Exploring Alignment in Gifted Education Program Policies and Practices

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Purpose of Study

Studies of the current state of program implementation in gifted education have relied on survey self-report data (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2013; NAGC & CSDPG, 2015). In this study, I examined state and district policies in conjunction with survey self-report to further illuminate the policy/practice relationship in gifted education.

Research Questions

1) To what extent are state and district level gifted education policies in the areas of identification and services aligned with recommended practices?
2) To what extent are district and school level reported practices in identification and services aligned with recommended practices?
3) To what extent are state/district level policy and district/school level reported practices in the areas of identification and services aligned with each other?

Method

Sample/data sources
- State policy in two states
- District program plans in two states
- Survey responses about practices in two states
- Districts sampled by size and resources
- State 1, $n = 8$; State 2, $n = 8$

Qualitative Document Analysis (Altheide, 1996)
- Iterative process
- Open, Axial, and Selective coding

Recommended Practices

Identification	Service Delivery Model/Programming
(1) Committee Review	(1) Continuum of services
(2) Universal Screening	(2) Acceleration allowed
(3) Appeals procedure	(3) Multiple grouping options
(4) Student reassessment	(4) Multi-year program plans
(5) Locally developed norms	(5) Mentorships, internships, & vocational experiences
(6) Use multiple assessments	
(7) Qualitative/ Quantitative measures	
(8) Assessments allow above grade-level performance	
(9) Student profiles expanded pool	

Policy Alignment with Recommended Practices

Recommended Practice	Policy (a)	Alignment	Cross-level (a/b)	Alignment	Policy (b)
ID	S1 - State	Toward	+/+	Toward	S1 - District
SDM/P	S1 - State	Full	++/+	Toward	S1 - District
ID	S2 - State	Toward	+/+	Toward	S2 - District
SDM/P	S2 - State	Full	++/+	Toward	S2 - District

Condensed Results

- **State Policy**
  - *Identification (ID)*
    - Toward alignment with recommended practices in both states
  - *Service Delivery Model/ Programming (SDM/P)*
    - Fully aligned with recommended practices in both states

- **Reported Practices**
  - *Identification (ID)*
    - Toward alignment on self-reported practices
  - *Service Delivery Model/ Programming (SDM/P)*
    - Only partially aligned on self-reported practices

- **District Policy**
  - *Identification (ID)*
    - Some fully aligned, some weakly aligned (at best)
    - Overall, toward alignment
  - *Service Delivery Model/ Programming (SDM/P)*
    - Toward alignment, some elements present, others missing

- **Cross-Level Alignment**
  - *Identification (ID)*
    - Well aligned across levels
  - *Service Delivery Model/Programming (SDM/P*
    - District policy indicated continuum of service; self-report indicated primary use of pull-out services.

Discussion

In previous gifted education policy research, investigators discovered a disconnect between state and district policies (e.g., Gallagher & Coleman, 1992). Findings from the two states and associated sample districts in this study provide promising insight into at least some aspects of gifted education policy that actually are consistent across levels. Though cross-level consistency in this study is much improved relative to previous research about gifted education policy, there is still inconsistency in the implementation of the policies into practices. In general, I found that state- and district-level policies about gifted education programming were in alignment, while district- and school-level reported practices were less aligned.

Implications

Future research should examine...
- actual on-site implementation of reported practices and written policies, and
- factors influencing policy implementation challenges that may or may not be specific to gifted education programs.

Select References

Callahan, C. M., Moon, T. R., & Oh, S. (2013). *Status of elementary gifted programs 2013*. Retrieved from National Association for Gifted Children website: http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/key%20reports/ELEM%20school%20GT%20Survey%20Report.pdf

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