ALL ARE INVITED TO ATTEND

The final, public dissertation defense for:

Josh Littenberg- Tobias

Wednesday, February 4, 2015
in
Carney 206
at
10 a.m.

TEACHING CITIZENS: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, INTERACTIVE CIVICS, AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT ON NAEP CIVICS

Committee:
Dr. Laura O’Dwyer, Chair
Dr. Vincent Cho, Reader
Dr. Lauren Saenz, Reader
Dr. Peter Levine, Reader
ABSTRACT:
Youth civic participation is at alarmingly low levels: Less than one in ten 18-29 year olds report contacting a public official, boycotting a product, or frequently expressing political opinions on the internet (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Teachers may offer a potential solution to this problem. A growing body of the literature has found that high quality teachers can change the trajectory of student achievement (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010; Kane & Steiger, 2008; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). This study employed multilevel models to examine how teacher characteristics such as participation in professional learning and use of interactive instructional practices might be related to students’ civic skills and knowledge using data from the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 8th grade civics assessment.

The study found significant variation between teachers for student achievement in civics and in their use of interactive instructional practices. Participation in professional learning predicted both interactive instruction and student achievement: a one standard deviation increase in professional learning was associated with a predicted .32 standard deviation increase in interactive instructional practices, and a predicted .045 standard deviation increase in student achievement. There was no significant difference between traditional and communities of practice based forms of professional development.

Interactive instructional practices were also significantly associated with increases in student achievement on NAEP civics, but the effect size was marginal: a one standard deviation increase in interactive instruction was related to a predicted .02 standard deviation increase in student achievement. Additionally, the relationship between interactive instruction and student achievement was curvilinear: high levels of interactive instruction were associated with decreases in student achievement. The study did not find any evidence that teacher participation in professional learning increased the effectiveness of interactive instructional practices.