ForwardED

PRE-K THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

The CALL for Improved Learning
Researchers make the case for distributed leadership

In a quest to answer the question, "How can we improve student learning?" hundreds of schools throughout the country—and in Denmark and Japan—are answering the CALL.

Developed at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, part of UW–Madison's School of Education, the Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning is a one-of-a-kind, online survey and automated feedback system that measures leadership practices across an entire school.

What makes CALL so unique is that survey questions are built on a framework of distributed leadership—the idea that all educators within a K-12 school, not just the principal, should help with the many leadership tasks of improving student learning.

This concept has been a welcome revelation to Michael Harris, former principal of Riverside University, the second largest high school in Milwaukee Public Schools. "CALL feedback revealed that my teachers wanted more leadership roles, which I embraced. Everyone brings something special to the table," says Harris, now an education leader in Athens, Ga.

By working together on the CALL recommendation to "focus on learning," Harris and his leadership team implemented a literacy strategy centered on writing and reading. "The ACT test has a writing component, so we wanted to help kids become proficient in reading comprehension and writing persuasive essays." After his teachers took CALL again this year, their focus on schoolwide learning had improved greatly. "I'm definitely a fan," says Harris.

Inside

For an expanded version of this newsletter, visit wcer.wisc.edu/news/newsletter.

Leadership researchers Richard Halverson and Carolyn Kelley display their new book, "Mapping Leadership: The Tasks That Matter for Improving Teaching and Learning in Schools."

With a $1.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the CALL survey was created in 2009 by Richard Halverson, a professor of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis in UW–Madison's School of Education, and Carolyn Kelley, an ELPA professor and the School of Education senior associate dean for academic programs.

"As leadership researchers, we found plenty of information on whether schools were improving student learning. But we thought there should be a map to show school leaders where they were in the process," says Halverson.

This four-year study resulted in the identification of five core domains for measuring leadership: a focus on learning; monitoring teaching and learning; building nested learning communities; acquiring and allocating resources; and maintaining a safe and effective learning environment.

"Our approach to CALL's design was to provide feedback to school leaders at every step so they could immediately improve teaching," Kelley explains. The survey takes about 40 minutes to complete, and responses are anonymous and confidential. "Everything is automated. As soon as the last person has taken CALL, the administrator gets results and recommendations."

Although the grant ended in 2013, schools wanted to continue using the assessment tool. So Halverson and Kelley collaborated with the Wisconsin Center for Education Products & Services (WCEPS), a non-profit organization that markets innovative products and services developed at the School of Education. They made CALL into a product that generates about $200,000 a year.

Mark Blitz, CALL project director at WCEPS, has worked with 400 elementary, middle and high schools in over 10 states, and in Denmark and Japan, to administer CALL. His clients swear by it. "Districts continue to partner with us because CALL provides action-oriented data, instead of just outcomes."

One of CALL's largest clients is the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement, which offers professional development and consulting to principals, teachers and superintendents in over 50 districts each year in Georgia. Leslie Hazle Bussey, GLISI's interim executive director, has used CALL for leadership building in rural Carroll County since 2013.

"We selected CALL because it measures the depth of instructional task distribution, rather than evaluating leaders," says Bussey. "GLISI's goal is to change culture and practice deep within a school at the teacher level with support from leaders, not to build super-hero leaders who try to do everything themselves."

Michael Harris, a former Milwaukee principal, is a big fan of using distributed leadership to improve student learning.

Bussey says one unexpected outcome of using CALL has been an increase in classroom peer observations—a new development driven by educators. "Teachers claim the observations are making a big difference instructionally."

While education assessments come and go, Bussey thinks CALL is exceptional—although a little too lengthy when it first came out. "The rigor and level of research that undergirds the content and design of CALL are highly credible."

Quite a ringing endorsement for Kelley and Halverson, who tell the story of the research behind CALL in their new book, "Mapping Leadership: The Tasks That Matter for Improving Teaching and Learning in Schools."

Halverson explains the premise: "This book maps the quality of school leadership and tells schools the next stages for improving teaching and learning for their students."

For the UW–Madison School of Education researchers, writing this book was a logical extension of 20-plus years of combined research on school effectiveness and leadership that is the backbone of CALL. "We had good ideas on distributed leadership that cannot be found in many books on school leadership, and we were compelled to make this contribution," says Halverson.

Kelley and Halverson hope "Mapping Leadership" will inspire school leaders to take CALL to find out how their schools rate with student learning and to ask the all-important question, "How can we, as a team of leaders, do better for our students?"

For details on CALL or "Mapping Leadership," go to leadershipforlearning.org.

