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Impact of Counseling Intervention on Academic Achievement and Behavior of At-Risk Students

CaLester C. Chaney

IMPACT OF COUNSELING INTERVENTION ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
AND BEHAVIOR OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

DISSERTATION

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by

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2008

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IMPACT OF COUNSELING INTERVENTION ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
AND BEHAVIOR OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

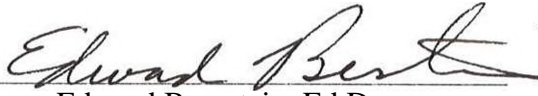
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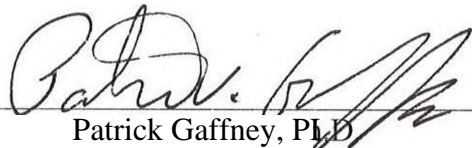
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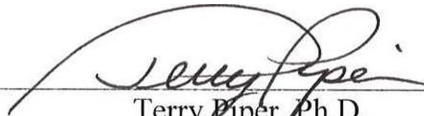
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ABSTRACT

IMPACT OF COUNSELING INTERVENTION ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND BEHAVIOR OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

CaLester C. Chaney

Barry University, 2008

Dissertation Chairperson: Dr. Edward Bernstein

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of counseling intervention on academic achievement and behavior of at-risk Students. This study evaluated seventh grade at-risk students who participated in a counseling intervention program, the BETA program, to determine if these students exhibited an increase in student achievement and behavior following the counseling intervention. A mixed method approach was utilized with quantitative research being the primary method and qualitative research as the secondary method. The theoretical framework for this research was based on psychologist Abraham Maslow's Plierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory.

Emphasis in this study was placed on data collected using the pre-test and post-test mean scores on the Kaufman-Test of Educational Achievement in Reading and Mathematics as well as pre-test and post-test mean rating scores on the Burks Behavior Rating Scale. The mean scores from the pre-tests and post-tests were used for each of the dependent t-tests to determine if significant gains occurred. An anonymous questionnaire was completed by teachers, counselors, and administrators who participated in the counseling intervention program utilizing SurveyMonkey™. The researcher analyzed the

data to form themes, categories, and patterns to discover trends and to provide reliability and validity for the quantitative component of the study and to create a realistic depiction of the phenomenon for the qualitative component. Participant responses in the qualitative findings provided insight into Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory at each level.

Findings from this study suggest that a counseling intervention program provides academic and behavioral benefits for at-risk students in alternative education settings. The data revealed that the intense counseling and staff support played a pivotal role in the at-risk seventh grade students' school year. The results showed significant differences in the pre- and post-test mean scores in reading, mathematics, and behavior. Limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations and implications for practice and further research are also discussed to further the knowledge of counseling intervention programs and at-risk students.

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DEDICATION

First and foremost to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, I never would have made it without you! This doctorate is a true testimony that with God all things are possible, if we faint not (Isaiah 40:31).

To my mother and best friend Carolyn, the wind beneath my wings. I always had the attention when you were the one who actually deserved all of the accolades I received. You are always strong, determined, encouraging, and eager to assist at anytime. Thanks for all of the sound advice, moral and ethical teachings and willing heart. I am who I am because of you. The closeness we share is a true blessing from God; it is so amazing how identical we are in nearly every way. You know the “real” me, and yet you still love me unconditionally. For that I will always love you!

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To my sister Ashlee, thanks for enduring my readings. My hope is that you may be inspired by my tenacity and endurance in education while you are on your pursuit towards educational excellence. Great things are in store for you, just wait and see!

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To my family and friends for the role you played in helping me reach the place I am today. I am forever grateful to you all in your respective places. I waited all my life for this moment to arrive and even with this great accomplishment I am still a work in progress. Anything is possible when you believe: I BELIEVE!

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

This research evaluated the impact of a counseling intervention program on the academic achievement and behavior of seventh grade at-risk students. The study focused on the dropout rate in today's urban school setting in public education. The theoretical framework, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory, and the mixed method research questions provide an introduction to the research. The statement of the problem, purpose of the study, definition of terms, limitations, and assumptions of the study are identified in this chapter.

Statement of the Problem

Stringfield and Herman (1997) found the following:

National data on schools and students shows that minority students in the United States are especially likely to be low achievers in school (Puma, Jones, Rock & Fernandez, 1993; Puma et al., 1997). Black and Hispanic children are twice as likely as White children to be low achievers and three times as likely to attend high poverty schools. The reading, writing, and mathematics skills of Black and Hispanic children are below those of White children (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990). (p. 258)

Students must be able to make adequate progress, become proficient readers, pass state mandated tests, and interact well with others in order to move to the next level. School failure is frequently characterized by poor grades, failing test scores on

achievement tests, and poor attendance. Poor educational success may eventually lead to a student acting out in school and, in due course, delinquency. Today's schools must be able to meet the needs of all students, even the academically and socially challenged students. A counseling intervention program can develop successful students and assist in bridging the achievement gap among all students.

Determining the impact of a counseling intervention program on the academic achievement and behavior of at-risk students can perhaps become the answer to attacking the dropout problem in today's schools. This study examined a group of seventh grade students who participated in a counseling intervention program and were being dually served in the Students At-Risk Program and BETA Program simultaneously. This study determined if the counseling intervention program, the BETA Program, had an impact on the academic achievement and behavior of at-risk seventh grade students.

Purpose of the Study

Early preventive strategies can improve academic achievement in students identified as at-risk. Many at-risk students have problems at home that prevent them from being successful in school. If students are provided with extra assistance in addition to the smaller class size provided in the Students At-Risk Program, they may show improved academic achievement which can lead to a higher educational and social success rates. Through the BETA Program, students receive extra services to help them with social and behavioral issues that may prevent them from focusing in school. BETA is not an acronym; it merely refers to the second component of an In-School Alternative Program for students at the secondary level. The impact of these services indirectly

allows an individual student to increase his/her academic achievement through smaller class sizes and much needed emotional support. The BETA Program allows for behavioral problems to be identified early, resulting in immediate feedback that can alleviate future consequences and hardships. If these problems are identified early and addressed, there will be a decrease in at-risk students which will hopefully reduce poor academic performance, decrease behavior problems, and improve social progress.

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of a counseling intervention program, the BETA Program, on the academic achievement and behavior of at-risk seventh grade students. There is a dire need to study the counseling intervention program to determine its success rate; if it is deemed to be successful it should be expanded around the state and eventually to the nation. If the program proves to be successful, it is suggested that the program will prevent at-risk students from dropping out of school and create model citizens who can overcome adversities to become successful educationally and socially.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for this research was psychologist Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory. There are five stages in this hierarchy of needs motivation theory: physiological, safety, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization. This research looked at the possibility of the student moving up the hierarchy to reach self-actualization. In self-actualization, the individual seeks his or her full potential which continuously changes as the person changes psychologically.

In a counseling intervention program, each student's individual needs are different and goals are set for the student to be successful. No one student has the same need as another student, and his or her needs may change from day to day. On-site counseling intervention programs can provide the ability to immediately identify the need or problem and to attack it before regression occurs.

Research Questions

This study employed a mixed method approach utilizing quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data was generated by a mean pre/post reading and mathematics test score on the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement (referred to in this study as K-TEA) along with the Burks Behavior Rating Scale (referred to in this study as BBR^{ss}S) pre/post test results. Qualitative data was generated through a phenomenology study utilizing a questionnaire. Participants who had experienced this phenomenon answered a questionnaire describing their lived experiences.

This research was guided by the following research questions.

Quantitative Research Questions

1. Does the counseling intervention program increase the pre/post-test reading achievement of the seventh grade at-risk students as measured by the results of the K-TEA?
2. Does the counseling intervention program increase the pre/post-test mathematics achievement of the seventh grade at-risk students as measured by the results of the K-TEA?

3. Does the counseling intervention program improve the pre/post-test behavior of the seventh grade at-risk students as measured by the results of the BBRS?

Null Hypotheses

- H₀₁: There is no difference between the pre/post-test reading achievement of seventh grade at-risk students participating in the counseling intervention program.
- H₀₂: There is no difference between the pre/post-test mathematics achievement of seventh grade at-risk students participating in the counseling intervention program.
- H₀₃: There is no difference between the pre/post-test behavior of seventh grade at-risk students participating in the counseling intervention program.

Qualitative Research Question

In what ways does a counseling intervention program impact seventh grade at-risk students' academic achievement and behavior?

Background and Significance of the Problem

At-risk programs are designed to meet the academic and social needs of at-risk students in selected schools. Students are placed in the Students At-Risk Program based on the Student Assistance Profile which generates a list of students with specific at-risk indicators, and by teachers recommendations of students who they feel will benefit from the Students At-Risk Program. In order to be placed into the BETA Program, students must be a part of the Students At-Risk Program, as well as meet additional program requirements. Research has shown that high school dropout rates can be reduced if

students are identified early; therefore, early identification of these students is critical to their educational and social success.

Local school districts have long operated dropout-prevention programs, but have not conducted evaluations to study the effectiveness of their programs. Beginning in the late 1980s, the U.S. Department of Education conducted three large evaluations of the effectiveness of programs designed to reduce dropping out. (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002, p.44)

Under the umbrella of at-risk programs for the State of Florida are programs to meet the needs of various students. These programs include: Dropout Prevention and Early Intervention Programs, Teenage Parent Programs, Second Chance Schools, English for Speakers of Other Languages Programs (ESOL), and Federal Title I Programs. According to the State of Florida's program description, the purpose of the Dropout Prevention Program is to provide a range of programs and services for students who are considered academically at-risk. Students may be considered at-risk due to a number of factors, such as pregnancy, habitual truancy, or limited proficiency in English. The public schools are required to provide programs and services that meet the needs of such students. At-risk programs thus have the common goal of reducing risk and maximizing the student's opportunity for educational success.

The Office of Bureau of Adult/Vocational, Alternative Education and Dropout Prevention offer numerous alternative programs to provide basic and support services to accommodate children with various needs. These programs can be divided into five general categories: in-school alternative programs, alternative programs, teenage parent

programs, disciplinary programs, and youth services. Programs are provided in alternative schools, centers, and in regular schools. There are countless programs offered under the in-school alternative programs; however, for this study emphasis was placed on a stand-alone program that services students from the Students At-Risk Program, an In School Alternative Education Program conducted in an urban school setting. The Students At-Risk Program, which will be referred to as SARP in this study, offers special strategies and unconventional methods to motivate students and promote their academic success. The program that was the focus of this study is the BETA Program, a counseling intervention program that only services seventh grade students that are participating in SARP.

