HELPING ACADEMICALLY, SOCIALLY AND EMOTIONALLY AT-RISK STUDENTS

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Abstract

Many students today are considered at-risk, and they struggle academically, emotionally, or socially. They need help from educators, mentors, and parents in order to be successful. Many programs have been implemented in order to help at-risk students. Many aspects of the programs have been successful and can be used to drive future programs. Both successes and failures of these programs can be examined and analyzed for further research in order to meet the growing needs of at-risk students in classrooms today.
Chapter I: Introduction

For many years, there have been students who excel and are at the top of the class. There have also been those repeatedly struggle with learning and need extra help in order to be successful. The gap in achievement between those who struggle and those who struggle is not a new problem, but it is a problem that has been dealt with in different ways over time. The thought process behind how to help children who are struggling has changed as well. In the past, children were helped using a remedial model, which slowed down the process for them in order to help them understand. More recently, interventions have been used in order to accelerate a child’s learning. These interventions are part of the RTI model, which argues that students should receive several different high-quality interventions before being considered for a learning disability (Lipson & Wixson, 2012).

Another idea that has changed over time is the material that should be taught to students who are struggling. In the past, students were pulled out of their classrooms and taught a separate reading curriculum, in order to help them understand the required material better. More recently, though, struggling students are receiving interventions that follow the core curriculum (Spiegel, 1995). There are many other changes that have been made to how struggling students are
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supported and educated. Some changes have been positive, while others may need to be revisited. Both new programs and old have been created in order to help all students to be successful. They may differ in theory and practice, but all are implemented with the same goal in mind, which is to close the achievement gap between students who are successful and those who are not.

Statement of Problem

The curriculum that students are required to learn continues to increase in intensity and difficulty, yet students continue to need support to face academic, social, and emotional challenges. Programs that are designed to help disadvantaged, struggling learners, who are in need of support in all of these different areas, have evolved and changed over time. Some parts of the programs have been successful, while others have not been as successful. As we continue to review and study our current programs, we want to find which aspects of the programs have been the most helpful to our students. We then want to build upon these positive aspects in order to strengthen the programs that are available for struggling students from low-income families. We also need to find the parts of the programs that are not successful, so that we can eliminate them or change them in order to better serve our neediest students.

In order to achieve my goal of finding the aspects of programs for struggling students that are the most successful, I plan to research several different programs. I will read case studies of students who have been involved in the programs, and I will examine the effectiveness of the programs. I will consider how the programs helped the students academically, socially, emotionally. I will examine how often the students were helped, at what stage in their development they were a part of the programs, and whether the programs involved family
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members or just the students. I will also consider the history of the programs and what theories
drive their instruction. I will review past research studies to see what other teachers and
colleagues believed to be the most helpful aspects of the program as well as what areas of the
programs could be improved upon for future students. Discovering the strengths and weaknesses
in the existing programs will then help me to make suggestions on which areas to continue to
practice and which areas to change for future programs.

Research Question

In what ways have current programs to better serve preschool and elementary students from low
socioeconomic families succeeded and/or failed?

Sub-Question: Which areas of each programs worked and why?

Definition of Terms

RTI: (Response to Intervention) It is intended to prevent problems through optimizing initial
language and literacy instruction. The RTI process emphasizes differentiating instruction or
intervention in language and literacy (Lipson & Wixson, 2012).

Remediation: An attempt to slow down the learning process for students (Lipson & Wixson, 2012).
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**Title One:** Formerly known as Chapter One, it is part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and is the foundation of the federal commitment to closing the achievement gap between low-income and other students (NAEYC, n.d.).

**At Risk:** These are students who are affected by environmental conditions that negatively impact their educational performance or threaten their likelihood of promotion or graduation (Juneau, 2010).

**Intervention:** It is a central tenet of the various multi-tiered approaches to implement RTI. Interventions enhance the general education curriculum and are based on a student’s performance on a variety of skills to improve student outcomes. They are targeted to a particular skill or set of skills to improve student outcomes, consist of short-term, explicit instruction, are monitored frequently to document progress, and are revised as necessary, based on student performance (Lipson & Wixson, 2012).

**Instructional Level:** The level at which the reader is challenged but not overwhelmed (Spiegel, 1995).

**Phonemic Awareness:** Awareness of the speech sounds, or phonemes, to which letters correspond (Spiegel, 1995).

**Direct Instruction:** Learners are shown explicitly what a strategy is and how to apply it (Spiegel, 1995).
Chapter II: Review of Literature

At-risk children struggle academically, socially, and emotionally. Many programs and interventions have been implemented to help children who are at-risk. Different ideas have driven these programs and interventions, and some have been more successful than others. In this review, studies examined different ways to help at-risk students to be successful. Topics in the following review include the importance of parental or mentor involvement, the use of Response to Intervention (RTI), the importance of early intervention, meeting students’ behavior and social needs, and the importance of quality of classroom instruction.

The Importance of Parental or Mentor Involvement

Studies have shown that students who come from low income families, live with single parents, are the result of a teenage pregnancy, have high levels of stress in the home, or have parents with a low level of education, parents who have a psychiatric illness, high levels of marital discord, a criminal history or substance abuse history have a greater chance of being diagnosed with oppositional defiance disorder (ODD) or onset conduct disorder (CD). These at-risk students are also more likely to develop reading difficulties as well as cognitive language delays (Webster-Stratton, 1998). An experimental study was completed to evaluate the effects of a parent education and participation program, called PARTNERS. The PARTNERS program is
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an early intervention program that is designed to prevent ODD and CD. At-risk families who qualified for Head Start were chosen to participate in this study. Out of a total of 64 classes, there were 542 families that were chosen to participate. Out of those families, 345 were chosen for the experimental group, and 167 were a part of the control group. The families that were a part of the control group attended Head Start but did not participate in the extra intervention, PARTNERS.

There were two different cohorts of families that participated in the study. The first cohort participated in the fall of 1993, and the second in the fall of 1994. Both cohorts completed the same assessments, home observations, parent interviews, and parent and teacher questionnaires. Teachers and parents leaders who participated in the PARTNERS program received additional training in order to conduct the intervention. A social competence scale, a child behavior checklist, and an Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory were completed by parents. Independent observations of the child as well as behavior scale named CII-Child were also completed.

The three main domains that were evaluated were parenting competencies, parent school involvement, and child social competencies and conduct problems. The results showed greater and significant long-term and short-term improvements in parenting competence in those who participated in the PARTNERS program compared to mothers in the control group. The experimental group mothers also showed a decrease in harsh parenting styles as well as an increase in positive and competent discipline, while the control group mothers showed no change. Results for whether the intervention caused an increase in parent involvement were inconclusive. Kindergarten teachers, who were not aware of whether parents participated in the PARTNERS program while attending Head Start, were more likely to report that the parents who were part of the experimental group were more involved, but the results were not statistically significant. Children who were a part of the PARTNERS intervention did show a decrease in
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negative behaviors and noncompliance, and they showed an increase in positive interactions with their parents. One year later, the negative behaviors were still significantly lower and positive behaviors were significantly higher. One area that could be further researched would be if this intervention is as significant with minority families, as many of the families in this study were not a part of a minority population. Also, a third control group who did not participate in Head Start or the PARTNERS program could have been observed to determine the benefits of Head Start without the PARTNERS program. Lastly, PARTNERS could be implemented throughout elementary school, so that longer-term effects could be evaluated.

