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Interventions for Helping Students at Risk of Dropping Out of School

Edmondson, J. H., & White, J. (1998). A tutorial and counseling program: Helping students at risk of dropping out of school. *Professional School Counseling*, 1(4), 43-47.

Edmondson and White (1998) addressed two research questions:

1. "Will tutoring at-risk middle school students improve their classroom behavior and increase their achievement and self-esteem?"
2. "How will counseling in addition to tutoring at-risk students improve their classroom behavior and increase their achievement and self-esteem?"

Method

Participants were 135 students in grades 6, 7, and 8, who were identified as at-risk of dropping out of school. They were white, rural and from lower SES families in the southern part of the U.S. The students were divided into three groups; those who received only tutoring (24 boys, 21 girls), those who received both tutoring and weekly group counseling (15 boys, 30 girls), and the control group of students who received no intervention (31 boys, 14 girls). Students were allowed to choose the level of intervention, so without randomization, selection-bias was present.

Achievement was measured using grade-point averages (GPA) from the 1st and 3rd quarter report cards. Self-esteem was measured using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI), administered by the school counselor. Classroom behavior was measured by teachers using the Behavior Rating Checklist (BRC) by Doss and Ligon (1979).

The tutoring group received 2 hours of tutoring each week for 6 months (from the end of the 1st marking period to the end of the 3rd). Teachers determined the subject the student was to be tutored in. Tutors were college Education majors who received 10 hours of training on how to tutor middle school students. University professors supervised the tutors while the school counselor coordinated the program and consulted with teachers, parents and students.

The tutoring/counseling group received the same academic support as the tutoring group, but during the six months of the intervention they also participated in weekly group counseling sessions which focused on self-esteem and study skills. The self-esteem component dealt specifically with students' identity, strengths and weaknesses, nurturing, and maintenance (Capuzzi & Gross, 1989).

The control group received neither tutoring nor counseling, though the students were encouraged to utilize the school counselor for individual counseling if needed and to seek academic support from school personnel.

Results

An ANOVA identified pre-existing significant differences among the groups in the following areas: age of group members (students in the control group were older than those in the other two groups), retentions (the control group had more), resources (ratings on family and personal resource measures were higher for the tutorial group), GPA (higher for the tutorial group) and Self-Esteem Inventory scores (the tutorial group had higher ratings).

A MANCOVA indicated significant differences in achievement, self-esteem and classroom behavior among the three groups ($p=.00001$). When between-group comparisons were done using ANCOVAs, the following differences were found:

1. Between tutorial and control groups: The group receiving tutoring made significant gains in achievement, self-esteem and classroom behavior, compared to the control group.
2. Between tutorial/group counseling and control groups: Students receiving both intervention improved significantly in achievement, self-esteem and classroom behavior, compared to the control group.
3. Between tutorial/group counseling and tutorial groups: Students receiving both counseling and tutoring improved significantly in achievement, classroom behavior, and self-esteem when compared to students who received tutorial assistance alone.

Implications

This research indicates that a dropout prevention program combining both academic tutoring and group counseling can result in improvement for students in the areas of academic achievement, behavior and self-esteem. School failure has been identified as a research priority for the school counseling profession (Dimmitt & Carey, 2003). Research identifying successful interventions for students at risk of academic failure is critical to the field.

This intervention supports the importance and effectiveness of the school counselor's role as the coordinator of services rather than the provider of all aspects of the intervention.

Critical Perspective

The greatest limitation of this study is the lack of randomization, which resulted in selection bias among the three groups. Because students were allowed to choose the level of intervention, those most motivated to change would also be most likely to select the tutoring/counseling group. Additionally, the results are based on groups with 45 students, which is a small number of students to be evaluating. Finally, though the sample accurately represented the demographics of the local population (white, rural, and

from low SES), there may be some limits to the generalizability of these result to more diverse middle school populations.

References

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