The goal of SARP is to provide secondary schools with a special alternative program that meets the needs of students who exhibit behaviors which might lead to dropping out of school. The overall purpose is to improve the educational opportunities for students who are not meeting the standards of the regular school or classroom setting by providing a student-centered environment. Meeting the needs of these students will help them become successful academically, as well as socially, and allow them to grow in a supportive environment.

Through the BETA Program, students receive extra services to help them with social and behavioral issues that may prevent them from focusing in school. The effect of these services indirectly allows the individual student to increase their academic achievement through smaller class sizes and much needed emotional support. The

program allows for behavioral problems to be identified early causing immediate feedback to alleviate future consequences and hardships.

Research Design

The study employed a mixed method approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative research was the primary research method used in this study. The quantitative variables analyzed the mean scores on a pre/post reading and mathematics achievement test, as well as a mean score on a behavior rating scale for the at-risk seventh grade students. The secondary method was qualitative research focusing on the teachers, counselors, and administrators who worked with the counseling intervention program.

Definition of Terms

Counseling Intervention Program. For the purpose of this study, a counseling intervention program is defined as the intervention program provided to the seventh grade at-risk students enrolled simultaneously in the Students at-Risk Program (SARP) and the BETA Program.

Academic Achievement. For the purpose of this study, academic is defined as a score on the reading and mathematics component the Kaufman-Test of Educational Achievement (K-TEA).

Behavior. For the purpose of this study, behavior is defined as a behavior rating score on the Burks Behavior Rating Scale (BBRS). The lower the score, the less deviant the behavior a child has from the norm. The behavior is divided into 3 categories, low deviant behavior, moderate deviant behavior, and high deviant behavior.

At-Risk Student. For the purpose of this study, an at-risk student is defined as a student enrolled in the Students At-Risk Program (SARP).

Students At-Risk Program (SARP). A program designed to meet the academic and social needs of students at selected secondary schools. A major emphasis is placed on personalized instruction where each teacher provides individual guidance and serves as an advisor to selected participants.

BETA Program. The second component of an In-School Alternative Program for students at the secondary level. The BETA Program serves seventh grade students that are also a part of the Students-At-Risk Program.

Limitations of the Study

The BETA Program, along with the counseling intervention program, is a stand-alone program and is only conducted at the school site which is being studied. There is no comparison group; thus, the study was based on the pretest/posttest control design. A purposeful sample will be utilized, as opposed to a random sample for quantitative data generation. Students were selected non-randomly based on the SARP and BETA Programs' criteria. The study does not have a comparison program in the local public school system. The uniqueness of the program being evaluated and the small sample size had an effect on the possible generalizability of this study.

Assumptions of the Study

There are many assumptions related to this study. A major assumption is that the counseling intervention program had an impact on the academic achievement and behavior of at-risk seventh grade students. In regard to academic achievement, it was

assumed that the pre/post test results on the reading and mathematics component of the K-TEA were accurately monitored and scored during the testing administration. The BBRS is also assumed to have been answered honestly by the participants in the study. It was further assumed that the K-TEA and BBRS are reliable and valid and provide a true depiction of the academic achievement and behavior of the seventh grade at-risk students.

Assumptions related to the qualitative portion of this study included the assumption that the questions answered by the individuals who worked closely in the program were answered candidly to provide a factual look into the program. Given the assumption about the truthfulness of the responses, it is assumed that the counseling intervention program had an impact on the academic achievement and behavior of the seventh grade at-risk students. Hence, the day-to-day operation of the program, from a qualitative perspective, was assumed to have a positive correlation to the quantitative component of this mixed method study.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a counseling intervention program on student achievement as it relates to academic achievement and behavior of at-risk seventh grade students. The theoretical framework for this research is based on psychologist Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory and is presented as a mixed method study. The study focused on the impact of the counseling intervention program on academic achievement and behavior of seventh grade at-risk students through a mean pre/post test score. Academic achievement was stipulated as a mean score on the reading and mathematics component of the K-TEA, and behavior as a mean rating on the

BBRS. As a qualitative study, phenomenology will be used to gain a truer depiction of the BETA Program.

Quantitative and qualitative research questions were formulated to take a closer look into the null hypotheses. Assumptions of the study were categorized to present a viewpoint based on data generation. Limitations of the study were mentioned to eliminate any bias or misconception of the program being evaluated. Key terms that are found in the study were also defined.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter reviewed the literature relative to the impact of a counseling intervention program on the academic achievement and behavior of seventh grade at-risk students. This chapter reviewed the context of the study, urban education in a public school setting. The theoretical framework that guided the research is outlined, and counseling intervention programs, the independent variable in this study, are reviewed. The literature review also examined dropout prevention, along with the dependant variables which are reading achievement, mathematics achievement, and student behavior.

At-Risk Students

A “national movement to bring comprehensive mental health services to youth right where they are in schools began in the mid-1980s and developed rapidly in the 1990s. Expanded school mental health (ESMH) programs augment traditional services from school counselors, psychologists, and social workers by linking schools to community mental health centers, health departments, and other social services” (Weist & Christoeolu, 2000, p. 50). The BETA Program is a school-based mental health program that deals with preventing multiple-risk students from using alcohol and other drugs. The intent is to serve students who will benefit from short-term, intensive counseling. The classes are designed to create a supportive learning environment where relationships are developed and nurtured.

At-risk students must be identified early to prevent failures academically and socially. Providing assistance to students once they have encountered problems can lead to a myriad of other issues. Strategies must be in place early to help students succeed rather than waiting to rehabilitate them once it is too late. In public education, the needs of all students must be met which involves a restructuring of schools across the nation. “Evidence of relations between school characteristics and student dropout outcome suggests that the context, climate, and organization of schools can serve to modify student dropout behavior” (Zvoch, 2006, p. 100). Creating and maintaining a safe, nurturing environment for the at-risk student will assist in meeting the demands of this target population.

Dropout Prevention

In today’s society, there is an urgent need to meet all educational goals and expectations for all students. This is especially true for the at-risk student population in today’s public schools. With school violence at an all time high, early prevention, intervention programs, and strategies must be implemented to provide a safe educational environment. These viable programs will ensure that students are receiving a safe, sound, and quality education.

The early identification of the at-risk student is critical to his/her educational success. Research has been conducted on alternative learning programs in urban school settings in the United States. In a study conducted by Nicholas and Steffy (1999), it was revealed that “nationally, it is estimated that between 15 and 30% of students will drop

out before they finish high school. This figure is significantly higher for African-Americans, Hispanics and students from low socio-economic backgrounds”

(p. 208). Hispanic dropout and non-dropout rates between the eighth and 10th grades were compared in a study conducted by Boyd and Tashakkori (1994). In that study it was suggested:

To achieve higher graduation rates, it is necessary to create special educational programs and curricula, provide opportunities for academic success, foster cooperation among students, create awareness of cultural and language differences, and increase sensitivity to cultural diversity among teachers and other school personnel, (p. 4)

Dropout prevention programs began in the early 1960s to close a needed gap in education in an effort to reach the needs of all students in the United States. At first, these programs materialized in the private sector before branching out into the public school system. These programs ranged from Freedom Schools to Open Schools. These programs were largely placed in suburban and urban communities more so than in rural communities.

The urban alternatives were aimed largely at making school work, for populations that were not succeeding there-minority youngsters and the poor. The early suburban alternatives, on the other hand, became innovative programs seeking to invent and pursue new ways to educate. (Raywid, 1999, p. 47).

Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, President Johnson placed a large emphasis on America's education within the public school system and dropout prevention programs began to emerge.

One of the major goals of alternative education is to return the at-risk student to his/her regular school or to the regular school population. Alternative education has had many different meanings to different individuals based on their objectives. In the 1960s and 1970s, schools were not seen as meeting the needs of all stakeholders. Thus, the many facets of alternative education emerged, enabling the United States to be on the forefront of reaching the needs of all students. It is paramount that interventions are put into place to assist the at-risk student in dealing with the academic, social, and emotional stresses of life. "Interventions that incorporate the values, culture, and norms of the community in their efforts to enhance children's well-being are most likely to be successful because newly learned behavior is easier to implement in a culturally familiar and supportive environment" (Black & Krishnakumar, 1998, p. 639).

Today, there is an array of alternative education programs ranging from dropout prevention to magnet and charter schools. Several types of programs have been designed to benefit every kind of student. In the alternative education setting today, these programs consist of Schools of Choice, Last Chance Schools, and Schools with a Remedial Focus. Each type of alternative education program is vying for its place in the learning environment in hopes that it will enlighten and prove advantageous to creating astute learners and citizens. Although there are alternative education programs in many states, different states provide different

services. Florida enacted the Dropout Prevention Act of 1986, Section 230.2316, authorizing and encouraging district school boards to establish comprehensive dropout prevention programs designed to meet the diverse needs of students in today's society who may need alternative strategies to support them in their educational and social development.

The law stipulates dropout prevention and academic intervention programs may differ from traditional educational programs and schools in scheduling, administrative structure, philosophy, curriculum, or setting and shall employ alternative teaching methodologies, curricula, learning activities, and diagnostic and assessment procedures in order to meet the needs, interests, abilities, and talents of eligible students. (Florida Department of Education).

All students have a right to free and appropriate education which is especially true for students who display characteristics of being a potential high school dropout. Students who do not fair well academically tend to develop excessive absences. One of the criteria for entrance into the Dropout Prevention Program deals with a pattern of excessive absenteeism or being a habitual truant. A habitual truant is any individual who has absences of any type (excused or unexcused) totaling fifteen or more during the previous school year. Students who have a history of being truant are at the top of the list of potential high school dropouts.

The at-risk student, due to lack of motivation and interest in school, can develop truancy which results in poor academic achievement. Truancy can lead to all sorts of problems if it is not dealt with at an early age. Truancy is a major problem in the United

States that can negatively affect a student's educational success. Truancy can lead to dropping out of school, alcohol and drug abuse, poor grades, and low self-esteem.