Children with ADHD struggle not only behaviorally, but they tend to struggle academically and socially as well. Only recently have researchers started to analyze and compare treatments for students with ADHD. This twelve month randomized clinical trial study examined two different interventions to determine which was most effective (DuPaul, Kern, Volpe, Caskie, Sokol, Arbolino & Brakle, 2013). The participants were 135 children who had been referred to a local private college because of ADHD symptoms. The participants were then randomly assigned to either the experimental or the control group. The experimental group received the MCI intervention, which consisted of parent education, as well as home and school interventions to assist with early reading skills. The control group received the PE intervention, which consisted solely of parent education. Children from both groups were assessed initially and again every six months to test progress. Teachers and parents responded to several different assessment tools, including behavioral, social and academic assessments. For both groups, parent education classes consisted of 20 two hour sessions delivered across twelve months. Parents of the MCI group also received in-home trainings of interventions to help their children academically. Day-care providers and teachers in the MCI group were also shown interventions to help the students
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Results revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the results of the control group and the results of the experimental group. Both groups did make statistically significant growth was found for 27 out of the 46 dependent measures of the study. This study proves that supporting and educating parents may be enough to help many at-risk students who suffer from ADHD. While some of the students in the study did need extra interventions in order to make progress, the majority of them were helped through parents support alone. A major limitation of this study was that the control group still received an intervention, because it would not have been ethically acceptable for the students in this group to receive no help, so it was difficult to determine whether the changes in the students were the result of the parent education or other outside factors, such as maturation. Further research can be done with the results of this study to determine what individual interventions are helpful to students who need more than just the parent education intervention.

Extensive research has been done to prove the importance of parental involvement with young children as they learn to read. Less research has been done on the effects of parental involvement with students who are middle school age or older. This quasi-experimental study examined the effects of parental involvement on middle school students’ reading scores (Cameron, Losike-Sedimo & Reglin, 2012). Participants were chosen randomly for the study. First, seventy-two students were selected and separated into a boy group and a girl group. Then, the names were put into a hat, and fifteen names were chosen from each group to create the experimental group. Then, thirty additional students were chosen for a control group. The instrument that was used to test student progress was a retired state End of Grade (EOG) reading
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comprehension assessment. A panel of experts, including teachers, parents, a counselor, and a principal, narrowed the 53 question assessment to 25 questions, so that students were able to complete it in one hour. Students were given the assessment pre-intervention and post-intervention. The intervention consisted of parents attending two workshops each week for a total of 36 hours over a 12 week period. Parents also were asked to monitor and help students with their reading homework for one hour each night, as well as to volunteer to help the reading teacher in the classroom and to conference with him/her for one hour each week. The total number of hours that parents were expected to participate in the intervention was 108 hours over the 12 week period. Each week, the intervention focused on a different skill or strategy that parents could use to help their child to be more successful. Parents also were encouraged to read three different books that were provided for them through the intervention.

Results showed statistically significant growth for reading scores of students in the experimental group. Scores jumped by 8.37 points from the beginning of the intervention to the end. The control group, however, did not show statistically significant gains. The results of the study prove that parental involvement is important, even at the middle school level. While this study focused on the effects of parental involvement on this reading test only, there are many more benefits to parental involvement, and these other areas could be examined through further research. A few other areas that could be explored more extensively are mental health, resilience to stress, social and emotional development, more positive peer relations, and more tolerance. All of these areas seem to be connected to parental involvement, and greater research in these areas would be helpful in understanding the importance of parental involvement with older children.
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Pairing up at-risk students with loving and caring adults, who can positively influence them in a mentor program, is a low-cost yet highly effective program for at-risk students. In this non-experimental, quantitative study, at-risk middle school students were monitored over a two-year period (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). The students were considered to be at-risk for several different reasons, such as being retained a grade level, poor attendance, problems with behavior, poverty, violence, low achievement, substance abuse, or teen pregnancy. The purpose of the study was to see if this mentoring program would help students to improve their GPAs, attendance records, and discipline referrals. The mentors consisted of teachers, administrators, librarians, janitors, retired teachers, and other school employees. Data was collected after each six-week grading period to measure the students’ GPAs, attendance records, and discipline referrals. The data was taken from the school’s student information database. Initially, there were 57 students that were a part of the study, but after three moved from the district, only 54 remained. Researchers used a quantitative analysis to compare the data from the 2003-04 school year to the data from the 2004-05 school year.

The study showed that students made significant gains in raising their GPAs and school attendance, and there was a significant decrease in discipline referrals. Also, 49 out of the 54 students that were a part of the study improved in all three areas. Due to these findings, it is clear that the mentoring program was successful in this school district. Students not only made gains academically, but they were more engaged and interested in school as well. Monitoring these students and helping them to find an adult who cared about their well-being and success proved to be a helpful intervention for these at-risk students.

Implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI)
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Many educators have been frustrated with the systems for getting children the help that they need in order to be successful in school. They felt that they were identifying students with needs and bringing them before intervention teams, but the teams weren’t making decisions on what to do with these students, or they were deciding that there was nothing that could be done. This frustration with their old model caused one elementary school in North Carolina to implement a new RTI system (Audette, Polly & White, 2012). Researchers completed a descriptive case study to determine the positive and negative feedback about implementing the RTI program. Fifteen participants were selected from the North Carolina elementary school. The participants were either school leaders or were part of the leadership team during the implementation of the RTI program. By focusing on only one school, researchers hoped to create a description that was detailed enough to help other schools make decisions about implementing an RTI program. Probing interviews were completed to collect data for analysis. The interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes for each participant. The interviewers then coded the interviews and met to discuss inter-rater reliability. The team then met to analyze the codes and created a matrix to determine the relationship between the themes from the interviews and the implementation of RTI.

Results showed that there were seven major themes that came out of the interviews. The staff members that were interviewed were frustrated with old models and systems. They believed that these systems did not truly help the children who needed help. Staff members were also concerned with the implementation process and procedures. To aid in this, the principal suggested the implementation of an RTI leadership team and had several staff members attend extensive training about RTI. Teachers in the school were also concerned about how to implement the program into their classrooms. They were overwhelmed with the progress
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monitoring and needed help understanding how to implement differentiated instruction correctly. Another theme that staff members pointed out was principal leadership. This school was fortunate enough to have a very supportive leader, and they felt that this was a key aspect of the program’s success. They also felt that professional development was important, but at the same time they were feeling overwhelmed by everything that they had to continue doing, while learning a new system. This study only followed one school, and further research can be done to understand the positive and negative aspects of implementing RTI models into schools. This study was a great start for other schools and policy makers to understand the strengths and weaknesses of RTI, but similar studies in more schools would lead to even greater information about RTI implementation.

