

Teacher's knowledge of the Expeditionary Learning School Outward Bound model and their perception regarding the impact on the student's academic achievement

Introduction

The Expeditionary Learning School Outward Bound (ELSOB,), was present at several schools in Puerto Rico, for a period of eight years (USDE, 2007). The ELSOB impact in the Puerto Rico school system, is an area that has never been studied, and for that reason, merited investigation. The research question was: What is the knowledge of teachers participating in the Expeditionary Learning School Outward Bound model and their perception regarding their impact on the academic achievement of students?

There are investigations into this model of education reform, specifically on schools located in the United States of America, (Martin, Bright, Cafaro, Mittelstaedt & Bruyere, 2008, Raymond, 2006; Spangler, 2008; Ulichny, 2001; Weinbaum, Gregory , Wilkie, Hirsch & Fancsali, 1996). However, no studies on this in Puerto Rico.

In 2000, several schools in Puerto Rico, adopted the Expeditionary Learning School model Outward Bound (Thomas, 1999). From 2000 to 2008, this model was present in over 20 Puerto Rican schools (Expeditionary Learning Schools Outward Bound, 2007). In addition, for 2008, a total of 160 American schools, including Puerto Rican schools, were using the model ELSOB (Spangler, 2008).

Method

To answer the questions, the researcher identified a school in the town of Salinas, where the model ELOB, was present for a period of eight years. This was the only school that kept archives of the learning expeditions, artifacts, student work and teachers that participated in ELSOB. The sample consisted of eight teachers and one school principal. The total number of teachers at the Escuela Urbana de Salinas that implemented the model ELSOB was 23 and the sample (n=8) represented 34% of the original population. The protocol of guiding questions was used, was developed by the researcher, following the theoretical framework for qualitative studies of Patton (2002). The interviews were conducted by the researcher, who also transcribed them, coded and categorized inductively. Similarly, the researcher observed documents of the teaching-learning used in the model studied, which were provided by study participants. Lastly, the results of the standardized test and student retention rates were identified and used as part of the quantitative side of the research. The study was a descriptive-explanatory, mixed method with emphasis on qualitative analysis.

Results

The level of knowledge regarding the ELSOB model, varied from teacher to teacher. Every teacher had a general understanding of the model ELSOB and 3 out of 8 had an extensive

knowledge of this model. However, teachers perceived the ELSOB model had positive impact on the academic achievement, but also saw how the model helped develop student leadership skills, eliminated complacency, motivated the students and helped with self-esteem.

Teachers perceived an increase in critical thinking skills as well as on reading and writing skills. Finally, teachers felt that ELSOB created a school culture of respect, service and ownership. During 2006 to 2008 the school had an increase in academic achievement as evidence by the standardized 10th grade test scores. Student retention during 2006-2008 was 99%.

Discussion

The main goal of this research was to understand the impact of ELSOB in the Puerto Rico School system. The qualitative and quantitative data suggests that the ELSOB-integrated curriculum approach was effective at not only improving academic achievement, but also in retaining students. Furthermore, ELSOB helped develop the schools' culture of respect, peace and service.

References

- Expeditionary Learning School Outward Bound. *School Network*. (2007). Retrieve March 3, 2007 from <http://elschools.org/about-us/school-network>.
- Martin, B., Bright, A., Cafaro, P., Mittelstaedt, R. & Bruyere, B. (2008). *Cultivating \ environmental virtue among 7th & 8th graders in an Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound School*. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 30(2), 294-298.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research method*. Newbury Park, London: SAGE Publication.
- Raymond, A. (2006). *It isn't about the*. *Teaching preK-8*, 2, 42-45.
- Spangler, A. (2008). *Educational trailblazers. Experiential learning guides students in a new path*. *Earth Island Journal*, 46-49.
- Thomas, D. (1999). *Department awards \$8.7 millions to assist providers of comprehensive school reforms*. Retrived on August 20, 2008 <http://www.ed.gov/PressReleases/10-1999/comproviders.html>
- Ulichny, P (2001). *Academic achievement in two expeditionary learning demonstrations*. Providence, Rhode Island: Author.
- US Department of Education (2007). *Comprehensive School Reform Quality Initiatives*. Retrieved on November 17, 2007 <http://www.ed.gov/programs/qualinits/awards.html>.
- Weinbaum, A., Gregory, L., Wilkie, A., Hirsh, L. & Fancsali, C. (1996). *Experiential Learning Outward Bound summary report*. New York, New York: New York Academy for Educational Development.