Absenteeism is detrimental to students' achievement, promotion, graduation, self-esteem, and employment potential. Clearly, students who miss school fall behind their peers in the classroom. This in turn, leads to low self-esteem and increases the likelihood that at-risk students will drop out of school. (DeKalb, 1999, p. 2)

Truancy can be controlled from within the schools and the problem must be addressed at its onset. Through the use of the SARP and BETA Program, students can be more closely monitored to eliminate truancy.

At-risk students are often categorized by their poor attendance which leads to truancy. Prevention efforts are in place across the nation to circumvent this crisis. Schools must undertake creative measures, as well as, implementing unconventional programs to meet the at-risk students' demands.

Anti-truancy efforts are not new, but there are powerful new incentives which are now spurring school officials' interest in keeping students in class at their school. Not only does the "No Child Left Behind" Act (President Bush's specially named reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) require schools to boost attendance and lower dropout rates, schools will never be able to succeed in meeting the law's Annual Yearly Progress goals if students aren't in class learning. (Stover, 2005, p. 49)

Although there are attendance policies that limit the number of acceptable absences, and even more severe penalties for unexcused absences, this does not seem to

actually improve student attendance. A program needs to be implemented that will oversee at-risk students' attendance to motivate them to attend school while eliminating the possibility of these students dropping out of school. The BETA Program is set up to do just this by calling parents/guardians each and every day the student is absent. This is one variable that may have a direct impact on school attendance rates.

In today's society, there is a great need to understand and address the needs of the at-risk student population. There must be specific objectives set up to alleviate the pressures that these students are dealing with which range from low self-esteem to poor academics and attendance. Providing at-risk students a safe and nurturing environment often leads to their overall success. Irmsher (1997) discussed the importance of education reform and students at-risk. In observing two broad components of effective programs, Irmsher discovered that "there were two components of effective programs: (1) these schools function as caring, cohesive communities, and (2) they operate under standards similar to high-reliability organizations" (p. 2). Ideas and resources must be sought to determine what makes a school a caring community and what are the characteristics of high-reliability schools. In SARP, students are given more one-on-one attention, and the teachers are able to get to know them for who they really are, not just a name on a roster.

Research indicates that at-risk students who have experienced school failure will more than likely experience failure as an adult. In the Brenner (1976) and Rumberger (1987) studies (as cited in Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 1998), it was indicated that "for individuals, for example, school failure has been associated with functioning less successfully as adults in roles associated with work and family, higher mortality and

suicide rates, and greater admissions to state mental hospitals” (p. 310). Social support is shown to be a valuable concept to assist the at-risk student with overcoming obstacles and becoming successful.

Counseling Intervention

Recent mandates have led to the recent rise in students dropping out of school. Students are not feeling safe and are not getting the necessary support at home to be successful in school. Having support at school can ease the difficulties students may have and increase their sense of belonging. Indirectly, this can lead to fewer students dropping out of high school.

Counseling intervention can enable students to deal with the stresses of life and help them feel better about themselves as well as others around them. Counselors, teachers, and administrators involved with this study assist with behavior modification, while infusing counseling to go along with the academic and social agenda. Keys, Bemak, and Lockhart (1998) found the following:

The focus of school counseling has shifted at different points in time in response to changing social, economic, and political conditions (Paisley & Borders, 1995). During the course of the twentieth century, school counselors have moved from focusing on vocational guidance (pre-1950s), to fostering personal growth (1950s), to enhancing individual development (1960s), to implementing comprehensive developmental guidance and counseling programs (1970s-present) (Paisley & Borders, 1995; Wittmer, 1993). Each change in focus prompted a corresponding change in the counselor’s role and function, (p. 382)

The array of circumstances in today's schools has led to a redesign of counseling in schools. In a study conducted by Carlson, 1996; Dryfoos, 1990; Kirst, 1991 it was discussed: "As schools move forward into the twenty-first century, they face the considerable challenge of educating a growing population of students at risk of school failure" (as cited in Keys et al., 2005, p. 381). It is evident that students in school today have a plethora of problems outside of the school setting that carry over into their school setting. Family issues often are not dealt with and will have an adverse effect on the student's day-to-day school operation. If these needs are not dealt with at school, students, especially the at-risk students, will look for success in other tempting situations.

"The gap between the mental health needs of children and adolescents in the United States and the services available to them is a widely recognized problem (Brenner, Weist, Adelman, Taylor, & Vernon-Smiley, 2007, p. 487). It is here where counseling intervention plays an important part of the total development of the student. School sites need individuals who are trained in dealing with volatile situations and behaviors, crisis intervention and management, excessive absences, educational achievement as well as other social ills specific to the at-risk student.

"A growing body of empirical literature that includes the results of controlled clinical trials and with-in group studies has documented the impact of mental health treatments and other interventions on child and adolescent outcomes (Hoagwood, Olin, Kerker, Kratochwill, Crowe, & Saka, 2007, p. 66). Having an onsite counseling intervention program eliminates problems that otherwise may go unnoticed. Students are

allowed to have immediate feedback that stops further disruptions in school and works on changing negative behavior to a more positive response and action.

BETA Program

The BETA Program is provided at the school site for students who exhibit characteristics exceeding the SARP requirements for intervention needs based on the Hawkins/Catalano Risk and Protective Factors for Alcohol and Other Drug Problems in Adolescence and Early Adulthood Checklist. The BETA Program has a fundamental component which is its comprehensive, intensive approach involving a significant amount of time with each student.

According to the BETA Manual (1990):

BETA is not primarily a behavior modification program, nor is the classroom a Special Education one. BETA is geared toward helping children who show early signs of having future problems with academics, social skills, problem solving, and coping skills. Due to the short duration of this intensive prevention model, BETA would not be a suitable choice for children who need longer treatment. Referrals are to be made for children who are at-risk for potential problems; that is, children who are just beginning to show signs of difficulties. Children with severe and chronic behavior problems will not be best served by BETA. (p. 21)

The BETA Program is an early intervention/prevention program designed to reduce certain risk variables that may prevent the at-risk seventh grade student from dropping out of school. The main purpose of the program is to meet the needs of students who may be at-risk for substance abuse. The program is intended to serve students who

will benefit from the unique preventative counseling component of the BETA Program. The program is geared to increase various protective factors to enable students to cope in various situations. The counseling component is the central ingredient of the BETA Program. Counseling sessions include positive peer interactions which are promoted as therapeutic in nature. Parental support is also a critical component of the program as parents must attend various activities during the school year and attend training classes.

The BETA Program has several objectives that are set for the school year. There must be 30 students in the program. Each participating student receives a minimum of one individual counseling session per week along with group sessions held three times a week. Students are seen daily for encouragement and support. An incentive plan is utilized to redirect inappropriate behavior while rewarding positive behavior and interactions. Helping the seventh grade at-risk student to be successful overall is one of the missions of the program. Academic achievement and behavior are enforced and improved as a part of the program. Students receive assistance with their academic studies, and the students rotate together for every class period. All students are instructed in the same way since there is only one math teacher and one reading teacher specifically for the BETA Program. This ensures that the students hear the same instruction the same way.

The BETA Program has a demanding and comprehensive approach involving a great deal of time spent with the individual student. Early identification of potential risk factors, intensive counseling, and academic support are key elements of the BETA Program. Research has shown that high school dropouts can be reduced if students are

identified early. “There is a demand in this country for effective programs and services designed to alleviate the societal problems, including deviant behavior, exhibited by increasing populations of at-risk youths” (Everett, Chadwell, & McChesney, 2002, p. 43). The counseling intervention program in which the seventh grade at-risk students are part of is doing that by being proactive before the undesirable outcomes are obtained.

In research conducted by Black and Krishnakumar (1998), the authors mentioned that “successful interventions and programs for children will improve their opportunities for resilience, often by improving the environments in which they live. For example, the Violence Prevention Project in Boston is a community-based effort to prevent youth violence” (p. 639). These programs involve all stakeholders who can have a lasting effect on the at-risk student. Support from outsiders, as well as those who directly come into contact with these students, is instrumental in developing a total person. Providing proactive interventions and strategies will prevent the at-risk students from succumbing to more challenging obstacles at a later date.

According to Miller, Fitch, and Marshall (2003), “educators who work with students in alternative education programs need to help students develop a greater perception of control. Specifically, counselors can assist them in making connections between their thoughts and actions and academic and social consequences” (p. 550). Counseling intervention programs also teach students how to deal with internal and external factors in gaining self-fulfillment toward academic and social achievement.

“Counselors and teachers who work in alternative education settings can help students by focusing in the consequences of specific actions and by exploring new options of responding” (Miller et al, 2003, p. 550).

Research indicates high self-esteem serves as a protective factor to youth involvement in risky health. High self-esteem is associated with high academic achievement, involvement in sport and physical activity and development of effective coping, and peer resistance skills. Conversely, low self-esteem is associated with youth involvement in alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; depression; suicide; violence; early sexual activity; teen pregnancy; and poor peer relationships. In the school environment, high levels of self-esteem increase the likelihood that youth will connect positively to peers, teachers, and the school as whole, important determinants of academic success. (King, Vidourek, Davis & McClellan, 2002, p. 294)

Academic Achievement and Behavior

There are numerous at-risk programs geared toward increasing achievement and decreasing inappropriate behavior. Using an experimental design with a one-year follow-up, a study conducted by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention sought to assess the effectiveness of one alternative education program in changing students' school-related attitudes, academic performance, and self-reported delinquency. The study found that “the program was able to produce short-term effects on grade point average, school attendance, and self-esteem” (Cox, 1999, p. 323). The goal of this study,

was to evaluate a counseling intervention program and its impact on student achievement as it relates to academics and behavior of at-risk seventh grade students.

It is essential that at-risk students experience success as it relates to academic achievement.

Kaufman, Klein, and Frase (1999) report that in 1997 the dropout rates were 25.3 percent for Hispanic youth, 13.4 percent for black, and 7.6 percent for white students (iii), and these figures only hint at the numbers of these students who might graduate from high school but leave without really having experienced much or any success at all” (National Center for Educational Statistics).