The changes in the IDEA Act in 2004 have led to a new form of assessment and intervention, called Response to Intervention (RTI). The RTI model consists of three tiers. Tier 1 is what all children receive, and it is the evidence-based classroom instruction that is taught. Tier 2 instruction is for those who need more help than the instruction that is given in the tier 1, and tier 3 is for children who continue to struggle even after receiving tier 2 help. Using a multiple baseline across participants design, an experimental study was completed to determine whether a tier 2 intervention could improve phonemic awareness skills in at-risk low-socioeconomic preschool students (Koutsoftas, Harmon & Gray, 2009). The study was conducted with three public schools and two Head Start classrooms that were involved with the Tempe Early Reading First Partnership (TERFP). All classes were located in Tempe, Arizona and contained three and four year old students from low-income families. A point system was put in place to decide which students qualified for the tier 2 intervention, according to benchmark assessments. Four different types of assessment were used to determine effectiveness of the intervention, including DIBELS,
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the Beginning Sound Awareness subset of the PALS-Pre-K CBM, the Trophies Pre-K Beginning Sound Awareness CBM, as well as testing students on selected CV, CVC and VC words. Thirteen groups of children with 3-4 children per group received the intervention for 20-25 minutes a day. Seven groups started the first week of the study, and the other groups started one week later. Professional staff from the TERFP program provided the intervention. They also met weekly to create intervention scripts for the upcoming week, based on student needs.

The results of the study showed that over 71% of the pre-school students who received the tier 2 intervention made significant progress, according to benchmark assessments given prior to the intervention as well as after receiving the intervention. To determine the long-term effects of the intervention, researchers followed up on the kindergarten DIBELS results of the students who received the tier 2 intervention in pre-school. The results showed that a smaller percentage of students who received the intervention in pre-school were considered at-risk in kindergarten. Although this study focused on phonemic awareness, more research can be done in the future to determine whether early tier 2 interventions can help in other areas of reading. Also, this was a fairly small study that was only done in one town. A larger experimental group could lead to greater understanding of the RTI model and its effectiveness with at-risk students.

Researchers agree that early intervention is key to helping students overcome reading difficulties. Response to Intervention (RTI) is a model that identifies students who are at-risk and provides them with the early interventions that they need in order to be successful. This experimental study investigated the effects of certain tier two interventions with kindergarten students to determine their effectiveness (Coyne, Crevecœur, Hagan-Burke, Kwok & McAlenney, 2011). Twelve schools were chosen to participate in the study, and 232 children qualified to participate. Students that scored below the 30th percentile on selected benchmark
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assessments were chosen to participate. The students were assigned to either the experimental group or the control group. The experimental group received the Early Reading Intervention (ERI), which is a program that consists of 126 daily lessons that concentrate on letters and sounds, segmenting, blending and integrating sounds, reading words, and reading sentences and storybooks. The control group received the interventions that their schools had been using previously, which were a mix of commercial resources and teacher resources. Both groups met for their interventions in groups of three to five, and they received 30 minutes of intervention 5 days a week. Researchers observed the interventions and coded the quality of instruction. To measure the effectiveness of the intervention, students were tested using assessments that measured letter knowledge, phonological awareness, decoding, word identification, spelling, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. Hierarchical linear models were used to analyze the multilevel models of data.

Results of the between-group analysis showed that the experimental group produced a stronger response than the control group in a majority of the areas of assessment, although both interventions seemed to be effective for the majority of students. In the area of phonemic awareness and nonsense word reading fluency, a larger percentage of students in the control group remained below the 15th percentile than students in the experimental group. Students who received the ERI intervention seemed to perform better on areas of the intervention that were introduced earlier in the program rather than later. A possible explanation for the lack of growth in reading comprehension could be the smaller number of lessons that were dedicated to reading comprehension in the ERI intervention. There were limitations to this study, including variability among interventionists, even though researchers tried to keep everything consistent. The tier two intervention was found to be effective, but more can be researched and investigated in relation to
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kindergarten interventions. Researchers can focus on how to improve reading comprehension, which was an area of weakness for this study. They can also compare other intervention programs to find the most effective programs for at-risk students.

Extensive research has been completed on the connection between vocabulary and comprehension skills in relation to early reading skills. It has also been discovered that reading comprehension skills rely heavily on oral language abilities. More recently, Response to Intervention (RTI) is an approach that has been used with at-risk students as a way to provide more intense levels of instruction to at-risk students. An early efficacy study was implemented in order to determine the effects of a vocabulary and comprehension intervention with embedded instruction in storybooks that were read through automated recordings to pre-school students using headphones (Spencer et. al., 2012). A pilot study was completed with six children previous to the current study in order to make changes and improvements for the actual study. The participants for the study were chosen from three public kindergarten classrooms. Three participants were selected from each of the classrooms. The students were selected based on the results from a Picture Naming Individual Growth and Development Indicator, which contained fifteen pictures, and was used as a screener to find students in need of a tier two intervention. Children who identified between four and eleven pictures were selected for the intervention. Children also completed the PPVT-IV test and the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals Preschool test to measure comprehension and vocabulary knowledge before the intervention. All participants came from families who reported annual income below the federal poverty line.

The intervention was implemented to groups of three children with one facilitator. The facilitator kept the children on task, but was not able to help them with answers or to praise them
for correct answers. The children completed pretests, listened to the stories without the embedded lessons, then listened to the stories with the embedded lessons, and then took posttests on the books that they read in the areas of vocabulary and comprehension. Then they started the pretest for the next book. This process took about six days each time. Researchers used a repeated acquisition design for the study. Results showed a significant increase in student vocabulary knowledge after the intervention, but not a significant gain in comprehension skills. In comparison to other vocabulary interventions, this tier two intervention was very successful. These students, who had very low oral language skills, learned an average of eight out of eighteen vocabulary words that were taught through the storybooks and embedded lessons. Future research can be done with larger groups, which would better gauge effect sizes. Also, vocabulary words can be replaced, and embedded lessons can be changed based upon what was found to be most successful from the current study.

Early Intervention for At-Risk Students

Recently, there has been much debate on the long-term and short-term effects of Head Start. Although many have studied the effects on academic achievements of children who were a part of the Head Start program, this is not the only area that Head Start works to strengthen. Head Start also works to help children in the areas of parent involvement, nutrition, social services, mental health services, and health services. A non-experimental study with a regression discontinuity design was completed by Jens Ludwig and Douglas Miller (2007) in order to understand the effects on Head Start children in the areas of health and academic achievement. For this study, 300 of the poorest counties in the United States were included. The students who attended Head Start in these counties were compared to students who did not attend Head Start but would have qualified for the program. The researchers used data given to them through
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federal census documents, NARA documents that outlined federal expenditures for the Head
Start program, child mortality rates from the Vital Statistics, as well as individual-data from
NELS studies, which included interviews with eighth grade students across the United States as
well as follow-up interviews from 1988 until 2000. In the interviews and family responses that
were a part of the NELS documents, it was indicated whether or not the students participated in
the Head Start program.

Researchers used an empirical strategy to calculate the effects of Head Start
effectiveness. Results, which were represented in tables with data to show outcomes in the
different areas that were researched, showed that Head Start had a positive effect on child
mortality rates as well as on number of school years completed. However, no positive impacts
were detected in relation to higher achievement on test scores among middle school students who
attended Head Start. Ludwig and Miller (2007) believe that more research needs to be done on
the longer-term effects of attending Head Start. They believe that the quality of education that
students receive K-12 has changed for at-risk students, and this could affect long-term results in
education achievement for students who completed Head Start. They believe that it is not
accurate to say that Head Start has been a failure, but they do believe that changes may need to
be made to the program in order to better prepare students for future schooling. Ludwig and
Miller (2007) believe that there were drawbacks to their research, because their data were
limited, but they still believe that their results were statistically significant enough to prove the
effectiveness of the Head Start program.

