



# Evidence in Action

## *A K20 Center Research Brief*

### A Mixed Methods Case Study Program Evaluation of a Middle School Career Exploration Program

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#### Introduction

This intervention brief explores the research article "A Mixed Methods Case Study Program Evaluation of a Middle School Career Exploration Program" by Sharon L. James, published in 2024. The article addresses the effectiveness of a middle school career exploration program in the Broken Arrow Public School District. The research problem focuses on evaluating the program to determine necessary adjustments for enhancing student success. The objectives are to identify the most important components of the program, the professional development needs of teachers, and stakeholders' perceptions of the program's effectiveness. The significance of the research lies in its potential to improve career readiness and informed decision-making among middle school students.

#### Methodology

##### Research Design:

The study employs a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design, combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the career exploration program.

##### Sample:

The sample includes 55 middle school teachers, five school counselors, and five administrators from five middle schools in the Broken Arrow Public School District. These participants were involved in the implementation and support of the career exploration program.

##### Data Analysis:

Quantitative data were collected through a teacher survey, and qualitative data were gathered through interviews with school counselors and administrators. The survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while the interview transcripts were coded and analyzed to identify themes and patterns.

#### Results

The study identifies six key themes that provide insights into the effectiveness of the middle school career exploration program:

1. **Collaboration between Teachers and Counselors:** Effective collaboration is essential for the successful implementation of the program. Teachers and counselors need to work together to support students in their career exploration activities.
2. **Commitment to Continuous Improvement:** The program requires ongoing evaluation and refinement to enhance its effectiveness. Feedback from teachers and counselors is crucial for making necessary adjustments.
3. **Early Awareness:** Introducing career exploration at the middle school level is crucial for guiding students toward informed career decisions. Early exposure helps students connect their interests and strengths to potential career paths.
4. **Intentional Implementation:** The program should be integrated into specific core subjects, and teachers with a positive attitude toward career exploration should be selected to lead the activities.
5. **Student Engagement:** Engaging students through hands-on activities, project-based learning, and career fairs is key to fostering their interest and active participation in the program.
6. **Teacher Training and Mindset:** Comprehensive and scaffolded professional development is necessary to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge to effectively implement the program. A positive teacher mindset toward career exploration significantly influences the program's success.

The implications of these results suggest that while the program has a positive impact on student confidence and early exposure to career paths, there are areas that need improvement. Enhancing resource effectiveness, increasing student engagement, and providing better professional development for teachers are essential for the program's success.

## Application into Practice

To replicate this intervention in a school context, educators can:

1. **Foster Collaboration:** Encourage collaboration between teachers and counselors to support the implementation of career exploration activities. Regular meetings and joint planning sessions can facilitate this collaboration.
2. **Commit to Continuous Improvement:** Establish a system for continuous program assessment and adaptation. Collect feedback from teachers, students, and other stakeholders to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments.
3. **Introduce Early Awareness:** Start career exploration activities at the middle school level to help students connect their interests and strengths to potential career paths. Provide opportunities for students to explore various careers through hands-on activities and career fairs.



4. **Implement Intentionally:** Integrate career exploration into specific core subjects and select teachers who are enthusiastic about the program to lead the activities. Provide support and resources to help these teachers succeed.
5. **Engage Students:** Use engaging and interactive methods such as project-based learning and career fairs to capture students' interest and encourage active participation in the program.
6. **Provide Comprehensive Training:** Offer comprehensive and scaffolded professional development for teachers to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively implement the program. Focus on building a positive mindset toward career exploration.

By integrating these strategies, schools can create a dynamic and engaging career exploration program that supports student interests and career development.

### Work Cited

James, S. L. (2024). A Mixed Methods Case Study Program Evaluation of a Middle School Career Exploration Program. Oral Roberts University.