In the literature review, one concept identified as crucial in improving student achievement is that of whole school reform. Whole-school reform is defined as a movement that seeks to improve school performance by simultaneously aligning all aspects of a school’s environment with a central, guiding vision. “These programs can produce compelling results such as substantial gains in student achievement. However, there is a catch. The design must be well implemented, and that is where many schools and districts have run into problems” (Herding, 1999, p. 2).

The counseling intervention program holds academic success in high regards. If students are in control of their emotions and behavior, they are better able to focus and reach their educational goals. Aunola, Stattin, and Nurmi (2000) studied “the relationship between the achievement strategies adolescents deploy in school context, and their self-esteem, school adjustment, and internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors” (p. 289). The study showed that:

Adolescents' achievement strategies are not only associated with their school adjustment, but also with their overall externalizing and internalizing problem behavior, and that the association between strategies and problem behavior is partly mediated by adolescents' school adjustment. Moreover, the results also revealed that part of the associations between self-esteem and problem behavior is mediated via adolescents' achievement strategies, (p. 300)

A major component of the counseling intervention program being studied is to provide strategies for the students to use in everyday life. A successful program has a lasting affect on their participants, not just for the moment or timeframe designated for the program. "Without question, promoting school success and preventing school failure are the objectives of every educator" (Beebe-Frankenberger, Lane, Bocian, Gresham, & MacMillain, 2005, p. 10). The counseling intervention program, the BETA Program is specifically designed not to alienate any student based on his or her academic failures and/or social misfortunes.

The role of leaders and teachers is a crucial part of school accountability. Effective leadership is extremely important when dealing with educational issues. "At one time, principals and teachers could satisfy the demands of accountability simply by working hard and following accepted professional standards. By contrast, the current accountability movement emphasizes results" (Lashway, 1999, p. 2). Principals must now be able and willing to develop and nurture a common vision. Teachers who are given the task to educate, motivate, and stimulate the minds of at-risk students are carefully chosen by the principal to ensure that the program is successful.

Schools must begin holding high expectations for all students if they are expected to reach high academic and social achievement, although this is easier said than done. Society tends to believe that all students are expected to achieve highly, yet what is professed is not always practiced. “In 1998, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that minorities consistently perform below their nonminority peers in reading” (Shippen, Houchins, Steventon, & Sartor, 2005, p. 176). In many urban and inner-city schools, low expectations dominate. For this reason alone, the SARP and BETA Program can break some of the social barriers and motivate at-risk youth to strive for success. The role of caring and effective leaders and teachers is an essential part of school accountability.

It is important that programs are put into place to circumvent inappropriate behaviors. With the assistance of strong teaching, techniques, structure, support, discipline, and counseling programs, students can receive the attention they need. According to Beebe-Frankenberger, Lane, Bocian, Gresham & MacMillan Beebe-Frankenberger (2005):

Positive behavior-support literature suggests that approximately 80% of school age students will respond to this primary level of prevention (Colvin, Sugai, & Kame’enui, 1993). The remaining approximately 15% -20% of students may not respond to global intervention efforts and will require secondary efforts to help them acquire the necessary knowledge and skills (Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004). (p.10)

Studying alternative programs can provide beneficial insight into whether or not a community in-service program like the BETA Program can make a difference in at-risk students. Gold (1995) revealed that “recent findings have shown that effective programmes include staff members that provide a great deal of warm, personal support and with a universal attitude that students are not permitted to fail” (p. 8). In addition, “alternative programmes tend to have their greatest success when they are first started, due to the fact that in the early stages teachers are enthusiastic, expectations are high and the programme is highly visible” (Nichols & Steffy, 1999, p. 208).

The at-risk student must be seen as an invaluable part of the school environment. Students must not allow the stigma, which comes with the label of being at-risk, to hinder their progress. The same expectations that are required of the regular education students should be applied to at-risk students with every extra effort provided to ensure their needs will be met. Lumsden (1997) stated that all schools claim to hold high expectations for all students; however, what is professed is not always practiced. “Teachers maintain uniformly high expectations for all students, others have ‘great expectations’ for particular segments of the student population but minimal expectations for others” (Lumsden, 1997, p. 1). In many urban and inner-city schools, low expectations predominate. For this reason alone, the BETA Program can break some of the social barriers and motivate at-risk youth to strive for success. The role of leaders and teachers is a crucial part of school accountability. Having a caring, supportive staff and faculty are crucial in the success of the at-risk student. According to McMillan and Reed (1994), “teachers play an important role in the success of resilient students” (p. 139).

When deciding the program structure for at-risk students, it is paramount that each student's best interest is kept first. Students can have high academic achievement if they are supported and encouraged.

McMahon, Browning, and Rose-Colley (2001) found:

Administrators, teachers, support staff, parents/guardians, and representatives of community agencies all struggle with issues related to child health and family needs as they seek to improve the academic success of children. To improve the likelihood of academic success, schools and communities need to address the multifaceted dynamics and critical importance of combined risk and protective factors, (p. 53)

All students, regardless of their educational label, should be pushed to a higher level in an effort to motivate them and increase their academic achievement. There are many alternative education models available to reach at-risk youth. The urban school system examined in this study is in a unique situation since it is able to offer an array of services to meet the diverse needs of the at-risk student and to ensure that no child is left behind. Alternative education programs can make a difference in the lives of our at-risk youth. The SARP and BETA Program, although different in delivery approach, both have the same goal: to increase the success of the at-risk student through academic achievement, motivation and self-esteem.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory

In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory, there are five stages that encompass an individual's life (see Figure 2.2). A need does not have to be fully

completed before the next one surface. The stronger the need, the more desire there is to satisfy the need. The independent variable in this study was the counseling intervention program. The counseling intervention program allows the seventh grade at-risk student to self-reflect, openly identify his or her needs, and work on correcting the problem area(s). Through daily counseling sessions, either individual or group, the counselors are able to work closely with the student. If the student's physiological and safety needs aren't met, counselors can more effectively and efficiently identify the need in order for students to have a desire to attain the next level. If the student's basic needs are not being met, then there is a chance that this student will not care about self-actualization which is the pinnacle of an individual's needs.

The dependent variables in the study are reading achievement, mathematics achievement, and student behavior. The counseling intervention program supports the needs of the student so that he or she can move forward toward self-actualization. The goal of the counseling intervention program is to eliminate any obstacles that may lead to the seventh grade at-risk student experiencing failure. The independent variable will guide the theoretical framework using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs for Motivation Theory to determine its impact on the dependent variables.

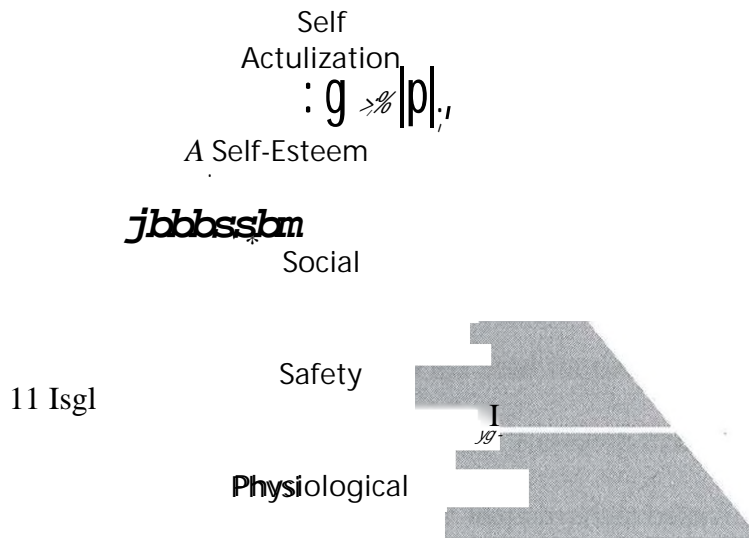


Figure 2.1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid

Chapter Summary

This chapter identified key areas that are directly related to the study. The role of dropout prevention programs as it relates to the early identification of the at-risk student was explored in this chapter. The importance of counseling intervention programs for students was identified through different studies. Major changes that led to dropout prevention, as it is known today, were revealed, providing an insight into the sense of urgency in meeting the needs of the at-risk student population. The lack of intervention programs in secondary schools were noted as a needed area for at-risk students.

The influence and effect of counseling intervention services and programs for the at-risk student were discussed. The roles of counselors as providers of invaluable resources to the student and family, individually as well as collectively, were mentioned. The lack of school-based mental health programs was examined as a way to meet the

need of the total student. The BETA Program, a counseling intervention program, that serves as the independent variable in this study was outlined and explored.

Programs to improve the academic achievement of the at-risk student were also cited to provide a clear picture of the task that must be undertaken to bridge the achievement gap of the at-risk student population. Research on academic achievement and its effect on the at-risk, reluctant student showed the need for the development of programs geared to assist in remediation for these students. Research indicating the need for prevention and intervention programs to circumvent inappropriate behavior was found in various studies. Creating a nurturing, supportive environment as a way to assist the at-risk student were also discussed.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology, a mixed method approach, which directed the study. The quantitative and qualitative research questions that guided the study are provided. The philosophical framework and its role in the study are discussed. The primary research method of the study was quantitative in nature and the instrumentations with its validity and reliability were provided. Phenomenology was the qualitative approach of the study that was used to validate the quantitative findings. Data collection and analysis that will guide the research are addressed. Ethical considerations that steered the study are also addressed in this chapter.

Philosophical Framework

The role of a philosophical framework is to design a research study. Due to the nature of this study, the philosophical framework utilized constructivism. Social constructivism allows for the researcher to seek information from the world. “The goal of the research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ view of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2003, p. 8). Hanson et al. (2005) found “in the social sciences at large, mixed methods research has become increasingly popular and may be considered a legitimate, stand-alone research design” (p. 224). “Recognizing that all methods have limitations, researchers felt that biases inherent in any single method could neutralize or cancel the biases of other methods” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15).

Research Questions

This research was guided by the following research questions.

Quantitative Research Questions

1. Does the counseling intervention program increase the pre/post-test reading achievement of the seventh grade at-risk students as measured by the results of the K-TEA?
2. Does the counseling intervention program increase the pre/post-test mathematics achievement of the seventh grade at-risk students as measured by the results of the K-TEA?
3. Does the counseling intervention program improve the pre/post-test behavior of the seventh grade at-risk students as measured by the results of the BBRs?