The importance of reading to young children has been discussed and researched
repeatedly. Various reading interventions have been tried with elementary students to help them
to be successful readers. Not many interventions have been tried with pre-school students,
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though, so an experimental study was completed to study the effects of a reading intervention with Head Start students. There were 167 children enrolled in Head Start programs who completed the study, which took place in 1992 and 1993. Four Head Start centers were chosen for the study. Classrooms were paired up based on whether they were a full day or part day program, and each was randomly assigned to either the control group or the experimental group. Seven classrooms were chosen for the intervention group, and eight classrooms were chosen for the control group. Students were given a vocabulary pre-test in the fall, which was called Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test as well as the Developing Skills Checklist to measure emergent literacy skills. Children were then post-tested in the spring with the same instruments. For the intervention, parents and teachers were trained by a short video on how to read and interact with the students while reading. Children read a book each week in a small group in their classroom and then took the book home to read with their parents, and the parents were instructed on types of questions to ask the students in order to teach them to be active readers. Beginning in February, each classroom also worked on a phonemic awareness aspect of the intervention. Each day, they worked on a different skill to help them learn new sounds. Teachers were videotaped teaching these phonemic awareness lessons, so that they could be coded to find significant teacher behaviors that helped with the reading intervention.

Results showed that statistically significant gains were made in student achievement from this intervention that did not require much training or time in the classroom. It was also a low-budget intervention. After measuring the post-tests against the pre-tests, it was evident that children’s language abilities were strengthened. Researchers from this study believe it was successful because of the amount of one-on-one interaction that these at-risk students received. Researchers would like to see the long-term effects of the intervention. They also believe it
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would have been beneficial to have a more systematic monitoring and feedback program. One major problem that the researchers identified was that although students made significant progress, they were still below the typical achievement level of other students their age. The researchers believe that more interventions are needed to help students to be more prepared to start kindergarten at the same level as other students.

Previous attempts have been made to determine the effectiveness of the “Success for All” reading program. This program targets children who are at-risk in the area of reading, and it aims to help both children living in poverty as well as those who are not, so that children that are living in poverty can be as successful as their more affluent peers. The previous studies had a couple of areas that needed improvement, such as needing to follow students for a longer amount of time and following a larger amount of students (Borman, Slavin, Cheung, & Chamberlain, 2007). Previous studies have used quasi-experimental approaches. The current study, which followed a cluster randomized design, followed schools that were either assigned to a control group or an experimental group for three years. There were 41 schools from 11 states that were chosen to participate in this program. These schools were part of the first cohort. Another 35 schools were chosen to be a part of the second cohort. Schools were then randomly assigned to the experimental or control groups. Trained professionals, who were mainly graduate students, gave students pre-tests in the fall. The pre-test was the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. The students were then individually post-tested by trained professionals as well through the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests. Teachers in the experimental groups, who were teaching the “Success for All” curriculum, were trained and monitored frequently, to ensure that they understood the curriculum and were teaching it correctly.
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A hierarchical linear model analysis of the cohorts of students showed statistically significant results for both cohorts of students who were taught the “Success for All” curriculum for three years. Results showed that even students who moved in to the experimental schools later in the study and did not receive all three years of instruction still made gains with “Success for All.” Results, which compared scores of poor and non-poor students from the experimental group, showed a difference of less than one half of one standard deviation. Researchers believe that this study may have been more successful than previous studies, because it was carried out over three years, which gave teachers more of a chance to strengthen their teaching skills and helped them to have a better understanding of the program. Students were also given more time to practice and strengthen their reading skills through the expanded study of the program. Although researchers believe that studies of this program, as well as other reading interventions, need to be repeated, they believe that this was a good start to understanding the effectiveness of “Success for All.” Further studies could follow groups of students from other cities, and perhaps they could follow students from more rural areas for further research.

The Head Start Program began in 1965, as a way to help at-risk students to be as successful as their peers from more affluent families. In this non-experimental study, Garces, Thomas, and Currie (2002) studied data from the National Longitudinal Survey’s Child-Mother files about the long-term effects of students who attended Head Start and their siblings who did not. The purpose of the study was to find the long-term effects of attending Head Start. A little less than 4,000 adults were interviewed, beginning in 1968, and the children of those surveyed were followed through adulthood. Garces, Thomas, and Currie (2002) focused on four different aspects to determine the long-term effects of Head Start on the children who attend. The four areas of focus were completion of high school, attendance in college, amount of money earned as
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the head of the household, and whether the person was ever booked or charged with a crime. Empirical methods were used to calculate the unobservable variables to determine the effects of attending Head Start.

Results showed that students who attended other pre-school programs were more likely to graduate from high school than those who attended Head Start, which is understandable considering that students who attend Head Start are at-risk, while many students who attend other pre-school programs are not. White students seemed to benefit more from Head Start, though, in the area of high school graduation than African-American students. White students who attended Head Start were 30% more likely to complete high school than their siblings who did not. It was also found that White students were 28% more likely to attend college than their siblings who did not. There were no statistically evident findings in relation to higher earnings made by students who attended Head Start. Lastly, it was found that African-Americans benefited most from Head Start in the area of criminal activity. They were 12% less likely to be charged or booked than their siblings who did not attend Head Start. The results prove that there are long-term effects of attending the Head Start program. Not all students benefited in the same way. There are different benefits for White children and African-American children, but there were significant benefits for both groups of children.

A reading intervention program, called Reading Recovery was developed from reading intervention concepts used in New Zealand. The program differs from traditional remedial programs, and it concentrates on individualized lessons that are led by the students, who are encouraged to be active readers (Pinnell, 1989). Students are taught reading strategies, instead of simply waiting to be corrected or helped. Students are pulled from their classrooms for 30 minutes each day to participate in reading lessons. The sessions usually last for about 12-14
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weeks. A district in Ohio decided to pilot the reading recovery program in a few selected first
grade classrooms. Students who were a part of the program were given diagnostic tests, and
students who were part of a skills-based intervention program were given the same diagnostic
tests. The tests included letter identification, a word test, concepts about print, writing
vocabulary, dictation task, and text reading.

Means and standard deviations were calculated in all of the different areas of diagnostic
testing before and after implementation of the Reading Recovery program. A multivariate
analysis indicated statistically significant differences between students who were a part of the
Reading Recovery program and those who were not. The results showed that Reading Recovery
students scored significantly higher in all areas of diagnostic testing after completing or being
discontinued from the program. Over 90% of the discontinued students met or exceeded
expectations that were set at the beginning of the program. A year after the program, Reading
Recovery students were tested again to see if they retained the skills that they were taught, and
they still scored higher than students that were not a part of the program. A case study was also
done on a first-grader named Melanie, who was a struggling reader. She was at the bottom of her
class before completing the Reading Recovery program. After completing 56 lessons, Melanie
was discontinued from the program. Her teacher reported that even after several months, Melanie
remained in the top third of the class, and began to enjoy reading. She was even able to help her
fellow students with reading skills. While there has not been enough research on the long-term
effects of Reading Recovery, the short term effects are impressive. Students are able to make
great gains in a short amount of time, while still receiving the core curriculum training that they
need. Reading Recovery contains many aspects that are beneficial to struggling readers, and it is
a program that needs to continue to be researched and implemented.
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Quality of Classroom Instruction

Students who struggle with reading or students with learning disabilities need individualized, explicit instruction in order to help them to gain reading knowledge. One way to support students with reading and learning disabilities has been to pull these students out of the classroom and into resource rooms for remedial instruction. The idea behind teaching students in the resource room is that they would have individualized instruction that would fit their abilities. Two years previous, a study was completed that showed that the instruction that children were receiving in the resource room was not adequate, and children were not making growth (Moody, Vaughn, Hughes & Fisher, 2000). A new quasi-experimental study was conducted to determine whether the resource room contributed to student growth at a large southeastern school district. Six teachers were a part of the study along with fifty-nine students. Data were collected for this study in the form of teacher interviews, classroom observations, teacher self-reports, a test of reading fluency, and the Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement. Results showed that teachers were aware that it is important to use balanced literacy, but through the observations it was evident that teachers were mainly using whole group instruction. Even when students were split into small groups, teachers were still using a whole group instruction approach instead of differentiating instruction.

