, 2001, 2002; Fehn & Koeppen, 1998; van Hover & Yeager, 2004). Three studies highlight elementary teachers and their decision-making in response to beliefs about student capabilities. Experienced elementary teachers who received a new textbook adjusted their use of the textbook based on their perceptions of student capabilities (Kon, 1995). When experienced elementary teachers in a high poverty area used a primary source text that they thought was too advanced for their students, they responded by reading the text aloud to students (Pace, 2008). Elementary teachers responded to perceived mandates from Common Core State Standards by increasing the level of complexity of texts and then using more whole-class reading strategies (Papola-Ellis, 2014b).

Curriculum consonance

Thornton (1988) defines curriculum consonance as "the relationships among what teachers plan to teach (the intended curriculum), what ensues in the classroom (the operational curriculum), and what students learn (the experienced curriculum)" (Thornton, 1988, p. 310). Ideally, what teachers believe, what actually occurs in the classroom, and what students learn should be the same. However, this curriculum consonance does not always occur. This study does not address the experienced curriculum. A number of studies address the intersection of the intended curriculum, or teachers' beliefs, and the operational curriculum, or teachers' practices.

Cornett (1990) describes personal practical theories as a set of beliefs derived from personal and practical experience that are used to guide instructional decision-making. Although Sue Chase, an experienced secondary social studies teacher, had not written down or extensively reflected on her beliefs prior to the study, the researcher found her practices matched her beliefs. Grant (2003) profiled two secondary history teachers with very different teaching styles and beliefs who were effective at carrying out their beliefs in their classrooms. Although the two teachers held different beliefs about the nature of history and how students learn, both teachers exhibited curriculum consonance (Thornton, 1988) and implemented their beliefs in their classroom practices. Much less is written about curriculum consonance in elementary teachers and there are no studies which directly address this.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4761694>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4761694>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)