Null Hypotheses

- H₀₁: There is no difference between the pre/post-test reading achievement of seventh grade at-risk students participating in the counseling intervention program.
- H₀₂: There is no difference between the pre/post-test mathematics achievement of seventh grade at-risk students participating in the counseling intervention program.
- H₀₃: There is no difference between the pre/post-test behavior of seventh grade at-risk students participating in the counseling intervention program.

Qualitative Research Question

In what ways does the counseling intervention program impact the seventh grade at-risk students' academic achievement and behavior?

Research Design

The uniqueness of this study leads to a mixed method approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The mixed method approach was selected to look at the data and provide a clear explanation of what occurred in the counseling intervention program. The primary method of this embedded approach was quantitative research with qualitative as the secondary research method. Using multiple forms of data collection and analysis assists the researcher in better understanding the impact of the counseling intervention on the seventh grade at-risk student.

For the quantitative portion of the study, the independent variable was the counseling intervention component of the BETA Program. The dependent variables are reading achievement scores, mathematics achievement scores, and student behavior scores. The mean scores from pre-tests and post-tests were used for each of the dependent t-tests to determine if significant gains occurred. The qualitative research consisted of teachers, counselors, and administrators that participated in the BETA Program completing an anonymous questionnaire using Survey Monkey™. The researcher analyzed the data to form themes, categories, and patterns. Trends and themes that were discovered through the questionnaire provided reliability and validity in the study through the use of multiple data sources.

Quantitative Method

Sample and Sampling Procedures

The study consisted of 30 at-risk seventh grade students who were placed into the BETA Program based on recommendations from teachers, counselors, and

administrators. Once students are identified and selected based on the BETA requirements, they must also meet the requirements to be a participant in SARP. The six grade teachers, counselors, administrators, and the Office of Alternative Education are the main referral sources of the BETA Program.

Instrumentation

The instruments that were used in this study are the Kaufman-Test of Educational Achievement (K-TEA) Brief Form and the Burks Behavior Rating Scale (BBRS). The K-TEA assessed the at-risk seventh grade students' reading and mathematics achievement, and the BBRS assessed their behavior. Both instruments were used as a pre-test and post-test at the beginning and end of the at-risk students' seventh grade year. All students who participate in the counseling intervention program were given both tests to measure individual student achievement to see if the program had an impact on the students' academic achievement and behavior. A difference in mean scores for each scale was used to determine the impact of the counseling intervention program on the seventh grade at-risk students.

The K-TEA was developed by Alan S. Kaufman and Nadeen L. Kaufman and was designed to measure achievement in reading, mathematics, oral language, and written language. The K-TEA is an individually administered test, and the at-risk seventh grade students used the Brief Form which consists of 52 questions for both the reading and mathematics tests. The K-TEA utilizes the discontinue rule which allows the examiner to stop administering a subtest to prevent the student from becoming frustrated.

Dichotomous scoring is used, and a correct answer is one point and an incorrect answer receives a zero.

The BBRS, developed by Harold F. Burks, has 110 items categorized into 19 patterns of behavior and is completed by a rater who has had daily contact with the student for a minimum of two weeks. The test indicates areas where changes in behavior patterns occurred over a period of time and indicates areas where further evaluation may be needed. Only the mean rating score was utilized for data purposes for this study.

Reliability

The K-TEA was tested on the split-half reliability. The properties of the Rasch-Wright Latent Trait Model were used for computing the split-half-reliability. Kaufman and Kaufman (1998) stated the following in reference to the split-half reliability:

This was necessary because according to K-TEA administration rules, each student in the standardization sample was administered only a subtest of the items in each test, with testing proceeding until the last item was reached or, more typically, until the discontinue criterion was met. (p. 112)

“The subtests had good reliability coefficients with mean values for all grades ranging from .85 (Mathematics) to .89 (Reading), and mean values for all ages ranging from .87 (Mathematics) to .91 (Reading)” (Kaufman & Kaufman, 1998, p. 112).

The BBRS identifies patterns of behavior in children in grades one to nine and should only be used as a prescreening device, generally with students who have behavioral difficulties. Students are rated by individuals who have frequent contact with the student, usually the teacher or parent. The students are rated on a five point Likert-

type scale where one signifies “not having noticed the behavior” to five “noticing the behavior to a very large degree.” The scores are added vertically in each of the nineteen columns to derive a score. According to Zlomke and Bush (2004) in their review of the BBRS, item reliability averaged .705 based on a sample of 95 disturbed children with test-retest ratings over 10 days (Eleventh Mental Measurements Yearbook, 2004).

Validity

The validity of a test shows the degree to which a test achieves what it was designed to do. In the K-TEA, the validity was determined by comparing the items with the K-TEA Comprehensive Form items. According to Bischoff, (2004), the BBRS possesses discriminant validity as well as factorial validity. “Discriminant validity is based upon a study in which the BBRS was found to identify as troubled a significantly greater percentage of children from a group of 153 referred children than from a group of 494 nonreferred children” (Bischoff, as cited in the 11 Mental Measurements Yearbook, 2004). The BBRS validity has been questioned in regard to factor analysis of category scores due to age. The same questions are asked about the behavior of students in grade one and grade nine. Certain behaviors are considered age appropriate behavior and are expected for children at that developmental stage.

Data Collection and Processing Procedures

Guidelines for conducting research were followed and permission from Barry University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) were gained prior to conducting any part of the research. Upon receiving consent from the IRB, the data- gathering and

data-recording procedures for the study began. Archival data were collected from a third party and used to obtain the mean score to be used for the pre-test and post-test results and was completely anonymous. A Third Party Confidentiality Agreement was used for collection of the archival data. Once the archival data is collected, it will be kept for five years in a secure, locked cabinet protected from any possible disclosure and then destroyed. There was no contact made with any student in the data collecting process or during any portion of the study. No identifiable information was obtained maintaining anonymity and gathered data will be kept confidential. All guidelines and protocols required by the IRB were followed at all times to assure the integrity of the research.

Seventh grade at-risk students' overall mean scores were used and the following variables were used for data analysis to measure academic achievement which includes pre-test and post-test results on the reading and mathematics component of the K-TEA. Student behavior will be measured by a mean rating score on the pre-test and post-test rating results on the BBRS. The K-TEA and BBRS are both administered at the beginning and end of grade seven.

The study will utilize the following independent and dependent variables (Figure 2.2).

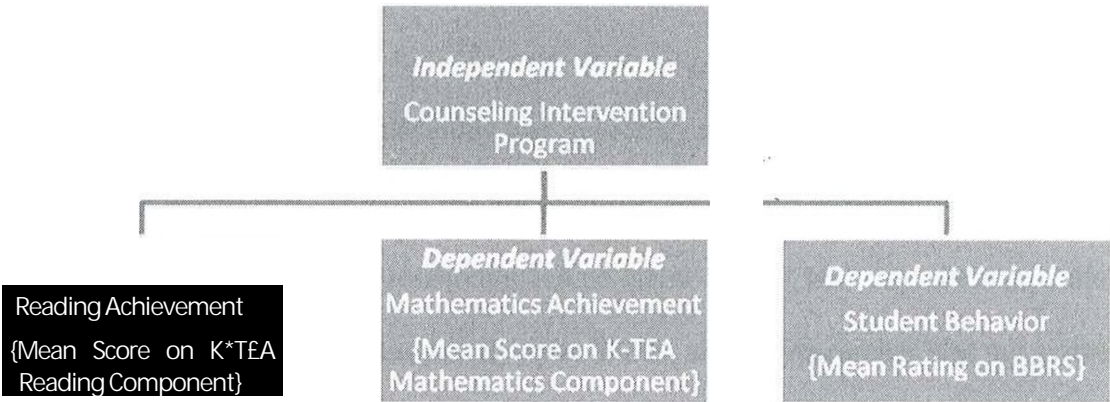


Figure 2.2: Independent variable counseling intervention and dependent variables reading achievement, mathematics achievement, and student behavior

Data Analysis Procedures

Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used in this study. Specifically, means, standard deviations, and dependent t-tests were used to determine if significant differences in reading achievement, mathematics achievement, and behavior occurred. Students’ academic achievement was measured by an increase in the mean score on the pre-test and post-test on the K-TEA in reading and mathematics. The mean rating score on the pre-test and post-test on the BBRs was used to evaluate the behavior of the at-risk seventh grade students to determine if the program has improved the students’ behavior. The use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 12.0 (SPSS-12) data analysis software was used to conduct the data analysis.

Qualitative Method

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in the study was guided by the rules, policies, and procedures set by the IRB. Through the use of SurveyMonkey™, credibility and reliability was established. The researcher had no direct contact with any of the potential participants. All data gathered was strictly anonymous, and the researcher was not aware of an individual participant's responses or identity.

The researcher has worked with the at-risk student population at different educational levels. The need for a possible solution to the dropout dilemma has always been at the forefront in the mind of the researcher. Intervention programs have been put in place, but due to budget concerns throughout the country they are being cut drastically. There have been only a small number of programs put into place that grasped the true fundamental nature of reaching at-risk students. An obvious bias of the researcher is that, given the necessary tools, strategies, support, and structure, the at-risk student can beat the odds. The researcher controlled biases by carefully analyzing the themes and data collected to reach an informed, accurate depiction of the at-risk seventh grade student. Through an overarching research question, the hypotheses were addressed with an open mind.

Sample

For the qualitative component, a convenience sample was utilized consisting of teachers, counselors, and administrators who participated in the BETA Program.

Participation in this study was strictly voluntary, and an email was sent by the researcher to all possible participants who had direct contact with the seventh grade at-risk students (Appendix A). A total of fifteen potential participants were contacted via email for possible participation. This allowed for any potential participants who declined to participate while still providing an ending count of a maximum sample size of seven participants. The first seven to respond who meet the criteria for inclusion will comprise the sample.

Instrumentation

Potential participants' were asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire using SurveyMonkey™. The questionnaire was be completed only by teachers, counselors, and administrators who were active participants in the counseling intervention program. The questionnaire asked open-ended questions that could be answered only by individuals who worked with the at-risk seventh grade population. SurveyMonkey™ allowed for the identity of the participants to remain anonymous.