Publications/Findings

Our researchers have been logging in impressive findings and published research. From studies on STEM and diversity, to leadership and alternative learning in schools, here are summaries of the latest in education research from WCER:

TEACHING PRACTICE

"How do Students Learn to See Concepts in Visualizations? Social Learning Mechanisms with Physical and Virtual Representations"
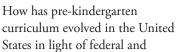

This study published in the *Journal of Learning Analytics,* led by WCER researcher **Martina Rau,** investigated how 12 high school students made sense of visuals that show concepts, with or without the help of educational technology. Findings showed that help from instructors was critical to students' understanding of visuals, even when they received support from an educational technology.

PRE-K

"Pulling Pre-K Into a K-12 Orbit: the Evolution of Pre-K in the Age of Standards"

How has pre-kindergarten curriculum evolved in the United States in light of federal and state benchmarks and assessments for the closely associated K-12 curriculum? In this study published in *Early Years: An International Research Journal,* WCER researcher **Beth Graue** and colleagues take a close look at a highly regulated pre-K program in New Jersey and compare it to Wisconsin pre-K. The researchers argue that standards-based practice is evolving into more accountability in public pre-K programs, even when early learning standards support a child-centered approach.

LEADERSHIP

"Portraits of Principal Practice: Time Allocation and School Principal Work"

How should school principals allocate their time across major leadership responsibilities? In this one-of-a-kind study published in *Educational Administration Quarterly,* WCER Deputy Director **Eric Camburn** and other researchers paint a detailed picture of a principal's work life during different times of the day, week and semester. Like prior studies, they found that principals work long hours and perform many different tasks. Unlike other studies, they learned that a principal's work is not predominantly characterized by brief attention to specific tasks or constant interruption.

MATH

"The Case of Ratio"

Most efforts to teach math rely on counting and whole numbers. But count-based thinking doesn't align well with many math concepts. In the *Journal of Numerical Cognition,* WCER researcher **Percival Matthews** and his colleagues suggest students' everyday non-numerical experiences can sometimes support deeply intuitive access to foundational math concepts. For instance, instruction capitalizing on kids' intuitions about size can often provide more meaningful introductions to general concepts like addition or continuous change than numbers can.

K-6

"A Learning Progression for Elementary Students' Functional Thinking"

In this study, WCER researcher **Ana Stephens** and her colleagues explore the progress of elementary students, grades 3-5, in developing mathematical thinking, with a focus on early algebra. Their approach involves a curricular framework, an instructional sequence, written assessments and a discussion of the observed responses over time. This research was published in *Mathematical Thinking and Learning.*

ALTERNATIVE LEARNING

"The Bubbler as Systemwide Makerspace: A Design Case of How Making Became a Core Service of the Public Libraries"

Maker pioneer and WCER researcher **Erica Halverson** introduces readers to the Bubbler, a makerspace launched in 2011 inside nine public libraries in Madison, Wis. This article, published in the *International Journal of Designs for Learning,* takes a detailed look at how the Bubbler developed, its core features, and the ups and downs in designing a systemwide makerspace in public libraries that aligns with the basic tenets of inclusion and diversity.

STEM & DIVERSITY

"Arizona's Rising STEM Occupational Demands and Declining Participation in the Scientific Workforce: An Examination of Attitudes Among African Americans Toward STEM College Majors and Careers"

Why is the diversity of Arizona's STEM workforce not keeping pace with the growth of STEM careers? This study published in *Texas Education Review,* led by **Jerlando F. L. Jackson,** director of Wisconsin's Equity and Inclusion Laboratory, explores which attitudes held by African Americans toward STEM degrees and jobs affect their decision to pursue a STEM career path. Researchers found that family support, exposure to STEM major opportunities and confidence in their ability to succeed in STEM fields were important factors.

JOB TRAINING

"Cultural Capital at Work: How Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills are Taught, Trained and Rewarded in a Chinese Technical College"

This exploratory study led by WCER researcher **Matthew Hora** examines how technical college educators and employers in one large Chinese city conceptualize skills, cultivate them via teaching and training, and use them when making hiring decisions. Findings show that what is essential for student employability in this sample are both cognitive and non-cognitive skills, a shift from didactic lecturing to active learning in the college classroom, and attention to hiring as a process of finding a good "cultural fit" between a firm and applicant.

BOOKS AND DIGITAL NEWS

"Educational Goods: Values, Evidence and Decision-Making"

Two economists and two philosophers, including **Harry Brighouse,** director of The Center for Ethics & Education at WCER, discuss what society should look for from the education system. They develop a theory of the just distribution of "educational goods"—the knowledge, skills, dispositions and attitudes that children must develop to flourish and contribute to the flourishing of others. The book outlines a method for combining values and evidence to reach decisions, and discusses how to apply it.

"Learning With Visuals," a vlog by Martina Rau

How can educational technologies better support student learning through visuals? In a new vlog series through her Learning Representations & Technology Lab, WCER researcher **Martina Rau** shows us how. Log onto YouTube.com and type into the search box: Learning Representations & Technology Lab.

For more findings, news and events, visit: wcer.wisc.edu/news/newsletter.

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