Students were pre-tested and post-tested using the TORF test as well as the Woodcock Johnson Passage Comprehension test. Both tests showed no statistically significant progress in reading from the fall to the spring. Researchers believe that one reason for the lack of growth is the large number of students that were in the resource room for reading support. Researchers believe that the resource teacher was overwhelmed and should be able to work with a smaller group. Researchers also believe that students need to receive more specialized, intensive
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instruction, and that districts need to rethink how they structure special education, so that
students can receive more one-on-one or small group instruction.

Finding ways to improve student achievement for at-risk students has been the focus of
several studies as well as the focus of many educators. Finding the most effective practices and
instructional approaches continues to be of great importance, and is a topic that leads to great
debate and discussion. Through an observational study, Title One and non-Title One schools
were compared to observe how teachers in each of type of school used literacy instructional time
in order to help high-poverty students (Stichter, Stormont & Lewis, 2008). Four public
elementary schools in a mid-size town in the Midwest were chosen for the study. Trained
observers completed 175 45-60 minute observations in the designated classrooms. All
observations took place during the literacy block on five consecutive school days. The data
collections occurred over a two year span. Two buildings were observed in year one and two
were observed in year two. Data was graphed into a table, and analyses of variance (ANOVAs)
with school risk status as the independent variable and teacher behavior as the dependent
variable. An alpha of .05 was used to determine significant relationships and differences.
ANOVAs were also conducted with Title One status as the independent variable, and
instructional contexts, instructional practices, and teacher behavior were used as dependent
variables.

Results showed that teachers in two of the Title One schools spent more time involved in
non-instructional talk, in transition, giving negative feedback, and more students leaving class
during literacy instruction time than the schools without Title One. Also, other studies have
revealed that small groups and peer-tutoring are effective practices. In the Title One schools,
though, the classrooms that were observed only spent 8% of their time in small groups or peer-
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tutoring groupings. Observers also found that 19% of the literacy block in the Title One schools was spent in large-group discussions that did not provide direct instruction or preparation time for the educators. Researchers believe that educators in the Title One schools need more feedback on their instructional practices, in order to address the amount of “down time” in their classrooms and to set goals to improve this area of weakness. Researchers also believe that teachers in these schools need to develop routines for entrances and exits to reduce wasted time as well as to increase positive prompts to students. Researchers believe that further research can be done with the results of this study. They believe more research can be conducted on specific instructional strategies and groupings of students. The researchers also believe that quality of teaching for at-risk students as well as students with and without disabilities should be explored further. The small sample for this research did create limitations, and researchers believe that it would be beneficial to continue this research with larger groups of students.

Many students are currently struggling with reading, and are significantly below grade level in their reading skills. Many of them receive special education to assist them in their reading skills. They attend a resource room for extra support, or they receive support through being pulled out of their classroom for a certain type of remediation. These programs have failed to help students accelerate (Torgesen et al., 2001) and have instead just helped to catch them up to where they need to be. Thus, two different studies were implemented, in a quantitative study, to try to accelerate student learning in order to bridge the gap between struggling students and those who do not struggle in reading. There were initially 60 struggling students between the ages of 8 and 10 who participated in the two programs. The methods for this study required that children had to meet a certain criteria in order to be a part of the study. They had to be identified by their teachers, their scores on two word-level reading tests had to be 1.5 standard deviations
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below their age, their estimated verbal intelligence had to be above 75, and they had to score
below their grade level on a phonological awareness test. They all received one-on-one
instruction in two 50 minute sessions for eight weeks. The students were tested before the
interventions, directly after and then one year after.

The first intervention used was the Auditory Discrimination in Depth Program (ADD)
and the second was the Embedded Phonics (EP) program. They differed greatly in their theories.
The ADD program focused on teaching phonological awareness through articulatory awareness,
which is the knowledge of how to pronounce sounds correctly, and individual word reading
skills, while the EP program focused more on writing and spelling activities and taught
phonemic decoding strategies. During and directly after the interventions, the ADD program
seemed to be more successful with students, but a year after the interventions, the success rate
was basically the same. While the programs differed greatly, they both concentrated on explicit
instruction in phonemic awareness and decoding, as well as sight word recognition skills. They
both also encouraged one-on-one work with students to master several other reading skills. This
led researchers to question whether arranging instruction according to teacher and student
preference may be beneficial, as long as they are following the basic principles of one-on-one
explicit instruction, as was done in the interventions that were studied. The researchers now want
to study more strategies that involve teaching reading comprehension strategies as a continuation
of their study on reading interventions.

It is reported that when 40% of children enter kindergarten, they are one or more years
behind their peers in critical language and reading readiness skills (Bailet, Repper, Piasta &
Murphy, 2009). In an attempt to support these children who come to school unequipped and
unprepared, a quantitative experimental study was implemented to assess an explicit,
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developmentally appropriate intervention, which was designed to teach emergent literacy skills to preschoolers who were considered at risk for reading failure. There were 38 private pre-schools and child care centers in a large city in the southwestern United States that were selected for this study. All sites had a comprehensive literacy instruction in place. Hierarchical linear modeling was used to model the variance within and among the sites. There were 744 students who were initially screened for the study, and 220 were identified as at-risk as a result of the screening process. Three parents declined to have their children be a part of the study.

The intervention used with these students focused on early literacy skills that were in addition to their existing literacy program. Students were tested at the beginning, middle and end of the year to evaluate progress. The intervention lasted for nine weeks and was instructed by a trained teacher to small groups of students. The instruction lasted for 30 minutes during each session and was explicit, while still being developmentally appropriate and engaging. The results showed that children who received more lessons made gains in phonological awareness, vocabulary, print and letter knowledge skills. The results proved that brief yet intense instruction can be beneficial to at-risk pre-kindergarten students who are struggling, or at-risk. There was more progress shown in the area of rhyming than in alliteration, but progress was shown in both areas. One important discovery from this research was that differentiated instruction is possible at the pre-school level, and interventions are beneficial. These interventions were implemented by teachers with more experience and education than in a typical pre-school or daycare setting, though, so more research needs to be done in order to determine if differentiated small-group interventions would be appropriate for a typical pre-school or daycare. More studies will need to be conducted in pre-schools to determine long-term effects of pre-school interventions as well as
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to determine whether other pre-school interventions help to better prepare pre-school students for kindergarten.