Design of the Study

Phenomenology was the qualitative approach used in this study. Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell(2005), defined mixed method research as “the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research” (p. 224). Potential participants completed a questionnaire using SurveyMonkey™. Teachers,

counselors, and administrators who were active participants in the BETA Program are the potential participants for this study.

Through phenomenology, lived experiences are captured providing a true essence of what occurred in order to depict a true description of a study according to the subjects. Creswell (2003) further explained the process of phenomenology as follows:

Understanding the “lived experiences” marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). In this process, the researcher “brackets” his or her own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study (Nieswiadomy, 1993). (p. 15)

Data Collection and Processing Procedures

Qualitative data were collected utilizing SurveyMonkey™. Teachers, counselors, and administrators who participated in the counseling intervention program for the at-risk seventh grade students were asked to complete a questionnaire that was sent via SurveyMonkey™ (Appendix B). Participation in the questionnaire was strictly voluntary. The email to potential participants described the study, the purpose of the study, and requested their participation in the research for this dissertation. Potential participants were asked to complete the questionnaire within seven days after receiving the email. The questionnaire should take approximately fifteen minutes to complete, and the responses are anonymous.

No identifiable information was collected which enabled the questionnaire to be completely anonymous. Participants were identified through SurveyMonkey™ only as teacher, counselor, or administrator which was used only for data analysis purposes when identifying themes and patterns in the study. The questionnaire was set up to prevent any individual who is not a teacher, counselor, or administrator from completing the online questionnaire. The researcher was not able to tell who responded to the questionnaire, therefore, assuring anonymity. All information received was used only for its intended purpose. The information collected via SurveyMonkey™ was saved to a disc and kept in a safe, secure cabinet protected from any possible disclosure for five years and then will be destroyed.

Data Analysis and Reporting Procedures

The Moustakas' Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of data analysis was used (Appendix C) with liberal use of the responses from the participants to demonstrate the validity of the findings. The researcher analyzed the data to form themes, categories, and patterns. Themes and factors in regard to academic achievement and behavior was created and compared to the mean pre-test and post-test scores to validate the quantitative findings. Verbatim examples were included where appropriate to provide clear insights into the experiences.

Ethical Considerations

The research was guided by strict ethical guidelines according to the Barry University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Anonymity was a viable factor, and no identifiable information was obtained through the research. There was no risk to the

participants. The participants were not in any danger, nor were their job placed on the line for participating or declining participation in the study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the methodology and procedures that will be utilized for this study. The design of the study was identified as a mixed method approach. The quantitative research was gathered using the mean scores of pre-tests and post-tests in reading, mathematics, and behavior of 30 at-risk seventh grade students. The qualitative portion of the study was gathered from a maximum of seven participants who completed an open-ended questionnaire using SurveyMonkey™. A convenience sample of teachers, counselors, and administrators who were actively involved in the program self-selected to participate in the qualitative portion of the study. An email was sent to each potential participant describing the study, the purpose of the study, and requesting his or her participation in the research for this dissertation.

Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. Dependent t-tests was used to analyze the mean pre-test and post-test scores on the reading achievement, mathematics achievement, and behavior rating scale of the at-risk seventh grade students. Strict ethical guidelines were adhered to according to the guidelines of the Barry University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter will present the findings from the quantitative and qualitative research questions for this study. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of a counseling intervention program, the BETA Program, on the academic achievement and behavior of at-risk seventh grade students. A mixed method approach was employed to look at the data and provide an understanding of the phenomenology of the counseling intervention program. Quantitative research was the primary research method in the study with qualitative as the secondary research method.

The quantitative research was evaluated using the mean score on the pre-tests and post-tests in reading, mathematics, and behavior of students who participated in the counseling intervention program, the BETA Program. Dependent mean t-tests were used to determine if statistically significant differences in reading achievement, mathematics achievement, and behavior occurred. The qualitative data portion of the study was gathered from teachers, counselors, and administrators who also participated in the program by completing an anonymous questionnaire utilizing SurveyMonkey™.

Quantitative Research Method

Description of Participants

This study consisted of 30 at-risk seventh grade students who participated in the counseling intervention program, the BETA Program. These students were given a

pre-test and a post-test in reading and mathematics using the K-TEA reading and mathematics tests. The BBRS pre-test and post-test were also completed for each student to determine behavior risk factors at the beginning and end of their seventh grade year.

Statistical Analysis of Data

The quantitative portion of this study was conducted utilizing two instruments. The Kaufman-Test of Educational Achievement (K-TEA) Brief Form, created by Alan S. Kaufman and Nadeen L. Kaufman, assessed the students' reading and mathematics academic achievement. The second instrument used was the Burks Behavior Rating Scale (BBRS) which assessed the at-risk students' behavior. Both instruments were administered to the at-risk students as pre- and post-tests.

The BBRS is divided into three categories: low deviant behavior, moderate deviant behavior, and high deviant behavior. The test indicates areas where changes in behavior patterns occurred over a period of time. The K-TEA provided the academic achievement data for this study using grade-equivalent scores for reading and mathematics. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences 12.0 (SPSS-12) was used to analyze the data in this study. A dependent means t-test was used to calculate the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores on the K-TEA in reading and mathematics, as well as for the BBRS pre-test and post-test.

Major Quantitative Findings

The quantitative findings are presented based on the null hypotheses of the study. Academic achievement is measured by an increase in the mean score from the pre-test to the post-test on the K-TEA in reading and mathematics. The data analysis for the

quantitative research portion of the study was completed utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 12.0 (SPSS-12). A dependent means t-test was used to calculate the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores on the K-TEA in reading. The statistical significance level was determined by an alpha level of .05.

Null Hypothesis One

There is no difference between the pre- and post-test reading achievement of seventh grade at-risk students participating in the counseling intervention program.

Students were given a pre-test and a post-test using the K-TEA in Reading. Reading achievement was measured by an increase in the mean score on the post-test. The total number of students completing the pre-test and post-test in reading was 30. Scores on the pre-test ranged from a minimum of 1.50 to a maximum of 7.30; the scores on the post-test ranged from a minimum of 1.50 to a maximum of 10.80.

Table 1

K-TEA Reading Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum
K-TEA Pre-test Reading	30	1.50	7.30
K-TEA Post-test Reading	30	1.50	10.80
Valid N	30		

The mean scores of the K-TEA reading pre-test and post-test were calculated using SPSS. The pre-test mean in reading was 4.30 with a standard error of the mean of .22 and a standard deviation of 1.22. The mean post-test in reading was 6.64 with a standard error of the mean of .37 and a standard deviation of 2.03.

Table 2

K-TEA Reading Pre-/Post-test Means

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
KTEA Pre-test Reading	4.300	30	1.219	.223
KTEA Post-test Reading	6.637	30	2.031	.371

A dependent means t-test was used to calculate the difference between the two scores. The statistical significance level was determined by an alpha level of .05.

Variable 1 was the K-TEA Reading pre-test and the post-test was variable 2 in SPSS. On the dependent means t-test for the K-TEA reading, $t = -9.03$, $df = 29$, $mean = -2.34$, $sd = 1.41$ and the significance value was 0.00. There was an increase in the post-test mean score on the K-TEA in reading. Therefore, based on the data from the K-TEA pre-test and post-test in reading, the first null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3

K-TEA Reading Dependent t-tests

	Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
KTEA Pre-test Reading K-TEA Post-test Reading	-2.337	1.418	.259	-2.866	-1.807	-9.029	29	.000

Null Hypothesis Two

There is no difference between the pre/post-test mathematics achievement of seventh grade at-risk students participating in the counseling intervention program.

Students were given a pre-test and a post-test using the K-TEA in Mathematics. Mathematics achievement was measured by an increase in the mean score on the post-test. The total number of students completing the pre-test and post-test in mathematics was 30. Scores on the pre-test ranged from a minimum of 2.80 to a maximum of 7.80; scores on the post-test ranged from a minimum of 3.80 to a maximum of 10.20.

Table 4

K-TEA Mathematics Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum
KTEA Pre-test Math	30	2.80	7.80
KTEA Post-test Math	30	3.80	10.20
Valid N	30		

The means of the K-TEA Mathematics pre- and post-tests were calculated using SPSS. The pre-test mean in mathematics was 5.80 with a standard error of the mean of .23 and a standard deviation of 1.24. The mean of the post-test in mathematics was 6.58 with a standard error of the mean of .29 and a standard deviation of 1.61.

Table 5

K-TEA Mathematics Pre-/Post-Test Means

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
K-TEA Pre-test Math	5.08	30	1.241	.227
K-TEA Post-test Math	6.577	30	1.609	.294

A dependent means t-test was used to calculate the difference between the two scores. The significance level was determined by an alpha level of .05. Variable 1 was the K-TEA Mathematics pre-test and the post-test was variable 2 in SPSS. On the dependent t-test for the K-TEA Mathematics, $t = -12.10$, $df = 29$, $mean = -1.50$, $sd = .68$ and the significance value was 0.00. There was an increase in the mean score from the pre-test to the post-test on the K-TEA in mathematics. Therefore, based on the data from the K-TEA pre-test and post-test in mathematics, the second null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 6

K-TEA Mathematics Dependent t-tests

	Paired Differences						t	Sig. (2- Df tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
KTEA Pre-test Math	-1.497	.677	.124	-1.750	-1.244	-12.100	29	.000
KTEA Post-test Math								

Null Hypothesis Three

There is no difference between the pre- and post-test behavior of seventh grade at-risk students participating in the counseling intervention program.

Students were given a pre-test and a post-test using the BBRS. The mean ratings on the pre-test and post-test on the BBRS were used to evaluate the behavior of the at-risk students. The lower the score, the less deviant the child’s behavior is from the norm. The behavior is divided into three categories: low deviant behavior, moderate deviant behavior, and high deviant behavior. This study focused on changing the high deviant behavior which will result in a lower pre/post mean score.

Scores on the BBRS pre-test high deviant behavior ranged from a minimum of .00 to a maximum of 4.00. Scores on the BBRS post-test high deviant behavior ranged from a minimum of .00 to a maximum of 3.00.

Table 7

BBRS Pre-/Post-Test High Deviant Behavior Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum
BBRS Pre-test High	30	.00	4.00
BBRS Post-test High	30	.00	3.00
Valid N	30		

The mean of the BBRS pre-test for high deviant behavior was calculated using SPSS. The pre-test mean for high deviant behavior was .83, with a standard error of the mean of .21 and a standard deviation of 1.15. The mean score for the BBRS post-test for high deviant behavior was . 17, with a standard error of the mean of. 11 and a standard deviation of .59.

