
ANNOTATION

Harrison, Heidi M. “Implicit Theories and Perceptions of Academic Changes among Teachers in Lasallian Secondary Schools in the San Francisco New Orleans District.” EdD dissertation, University of San Francisco, 2016. 328 pp.

Heidi Harrison’s 2016 doctoral research was motivated by a desire to explore the role that teachers play in preparing students to lead and transform society amid the challenges, disruptions, and changes of the Twenty-First Century. In her research, she explored the attitudes and beliefs that teachers in Lasallian secondary schools of the San Francisco New Orleans District (SFNO) brought to the task of renewing and updating their practice, their curriculum, and their assessment methods to better respond to the needs of young learners in the Twenty-First Century.

Harrison explored Lasallian secondary school teachers’ attitudes toward academic changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment using Dweck’s (2000) psychological framework of implicit theory as the theoretical rationale for her study. This theory proposes that people view intelligence, the world, and morality as either fixed or malleable. Harrison explains: “Individuals with an entity theory (an implicit theory that is fixed and static) are less adept at managing changes and challenges, whereas those with an incremental theory (an implicit theory that is growth-oriented and malleable) are more adept at managing changes and challenges” (35). Harrison’s search for studies related to teachers yielded a number of studies, but none of them focused on Catholic schools in general or Lasallian schools more specifically. Hence, the need for her study.

The purpose of Harrison’s research study was “to investigate the extent to which teachers in Lasallian secondary schools in the SFNO District have entity or incremental theories in the domains of (a) intelligence, (b) the world, and (c) morality.” Also included in the study was an investigation into the degree to which these teachers had “favorable perceptions about implementing academic changes” in three areas: curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Finally, the study explored the possible correlation between the implicit theories of these teachers and “their perceptions about implementing academic change” (30).

Harrison’s study explored three research questions: 1) to what extent do teachers in Lasallian secondary schools in the SFNO District have entity or incremental theories in the domains of (a) intelligence, (b) the world, and (c) morality?; 2) to what extent do teachers in Lasallian secondary schools in the SFNO District have favorable perceptions about implementing academic changes in the areas of (a) curriculum, (b) instruction, and (c) assessment?; 3) is there a correlation between the implicit theories of teachers in Lasallian secondary schools in the SFNO District and their perceptions about implementing academic changes in their schools? (30-31).

Among other things, Harrison’s review of literature does a fine job of summarizing the Lasallian approach to education through a review of the Lasallian founding story that reveals a very real concern for meeting the practical, contemporary needs of students to be educated in such a way as

to best prepare them for success in this world and in the next (48-67). Further, she emphasizes the important role that teachers play in the education of the young people – both the work of teachers in the classroom and the ongoing preparation and renewal of teachers throughout their lives to adapt to changing needs and times (37-41).

Harrison created an online survey that consisted of three parts: 1) measuring implicit theories of teachers (using survey items published by Chiu, Dweck, Tong, and Fu in 1997); 2) assessing teacher perceptions about implementing changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and 3) demographic information (133-135). The population for the study included teachers from 14 Lasallian secondary schools in the San Francisco New Orleans District (SFNO). “Teacher” was defined as a person who was teaching at least one class period during the term in which the survey was conducted. Out of the 671 teachers invited, 366 fully completed the survey; and 18 partially completed the survey (132). All responses were counted. The survey was conducted during January and February 2016.

Related to research question #1, statistical analysis showed that a strong majority of survey respondents possessed incremental theories (growth mindsets) for intelligence (156), world (162), and morality (167). As far as statistically-significant differences among subgroups are concerned, while the majority of World Languages/ Languages Other Than English teachers possessed incremental theories, they had a greater number of responses related to entity theories (fixed mindset) in the intelligence domain than members of other academic departments (160-161); females were more likely to possess growth mindsets in the world domain than males (163); and the percentage of teachers with growth mindsets decreased (yet remained in the majority) as years of teaching experience increased (166).

Related to research question #2, statistical analysis revealed favorable perceptions to changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment in eight of nine survey items, the exception being a neither favorable nor unfavorable perception of developing a new course mandated by administration or an outside governing authority (189-190). Also, in both the instruction and assessment domains, while the majority of both female and male respondents were favorable, more females than males held favorable perceptions of change (190).

Related to research question #3, statistical analysis indicated no correlation between respondents’ implicit theories of intelligence and their favorable perceptions of change in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. With regard to respondents’ implicit theories of world, Harrison found that those with incremental theories of world were more likely to hold favorable perceptions of changes in curriculum and assessment, while those with entity theories of world were more likely to be neither favorable nor unfavorable toward change in assessment. Also, a correlation was found between implicit theories of world and favorable perceptions of change in curriculum and assessment for respondents with 1 to 10 years of teaching experience. A correlation was also found between implicit theories of world and perceptions of change in curriculum and assessment for male respondents. No correlation was found between respondents’ implicit theories of morality and their favorable perceptions of change in curriculum, instruction, and assessment (196).

With regard to conclusions, implications, and recommendations, Harrison made note of the large majority of survey respondents who possessed incremental theories related to intelligence (208,

247), world (211, 247), and morality (212, 247). This bodes well for the openness of Lasallian Catholic communities of educators to creative and adaptive change necessary to continue to meet the evolving needs of young people, both now and in the years to come. At the same time, she drew the reader's attention to the "considerable minority" (223) of respondents who possessed entity theories related to intelligence, world, and morality – people who, generally speaking, would be less open to change and adaptation. Many of Harrison's recommendations focused on *how* school leaders must manage academic change, regardless of the implicit theories teachers hold. She highlighted the importance of establishing and nurturing relationships of trust (both between administrators and teachers and among teachers) (224, 240); of strong professional development programs to educate teachers about the world of learners and about potential changes to introduce (223, 226-227, 232-233, 235, 241); of mission-related formation to help teachers know, understand, and embrace both the Catholic Church's and the Lasallian Family's commitment to creativity and adaptive change in education (229, 239); of a collaborative approach to the process of change-making in schools (225, 242, 243); of recognizing and addressing teachers' past experiences with change-making in schools (229-230, 242); of clear expectations related to reflective teaching, lifelong learning, and openness to adaptation and change throughout one's academic career (236-237, 241, 247); and of informed, focused hiring practices that look for future educators who are open to change and willing to put in the time, effort, and study to effect change that will better address the academic, personal, and spiritual needs of the young people entrusted to their care (243-244).

Harrison's research study adds to the knowledge base in the field related to the role that teachers play in the process of implementing necessary change in academic areas of school life – in particular, in Lasallian Catholic schools. Her study provides a good deal of hope for Lasallian Catholic educators as they face the many calls for creative and adaptive academic change in their schools and provides much insight into the process of making such change.