Meeting the Needs of Students Who Are At-Risk Emotionally and Socially

Response to Intervention has become a successful and well-known model for students who are academically at-risk. This model identifies students who are not successful in the tier one setting, which is usually a whole group model. These students, who are identified as at-risk, are then chosen for a tier two intervention, where they receive the help that they need in order to be successful. While most RTI models have focused on academics, a recent experimental study has examined the effectiveness of a behavior RTI model for students who are at-risk with severe behavior problems (Cheney, Stage, Hawken, Lynass, Mielenz & Waugh, 2009). Two different programs were examined before beginning this study. They were the Behavior Education Program (BEP) and the Check and Connect (C & C) program. Ideas from each of these programs were used to create the CCE intervention that was used for the current study. Participants for this study were from 18 schools in western Washington. The schools were matched on four demographic variables, which were school size, percentage of students with IEPs, percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, and percentage of Caucasian students. Nine intervention schools and nine comparison schools were chosen. There were 280 first, second, and third grade students enrolled in the study. The CCE program had 168 students, and the comparison group had 112 students during the first year. During the second year, there were 121 CCE students and 86 comparison students. Each district also had a district-employed coach, who
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was a student mentor, and a full-time behavior specialist who supervised the coaches in the district.

Students were assessed at the beginning of the program to find which students were in need of the intervention, and they were assessed again at the end to determine progress. Students started at the “Basic Level” of the program, where they checked in daily with their coaches and discussed Daily Progress Reports (DPRs). Students received points for their check-ins and DPRs, and if they received 75% of the possible points after the 8-week period, they were able to move on to the Self-Monitoring stage. If they didn’t receive 75% of the points in the Self-Monitoring stage in this 4-week stage, they returned to the Basic Level for four weeks. Students who still were not successful received 8 weeks of the Basic Plus plan. Students who didn’t receive 80% of the points after 8 weeks of Basic and 8 weeks of Basic Plus received an Intensive program.

Measures that were used to determine success were the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders, DPRs, a Social Skills Rating system, which as a teacher form, a Teacher Report Form, an Academic Engaged Time, the Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement, a Teacher Adherence and Quality Form, a Check-In Adherence and Quality Form, a Check-Out Adherence and Quality Form, a Coach-Student Relationship Scale, a Student-Coach Relationship Scale, a Teacher Evaluation Inventory, and a Student Evaluation Interview. Results were found using linear growth analysis through a Hierarchical Linear Modeling software program. Results showed statistically significant progress in internalized behavior as well as externalized behavior for graduates of the CCE program. Results of the program showed that students who were Caucasian were more likely to be successful as well as students who were female. Further research needs to be done with this program to determine why 40% of the students did not respond to the intervention. In future studies, students who are not responding could move to a
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tier 3 intervention, which would more intense in order to fit their needs. This study could also be repeated with more students for shorter and longer periods of time, as well as within classrooms instead of schools.

According to previous research, a correlation between strong social skills, including self-regulation and problem solving, and academic achievement has been confirmed. Due to the strong relationship between social skills and academic achievement, an experimental study was implemented to determine the effects of a school-wide social skills intervention (Kilian & Kilian, 2011). The intervention, Project Achieve Social Skills Program, had been in place school-wide for two years before the study, but individual groups of students were not pulled for more intense interventions. This more intense intervention lasted for another two years, while the school-wide program continued. At the start of the study, 35 of the most seriously problematic students were chosen from a suburban elementary school near New York City. The students who were chosen had a minimum of 15 annual office referrals. A comparison group of 35 third through fifth graders was chosen from another school district with similar demographics that was waiting for a social skills intervention program. Students who were a part of the intervention group attending social skills counseling groups. The leaders of the group were trained and given scripts to read to introduce and practice the social skills with the students. The group leaders were also monitored through unannounced observations. The variables that were used to determine the success of the program were number of office referrals, end of year report card grades in reading and math, state test results in reading and math, and support services needed. Baseline and post-intervention results were recorded in all of these different areas. These results were graphed and analyzed.
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Results of the study showed that students in the intervention group received a significantly lower number of office referrals after the second year of the intervention, while the comparison group received significantly more referrals after the second year. According to end of year report cards, students in the intervention group received substantially improved reading grades, which were above the expected criteria, while students in the comparison group received reading grades that remained at the criteria level. The end of the year report cards showed that students in the intervention group received significantly higher math grades as well, while students in the comparison group showed a downward trend in year-end math grades. At post-intervention, students in the intervention group went from not proficient to proficient in their state-wide ELA scores, while the students in the comparison group had ELA scores that decreased. The intervention group also met proficiency math criteria for the state tests, while comparison group students remained below proficiency on the state-wide test. Also, at the end of the two-year intervention, the number of students in the intervention group who received additional support services decreased, while the number of students who received additional support services in the comparison group increased. Students in the intervention group made significant progress in every area, while students in the comparison group did not. While this study did prove to be successful, there are areas that were limited or could be further researched. This was a fairly small group sample, and the comparison group was not exactly a control group, as the researchers were not able to control everything that happened in this other school. Also, these students need to be followed to determine whether these results lasted long-term. Research can also be done to determine whether the counseling groups are successful in schools that do not implement the intervention school-wide, and whether the intervention is more successful for different genders, income levels, or ethnicity groups.
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When children suffer from mental illnesses, this can be a direct predictor of academic achievement. It can also be a predictor of school dropout rates, juvenile delinquency and substance abuse. In order to help students with mental health problems as well as to prevent future problems that can be caused by mental health issues, interventions have been implemented to help students at an early age. One intervention that has been used frequently in California is the Primary Intervention Program (PIP), which is a school-based program that is designed for early detection and prevention of emotional, behavioral, and learning problems in preschool and primary grades (Nafpakitis & Perlmutter, 1998). In an observational study, an intervention program was implemented for children in grade one through four from two rural elementary schools in central California. There were 22 females and 17 males who participated in the study. Out of the 39 participants, data were reported for 35 of the students. A screener was used before the intervention to find eligible participants. The screener was called the Acting Out, Moody, and Learning Behavior Rating Scale-Revised (AML-R), and students who scored between the 15th and 30th percentile on the AML-R were referred to an early intervention program. Forty referred students were then assigned randomly to groups. Group one held 19 participants, while group 2 held 16 participants.

Child aides were hired and chosen to lead the PIP group. They received a two-day training and conducted play sessions for the children that were chosen for the intervention once a week. Children participated in 12 of these 30-minute, one-to-one play sessions each week. Playrooms were specifically designated with expressive play equipment. Play sessions were unstructured, and children chose the activities. The child aides only joined the children in playing if the children asked them to do so. Group one participated during the first semester of the school year, while group two participated in the study during the second semester. Teachers completed
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Teacher-Child Rating Scales (T-CRS) for students in both groups before and after the intervention. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to analyze data between the treatment and control groups. Results showed that significant effects were found for five out of seven of the T-CRS scales, which included shy-anxious, learning problems, assertive social skills, task orientation, and peer social skills. Group one had more significant gains than group two in these areas. One area that did not improve for either group was acting out. There was a small increase in acting out, but researchers believe this could have been due to chance. There was also a small increase in frustration tolerance, but it was not statistically significant. A follow-up was conducted twelve weeks later. Researchers found that results did decrease from the post-intervention to follow-up, but it was not a significant decrease. The results still remained higher than before the intervention. Researchers believe that booster sessions may be necessary so that participants do not regress. Researchers also believe that a limitation of this study was the small sample size, so future researchers may want to consider a study with a larger group of participants. A long-term follow-up would be beneficial as well. It would also be helpful to implement this intervention with students who exhibit more severe behavior and emotional problems.