Table 8

BBRS Pre-/Post-Test High Deviant Behavior Means

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
BBRS Pre-test High	.833	30	1.147	.209
BBRS Post-test High	.167	30	.592	.108

A dependent means t-test was used to calculate the difference between the two scores. The significance level was determined by an alpha level of .05. Variable 1 was the BBRS pre-test for high deviant behavior and the post-test for high deviant behavior was variable 2 in SPSS. On the dependent t-test for the BBRS for high deviant behavior, $t = 3.44$, $df = 29$, $mean = .67$, $sd = 1.06$ and the significance value was 0.02. Therefore,

based on the data from the BBRS pre-tests and post-tests, the third null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 9

BBRS Dependent (-tests High Deviant Behavior

					Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)		
					Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
							Lower	Upper			
BBRS Pre-test High	BBRS Post-test High	667			1.062	.194	.270	1.063	3.440	29	.002

Scores on the BBRS pre-test low deviant behavior ranged from a minimum of 3.00 to a maximum of 18.00. Scores on the BBRS post-test low deviant behavior ranged from a minimum of 10.00 to a maximum of 19.00.

Table 10

BBRS Pre-/Post-Test Low> Deviant Behavior Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum
BBRS Pre-test Low	30	3.00	18.00
BBRS Post-test Low	30	10.00	19.00
Valid N	30		

The mean of the BBRS pre-test for low deviant behavior was calculated using SPSS. The pre-test mean for low deviant behavior was 12.73 with a standard error of the mean of .69 and a standard deviation of 3.78. The mean BBRS post-test for low deviant behavior was 17.03 with a standard error of the mean of .48 and a standard deviation of 2.62.

Table 11

BBRS Pre-/Post-Test Low Deviant Behavior Means

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
BBRS Pre-test Low	12.733	30	3.778	.690
BBRS Post-test Low	17.033	30	2.619	.478

A dependent means t-test was used to calculate the difference between the two scores.

The statistical significance level was determined by an alpha level of .05. Variable 1 was the the BBRS pre-test for low deviant behavior, and the post-test for low deviant behavior was variable 2 in SPSS. On the dependent t-test for the BBRS for low deviant behavior, $t = -9.78$, $df = 29$, $mean = -4.30$, $sd = 2.41$, and the significance value was 0.00.

Table 12

BBRS Dependent t-tests Low Deviant Behavior

Paired Differences								t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
					Lower	Upper				
BBRS Pre-test Low	BBRS Post-test Low	-4.300	2.409	.440	-5.200	-3.400	-9.777	29		.000

Scores on the BBRS pre-test moderate deviant behavior ranged from a minimum of 1.00 to a maximum of 13.00; scores on the BBRS post-test moderate deviant behavior ranged from a minimum of .00 to a maximum of 9.00.

Table 13

BBRS Pre-/Post-Test Moderate Deviant Behavior Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
BBRS Pre-test Moderate	30	1.00	13.00	5.433	3.036
BBRS Post-test Moderate	30	.00	9.00	1.800	2.36934
Valid N	30				

The mean of the BBRS pre-test for moderate deviant behavior was calculated using SPSS. The pre-test mean for moderate deviant behavior was 5.43 with a standard error of the mean of .69 and a standard deviation of 3.78. The mean BBRS post-test score for moderate deviant behavior was 1.80 with a standard error of the mean of .48 and a standard deviation of 2.62.

Table 14

BBRS Pre-/Post-Test Moderate Deviant Behavior Means

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
BBRS Pre-test Moderate	5.433	30	3.036	.554
BBRS Post-test Moderate	1.800	30	2.369	.432

A dependent means t-test was used to calculate the difference between the two scores. The statistical significance level was determined by an alpha level of .05.

Variable 1 was the BBRS pre-test for moderate deviant behavior, and the post-test for moderate deviant behavior was variable 2 in SPSS. On the dependent t-test for the BBRS for moderate deviant behavior, $t = 8.50$, $df = 29$, $mean = 3.6$, $sd = 2.34$, and the significance value was 0.00.

Table 15

BBRS Dependent (-tests Moderate Deviant Behavior

	Paired Differences			T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. 95% Confidence			
			Error Interval of the Mean Difference			
			Lower	Upper		
BBRS Pre-test Moderate						
BBRS Post-test Moderate	3.633	2.341	.427	2.759 4.507	8.500 29	.000

Summary of Quantitative Findings

Through the quantitative data analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 12.0 (SPSS-12), the three null hypotheses were rejected. The alpha level was set at .05 for statistically significant differences. A dependent means t-test was used to calculate the differences between the pre-test and post-test scores on the K-TEA in reading and mathematics and on the BBRS. The data indicated that there was a statistical difference between the pre-test and post-test on both instruments.

Qualitative Research Method

Description of Participants

A total of 15 potential participants were contacted via email for possible participation in this study. This study sample used the first seven participants who met the criteria for inclusion. The sample was comprised of teachers, counselors and administrators who were actively involved in the counseling intervention program. Out of the seven participants, two were administrators, four were teachers, and one was a counselor. The percentage breakdown of the sample is as follows:

Table 16

<i>Qualitative Sample Participants</i>		
	N	Percentage
Teachers	4	57%
Counselors	1	14%
Administrators	2	29%
Total	7	100%

Analysis of Data

A convenience sample was used which consisted of teachers, counselors, and administrators who participated in the counseling intervention program. A total of 15 potential participants were contacted via email for possible participation; the first seven who met the criteria and were willing and able to do so completed the survey. Using SurveyMonkey™, participants anonymously completed a questionnaire which consisted of 10 open-ended questions. All questions were completed by each participant. The only identifiable information in the questionnaire was the first question which asked participants what role they played in the counseling intervention program: teacher, counselor, or administrator. This information was used for data-generation purposes only.

The researcher utilized the Moustakas’ (1994) Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of data analysis with liberal use of the responses from the participants to demonstrate the validity of the quantitative findings. Data were analyzed by the researcher to form themes, categories, and patterns.

Major Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings served to strengthen and provide validity to the qualitative findings. The overarching qualitative research question asked: In what ways does a counseling intervention program impact seventh grade at-risk student academic achievement and behavior? Questionnaire responses were analyzed based on the Moustakas' (1997) Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of data analysis. Themes, patterns and categories were created based on the five stages in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory: physiological, safety, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization.

The theoretical basis for this research was psychologist Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory on which 50% of the questions were based. An additional question asked about the impact of the counseling intervention program on students' drop out rates and a series of questions asked about the students' ability to attain the different stages in Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Participants were asked in what ways the counseling intervention program impacted the academic achievement of the at-risk students. All participants answered that the program improved the reading achievement of the students. One participant wrote, "It increased it." Another wrote, "The program gave the students a new perspective on the importance of education by giving them strategies and developing their skills in dealing with various other aspects of their lives in order for them to focus on their education."

Each participant's responses revealed success with the academic agenda for the at-risk students. The impact of the counseling intervention program was noticeable. A

participant wrote, “It assists them in keeping focused on their studies and assists them in handling the issues that keep at-risk students off task.” Another wrote, “Students showed a marked increase in grades as a result of receiving regular and frequent counseling services.”

Participants were asked in what ways the counseling intervention program impacted the behavior of at-risk students. All of the participants mentioned an improvement in behavior. One participant wrote, “Behavior was greatly improved because the counselor was always nearby and able to intervene when problems arose.” Another wrote, “It controlled and monitored it.” And, another wrote, “Students are first presented with what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Then they are given alternative techniques on handling incidents that often ignite bad behavior. They learned to control their initial instinct to react poorly/violently. This improved their behavior tremendously.”

A participant wrote, “By getting to know the students individually, counselors could handle situations and issues before they became major issues in many instances but not all. The BETA program was a tremendous resource for the students. The communication between the counselor and core teachers was an instrumental factor in trying to keep these students on tasks and providing support programs.”

As preventing at-risk students from dropping out of school is crucial, participants were asked if the counseling intervention program prevented the at-risk students from dropping out of school. All of the participants’ responses showed that the program did prevent the students from dropping out. One participant wrote, “Knowing that someone

was there who cared about them and had time to listen to them went a long way in keeping students in school.” Another wrote, “It gave students an awareness of what they needed to accomplish to be successful, and the counselor kept track of the students’ progress.” One participant commented, “Since students were given a whole new perspective on education and life in general, they began to feel more comfortable and better equipped to handle the challenges they faced in school. They also realized that they could count on teachers and counselors for the support they need to become successful students.”

Themes, patterns and categories were created based on the five stages in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs motivation theory: physiological, safety, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization. All participants had positive responses in regard to the impact of the counseling intervention program on at-risk students achieving the hierarchy of needs. The counseling intervention also met the physiological needs typically provided by 0.parents. One participant wrote, “Many times what the student could not get at home was provided by the counselors, teachers, program director, and school resources. In some instances the counseling sessions were beneficial to the parents, too.” Another wrote “Teachers were 'trained' in the program to be attentive to the possibility of neglect. Additionally, students were given one-on-one counseling sessions regularly in which aspects of their home life were discussed. Finally, students were made aware of the availability of the free breakfast offered at the school, as well as the free/reduced lunch available to them. During their class sessions, students were given information on nutrition and personal hygiene.”

Students' safety needs were met according to participant responses. One participant wrote, "It [the counseling intervention program] provided a safe haven." Another wrote, "During group sessions, students are presented with safety scenarios and how to avoid or handle dangerous situations. As mentioned earlier, students are also given individualized attention in a comfortable environment with trained counselors in order to ensure that they are not in any danger inside/outside of school. Also, teachers are trained to be attentive to signs of possible abuse." Another participant further developed this theme by commenting: "Students could speak to their counselor without fear of repercussions at the school unless it involved an issue that needed to be reported due to professional responsibility. Otherwise, the students could speak freely without fear of retaliation or embarrassment." Finally, a participant wrote, "The counselor would often talk with students about possible abuse at home as well as threats at school."