Summary

Students need support in many different ways. Some students need academic support through interventions that focus on reading or math skills. Other students need guidance and direction on how to interact with one another through social or emotional interventions. Lastly, some students need parental support in order to be successful academically, socially, and emotionally. The studies that were analyzed examined different ways to help at-risk students with their various needs in order to help them to be successful.
Chapter III: Results and Analysis of the Data

Introduction:

Based upon the research that is available, many connections can be made about how to help at-risk students. Through involving parents, providing early interventions, using RTI or other programs, and finding other ways to help children who are at-risk emotionally and socially, research has proven that helping even the neediest children is possible. Analyzing the available research will lead to further explanations of ways to benefit at-risk children.

The Importance of Parental or Mentor Involvement

Researchers believe that teaching parents how to meet the needs of their children is of utmost importance and can help even the neediest at-risk children. Training parents on ways to help their children, without any other in-school interventions, was even proven to be just as successful as adding in-school interventions to parent involvement (DuPaul et al., 2013). Parents often do not know how to help their children who are at-risk academically, socially, or emotionally, but they can learn through interventions, through modeling from trained adults, and by being a part of their child’s school day.

Parents don’t only need to know how to work with their children, but they need to know how to work with teachers and other school employees as well. Working with school employees can often be intimidating or overwhelming for parents, so they need chances to interact with one
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another. This can be done through teachers and school staff leading workshops that show parents ways to help their children or by providing information on reasons why it is important to help your child at any age. It can also be done through inviting parents in to observe their children in the classroom and to have discussions with reading specialists or other teachers about lesson planning for the next week (Cameron, Losike-Sedimo & Reglin, 2012). This would give parents a better idea of what their children are working on in the classroom, and it would help the parents to have more questions to ask their children about what they are learning in the classroom (Cameron, Losike-Sedimo & Reglin, 2012).

If a child does not have parents who choose to be involved, a mentor is also very important in motivating at-risk children and encouraging them to do well in school. It is a low-cost way to intervene and help children who may feel helpless or forgotten to understand the importance of working hard in school. Not only does mentoring help students to do better in school academically, but taking the time to check in with students about how they are doing and helping them to make plans to overcome their struggles can also help students to have fewer discipline problems and to improve attendance as well (Johnson & Lampley, 2010).

Implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI)

Researchers have found that some students are not able to be successful in school through classroom instruction alone. The students who are identified as struggling learners in the classroom need different tiers of interventions in order to be successful. Even pre-school students can benefit from Response to Intervention (RTI). Through tier two interventions, which are more intense and explicit learning opportunities for students who are struggling in the regular
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classroom setting, even pre-school students who are at-risk and living in poverty can learn skills that will help them be ready for kindergarten (Koutsoftas, Harmon & Gray, 2009).

RTI can be beneficial to struggling students, because their interventions build upon what they are already learning in the classroom, but the interventions are more intense and explicit, and taught in smaller groups, so that the at-risk students have a better chance of learning the material. Although researchers have found limitations in their research on RTI, they have found that teaching struggling students through tiered interventions can help to improve vocabulary skills as well as many other areas of reading, even to students who are significantly below grade level before receiving the interventions (Spencer et. al., 2012).

Early Intervention for At-Risk Students

Researchers have found that it is best to help at-risk students as soon as possible. Early intervention is very important in preventing and fixing reading problems and other academic difficulties in children. One way to intervene with at-risk children at an early age is by enrolling them in the Head Start program. While some at-risk students who attend Head Start still may not start kindergarten as ready as students from more affluent families, there are still many benefits to the Head Start program. Benefits include a lower mortality rate of students involved in the program and a higher number of years completed of school (Ludwig and Miller, 2007). While these results may not directly affect academic achievement, they do ensure that children will be in the classroom to receive quality instruction longer, which can positively impact student achievement. Researchers do believe that implementing intense and explicit interventions with Head Start students can ensure that they are just as ready as any other student to start kindergarten, though (Whitehurst et al., 1994).
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Researchers also believe that other programs, such as “Success for All” and “Reading Recovery” can be effective interventions for at-risk students. These programs help students by building upon what they already are learning in the classroom. They are then helped through small group intense reading interventions. Students in the Reading Recovery program even tested higher than other students in follow-up sessions after being discontinued from the program (Pinnell, 1989). These students could even be found helping other students and enjoying school after being a part of the Reading Recovery program, because long term goals continued to be positive. The effectiveness of this program is due to the explicitness of the instruction, as well as the expectations that the trained instructors have for the students before discontinuing them from the program. These high expectations ensure that students are above grade level in their reading abilities before being done with the daily intervention.

Quality of Classroom Instruction

Researchers believe that the quality of classroom instruction can greatly affect the success of at-risk students. While most teachers believe that balanced and differentiated instruction is important in order to assure success for at-risk students, not all teachers are differentiating instruction or splitting instructional time between large group, small group and one-on-one instruction (Moody, Vaughn, Hughes & Fisher, 2000). In order for the at-risk students to be successful, teachers need to teach to meet the needs of their students. Whole group learning is usually not effective for the at-risk kids. They need small group or one-on-one instruction that is different from what they are learning in the whole group setting. Small group and large group instruction should not be the same. Large group instruction needs to be taught explicitly, but it can encompass many different areas. Small group instruction needs to target the specific areas that the at-risk students need help with, in order to help them understand what
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many of the high-achieving students already understand (Moody, Vaughn, Hughes & Fisher, 2000).

Teachers also need to observe how long transition or wait times are taking, because time in the classroom should not be wasted by transitions or students entering and leaving the classroom (Stichter, Stormont & Lewis, 2008). If at-risk students are missing the initial instruction, it will make catching them up with the other students even more difficult. There is very little time to teach students what they need to know, and teachers need to make sure to make the most of that time. Although there will be times when teachers will engage in non-instructional talk, this should be minimal, as teachers have several standards that need to be covered in a day, and at-risk students especially need to be engaged and interested in what is being taught for the majority of the time that they are in the classroom, so that they are able to comprehend the concepts that are being taught.

Researchers have also found resource rooms to be an ineffective way of teaching at-risk students (Torgesen et al., 2001). These students are being pulled out of classrooms to try to catch them up to their peers, but they are not expected to excel past what their peers are able to do. Students should not simply catch up to what their peers are doing, but they need to be successful enough to move past the success of their peers, or they will constantly need the remedial help. These students need intense and explicit interventions that add to what they are already learning in the classroom. When they are pulled out for help in the resource room, they are missing the core classroom instruction, and this is not as helpful to them as when they receive the intervention, which are implemented in shorter amounts of time. Instead of the mentality that is associated with resource rooms of catching students up, students need to be challenged to meet
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their highest potential, through interventions that help them to fully grasp the material that is
being taught.

Meeting the Needs of Students Who Are At-Risk Emotionally and Socially

Students who are at-risk socially and emotionally can also suffer academically. Even
without having a learning disability, academically and socially at-risk students often need to
overcome their disabilities in order to be successful in the classroom. Often, students who are
emotionally and socially at-risk receive many office referrals, which keep them out of the
classroom. They also may have trouble focusing on their class work, when they have other needs
that need to be addressed first. By providing interventions that allow students to check in with
mentors about their behavior, office referrals can decrease and grades can increase (Kilian &
Kilian, 2011). Providing interventions for socially and emotionally at-risk students does not only
help them learn how to control their behavior, but it helps them to spend more time in the
classroom, so that they are receiving more instruction and allows them to focus on the
curriculum that they need to learn inside the classroom.

Researchers have found that helping students with mental illnesses can also be helpful in
both short term and long term ways. Getting students with mental illnesses the help that they
need can lower the number of distractions in the classroom, which can allow for better classroom
instruction. It can also help the students who suffer from mental illnesses to learn how to be
successful in the classroom, while also lowering school drop-out rates and substance abuse
problems (Nafpakitis & Perlmutter, 1998). Teaching students how to interact with the peers and
their teachers successfully can do more than just help them to have conversations. It can help
them to have conversations with their teachers in order to receive the extra help that they need,
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and it can help them to focus and to be more successful in the classroom, which will lead to more years of schooling and a greater focus on school achievement rather than focusing on other activities that could be harmful to their bodies or school success.

Conclusion:

Through helping students academically, socially, and emotionally, classrooms will be much more productive and efficient. Relationships between parents and children can also be much more positive and effective. Through analyzing the available research and data, conclusions can be determined, and ideas for further research can be established.
Chapter IV: Recommendations and Conclusions

According to research, there are several different programs and interventions that can be implemented to help at-risk students to be successful. While they have not all created success for one hundred percent of their participants, there have been many aspects of them that have helped at-risk students to not only catch up to their peers but to excel academically, socially, and emotionally. Many ideas and strategies have been discovered through research that have helped at-risk students to be successful, but there is still research that needs to be done to find new ways to help students and to help them to continue to be successful. Helping at-risk students is not a problem that can quickly be fixed, and while we have many answers to our questions about how they can be helped, it is an area that needs continued research and exploration.

Conclusions

Multiple aspects of interventions and remedial programs have helped to make at-risk students successful. One aspect that helps students in all areas is parental support. According to research, the effects of parental involvement have shown a consistent, positive relationship between parents’ engagement in their children’s education and student outcomes (Cameron, Losike-Sedimo & Reglin, 2012). This not only applies to student outcomes in connection to grades, but it also applies to their behavioral and social success as well. If parents are involved in a student’s education, they are able to have more conversations about how they can help, and
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they will understand what they need to do to push and challenge their students. Giving parents a chance to meet with teachers about making curriculum and lesson planning choices is also important, as it will give parents the confidence that they often need to approach teachers and to feel educated enough to ask questions and to have the necessary conversations with teachers about how to help their children.

Another area that needs attention is helping students to be successful behaviorally and socially. Social skills, including self-regulation and problem solving, are powerful predictors of academic achievement (Kilian & Kilian, 2011). Teaching students how to interact with their peers through interventions and mentor groups will help them to be more successful in the classroom. If they understand how to interact positively with their peers, they will be able to work better together with students on projects and learn how to ask their peers for help when they are unsure of how to complete an assignment. Teaching students social skills will also teach them how to properly ask for help from teachers. Helping students socially will also help them understand how to react to adversity and difficulties in the classroom, so that they are able to handle their emotions in a productive way instead of becoming a discipline issue.

Along with predicting future academic achievement, behavior and social disorders can also be predictors of substance abuse, school dropout rates, high aggression and juvenile delinquency (Nafpakitis & Perlmutter, 1998). Helping students through assigning them a mentor, educating parents on how to help them, or implementing interventions with them that teach them how to work through their social and behavior disorders can help students to be successful immediately, but it can also help them to be successful in the future. Before students are able to concentrate on academics, they need to understand how to work through their behavior and social disorders. Research has shown that helping students learn how to cooperate and interact
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with peers and teachers will keep them in the classroom more frequently and for many more years. It also will help them to concentrate and focus on what they are being taught, which will help them to be more successful academically as well.

Students need to be taught explicitly and instruction needs to be differentiated in order to meet the needs of all of the students. Teachers also need to maximize instructional time, because there are so many standards that need to be covered daily, and at-risk students especially need to learn as much as they possibly can while they are in the classroom in order to be successful. Interruptions, transitions, and talk about unrelated topics needs to be minimized, and students need to be engaged in what they are learning in order to reduce negative behavior and students being off-task (Stichter, Stormont & Lewis, 2008).

Students who are struggling need to be detected early, so that interventions can be started immediately. Interventions can be started as early as pre-school in order to help students be successful as they continue through grade school. Instruction that is taught in interventions should be explicit and should only add to what is being taught in the classroom. The interventions should be designed to help students excel above where their peers are achieving, and not just as a way to catch students up to their peers (Pinnell, 1989). Interventions can be helpful to at-risk students if they are designed and implemented correctly.

Recommendations for Teachers

Helping at-risk students can seem overwhelming. It is important to find ideas and programs that have been successful for other students and to use those ideas with your own at-risk students. Start by collaborating with colleagues about effective teaching approaches to ensure that your instruction is explicit and research based. Encourage colleagues to observe in
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your classroom to ensure that you are using instructional time in the most helpful way for students. Once you have implemented effective instructional approaches and worked to improve transition times, interruptions and off-task time, work on identifying students who are at-risk.

Decide if students are at-risk academically, socially, or behaviorally. If students are at-risk academically, identify the areas in which they need the most help. If there is a reading or math specialist at your school, discuss intervention ideas with them that may be beneficial to your students. Find an intervention that may work, and implement it with small groups of students. Differentiate your instruction to meet the needs of the at-risk students, and assess them to see if they are making progress. If students are at-risk socially or emotionally, talk with your school counselor or social workers about programs that may be helpful. Help students to connect with mentors though your school or through other programs, such as the Big Brothers/Big Sister program.

Most importantly, get parents involved. Hold workshops to teach parents how to help their children academically, socially, and emotionally. Show them how to interact with their students. Equip them with questions to ask, and educate them on what their children are learning in your classroom. Invite them in for lesson planning, hold after school meetings to encourage questions and discussions, and invite them in during the day to work with their students and other children in the classroom. If parents understand the importance of helping their children, they will be much more likely to help. If children are getting the support that they need at home and in the classroom, they will be more likely to succeed.

Areas for Further Research
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Research has been quite prevalent on ways to help at-risk students. It is an area of great concern in schools today, which has led to many studies and implementation of many different programs. While there are many interventions and programs to help students, many of them are newer, and long term effects have not been studied. I would like to see more research on the long term effects of these studies and whether students have continued to be successful years after they have graduated from the programs.

Another drawback to many of the studies is that they are only implemented with small groups of students or only in certain areas of the country. I would like to see some of these programs implemented with larger groups of students to see if they are as successful with students in different demographics and backgrounds. I would also like to see if the same programs and interventions are as successful with rural students as they were with urban students, or with students from different states or with differing cultures. The research that is available is very helpful in aiding at-risk students, but I am interested in seeing more research that covers a broader range of students and follows them for a longer period of time.

Summary

Research has led us to many different avenues of helping at-risk students. We have found strategies to help students academically, socially, and emotionally. While they have not all been successful, there were aspects of them that were, which led to more programs and studies of programs. Many students have been helped as a result of programs that are dedicated to helping at-risk students, but more programs can be implemented and studied. As more interventions and programs are implemented, researchers will be able to study their long term effects and discover
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how they can be helpful to students with various backgrounds and cultures. These studies will work to help even more at-risk students to receive the help that they need to be successful.

Sources


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