The social needs, such as a sense of belonging, getting along with others, and acceptance, were met in the counseling intervention program. The counseling intervention program was seen as a family unit according to the participant responses. One wrote, "Being part of a group gave the students a sense of belonging and they knew they were not the only ones who were having difficulties in areas of academics, discipline, acceptance and self-esteem issues." Another wrote, "Students get a sense of belonging because they are participants in the program and get to partake in various activities. In group sessions, students take part in learning games that require them to collaborate with others to achieve their goals. This teaches them to get along with others regardless of the personal feelings they may have about that person. Once the student has

been in the program for a little while, they feel more accepted by their peers and the adults that work with them.” Finally, a participant noted, “Group sessions were often held to discuss social issues including conflict resolution techniques. It showed them that by sticking together, they all could make it.”

The counseling intervention program had an impact on the self-esteem of the at-risk students. Participant responses showed that students were encouraged and praised in the program. One wrote, “At this age self esteem is a major issue for students and being positive and accentuating the positive behaviors and celebrating the positive grades was a step to achieve positive change in the students. The ability to be rewarded for making successful decisions that benefited the student was rewarded—academically and behaviorally.” Another wrote, “Students are often given praise and assignment grades focus on the answers they got correct rather than on the incorrect ones. They are also taught to look at their mistakes and learn from them by conducting one-on-one meetings with each student to discuss their achievements and competencies.” And, finally, a participant wrote, “Through counseling sessions, it was evident that students began to see themselves in a more positive light.”

The goal of any counseling program is for those receiving services to reach their full potential. Participants were asked in what ways the counseling intervention program impacted the self-actualization in terms of the students realizing their individual potential. All participant responses revealed that the counseling intervention program improved the students’ self-actualization and according to one participant, “It gave them hope.” A participant wrote, “Teachers and counselors in the program are trained to focus on the

strengths of the students. They then give constant praise and teach students how to use their strengths to work on areas where they need to improve.” Another wrote, “Through a needs assessment and survey for careers, students could see the professions that would suit them.” And lastly, a respondent wrote, “Through positive reinforcement and eventual success at school, students were able to realize many of their dreams.”

Summary of Qualitative Findings

Through qualitative data analysis using the Moustakas’ (1997) Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of data analysis, themes and patterns in the study were identified. Themes were supported with verbatim responses from the completed questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions that sought to determine the impact the counseling intervention had on the academic achievement and behavior of the at-risk students.

Based on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, the counseling intervention program had an impact on the at-risk students needs at each of the hierarchical levels. The students’ physiological needs were met by making sure that the students were ready to learn by providing meals daily and assisting with the students’ individual needs and family needs. Their safety and social needs were met by providing a safe place for students to learn in a caring, and encouraging environment where the at-risk students developed a sense of belonging with one another. The at-risk students’ self-esteem and self-actualization needs were met through intensive counseling sessions along with students achieving success in their academics and behavior, as well as realizing their individual potential through successful tasks.

Through this data generation the theoretical framework for the study, Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory, was reinforced. Overall, the qualitative research question was answered in a positive manner through participant responses which indicated that the counseling intervention program had a positive impact on the academic achievement and behavior of the at-risk seventh grade students.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the results of the mixed method study. The quantitative and qualitative findings were discussed and supporting data were provided. The quantitative data collection was completed utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 12.0 (SPSS-12). The sample consisted of archival data from 30 students who participated in the counseling intervention program. A dependent means t-test was used to calculate the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores on the K-TEA in reading and mathematics and on the BBRS. The significance level was determined by an alpha level of .05 on both instruments.

Using SurveyMonkey™, qualitative data were collected anonymously from teachers, counselors, and administrators who participated in the counseling intervention program. An email request for participation was sent to 15 potential participants with an end result of 7 participants completing the anonymous questionnaire. Qualitative data analyses were conducted using the Moustakas' (1997) Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of data analysis. The qualitative research question was examined using the theoretical framework for the study, i.e., Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory.

The qualitative research question asked: In what ways does the counseling intervention program impact seventh grade at-risk students' academic achievement and behavior. The researcher was able to provide insight into the counseling intervention program through the lived experiences of the participants. Findings suggested that seventh grade at-risk students enrolled in a counseling intervention program should improve in reading, mathematics, and behavior. These findings were supported by qualitative data which suggests that the impact of the program deals with counseling that meets the hierarchy of needs. The program sense of community which meets the students needs based on Maslow's Theory. Based on the data from the study, the three null hypotheses were rejected.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

This study focused on a counseling intervention program and its impact on at-risk students. The intent of this study was to determine the impact of a counseling intervention program, the BETA Program, on the academic achievement and behavior of at-risk seventh grade students. For the purpose of this study, academic achievement was measured by an increase on the post-test mean scores on the K-TEA in reading and mathematics. Behavior was measured by an increase in the post-test low deviant behavior mean rating score and a decrease in the post-test moderate and high deviant mean behavior rating scores on the BBRS.

Summary of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of a counseling intervention program, the BETA Program, on the academic achievement and behavior of at-risk seventh grade students. The intent was to determine if the academic achievement and behavior of the at-risk seventh grade students improved due to the counseling intervention program in which these students participated.

Significance

This study provides an understanding of the impact a counseling intervention program has on at-risk students' academic achievement and behavior. Poor academic achievement has been found to lead to deviant behavior in school and society. At-risk

students must have a safe, nurturing, and supportive environment in which to thrive and blossom. “A developmentally appropriate standards-based curriculum, strong pedagogical technique for delivery of curriculum, and a comprehensive discipline plan with preventative and reactive components are considered the primary methods of preventing school failure”(Beebe-Frankenberger, et. al, 2005, p. 10). Providing immediate counseling intervention strategies can assist students in reaching their maximum potential. There will always be a need to serve the at-risk population, and nontraditional programs must be in place to bridge the achievement gap while redirecting the inappropriate behavior.

Methods

A mixed method approach was employed for this study. The primary research method was quantitative research, and the secondary method was qualitative research. The quantitative sample study consisted of 30 students who participated in the counseling intervention program. Each student was administered a pre-test and post-test on the K-TEA reading and mathematics and BBRS. The K-TEA is an individually-administered test and consists of 52 questions for both the reading and mathematics subtests. For the purposes of this study, academic achievement was measured by an increase in the mean score from the pre-test to the post-test on the K-TEA in reading and mathematics.

Students also participated in a pre-test and post-test utilizing the BBRS. The BBRS has 110 items categorized into 19 patterns of behavior and is completed by a rater who has had daily contact with the student for a minimum of two weeks. The test indicates areas where changes in behavior patterns occurred over a period of time and

indicates areas where further evaluation may be needed. For the purposes of this study, behavior was measured by an increase in the mean rating on the post-test on the BBRS in the low deviant behavior category and a decrease in the mean ratings on the post-test on the BBRS in the moderate and high deviant behavior categories.

For the quantitative portion of the study, the independent variable was the counseling intervention program. The dependent variables were the at-risk students' reading achievement scores, mathematics achievement scores, and student behavior rating scores. The mean scores from pre-tests and post-tests were used for each of the dependent means t-tests to determine if significant gains occurred.

The theoretical framework for this research was based on psychologist Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory. The qualitative research data collection consisted of data gathered from a purposeful sample of seven teachers, counselors, and administrators who participated in the counseling intervention program, the BETA Program, completing an anonymous questionnaire using Survey Monkey™. The researcher analyzed the data to form themes, categories, and patterns to discover trends and to provide reliability and validity for the quantitative portion of the study through a realistic depiction of the phenomenon.

Limitations

As with all research, this study had several limitations. The counseling intervention program, the BETA program, is a stand-alone program and is only conducted at the school site which is being studied. There is no comparison group; thus, the study is based on the pre-test/post-test control design. A purposeful sample will be

utilized, as opposed to a random sample, for quantitative data generation. Students were selected non-randomly based on the SARP and BETA Programs' criteria. The study does not have a comparison program in the local public school system. The low number of participants completing the questionnaire for the qualitative component of the study presented a limitation to the study; however, seven is an appropriate number for this design (Creswell, 2003). The uniqueness of the program being evaluated and the small sample size can have an effect on the possible generalizability of this study. Since only at-risk students whose scores are extremes, are eligible for participation in the counseling intervention program, a possible limitation may be due to the effect of regression toward the mean, as opposed to the effects of the intervention.

Discussion of the Findings

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of a counseling intervention program on the academic achievement and behavior of at-risk seventh grade students. The study utilized two instruments, the K-TEA in reading and mathematics and the BBRS. A dependent means t-test was used to calculate the difference between the mean pre-test and post-test scores on both instruments. The data analysis for the quantitative research portion of the study was completed utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 12.0 (SPSS-12). The significance level was determined by an alpha level of .05. The quantitative findings are presented based on the null hypotheses of the study.

Research conducted by Shippen, Houchins, Steventon, and Sartor (2005) showed:

Often, urban populations are composed predominantly of minorities and people from low-income backgrounds. In, 1998, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that minorities consistently perform below their nonminority peers in reading. This gap widens as students move from first grade through third and fourth grades, (p. 176)

The findings of the increase in the post-test results on the K-TEA in reading from a pre-test mean of 4.3 to a post-test mean of 6.6 showed how low-performing students' reading and mathematics scores can increase when different strategies are in place to support the individual students.

The research focused on the following three quantitative research questions:

- 1) Does the counseling intervention program increase the post-test reading achievement of the seventh grade at-risk students as measured by the results of the K-TEA?
- 2) Does the counseling intervention program increase the post-test mathematics achievement of the seventh grade at-risk students as measured by the results of the K-TEA?
- 3) Does the counseling intervention program improve the post-test behavior of the seventh grade at-risk students as measured by a decrease on high deviant behavior rating results of the BBRs?

The qualitative research question was:

In what ways does a counseling intervention program impact seventh grade at-risk students' academic achievement and behavior?

Data were analyzed based on answers from a questionnaire collected utilizing SurveyMonkey™. Participants were teachers, counselors, and administrators who participated in the counseling intervention program for the at-risk seventh grade students.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics:

In October 2005, approximately 3.5 million 16- through 24-year olds were not enrolled in high school and had not earned a high school diploma or alternative credential such as a GED. These ...dropouts accounted for 9.4 percent of the 36.8 million 16- through 24-year olds in the United States in 2005. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

At-risk intervention programs, like the counseling intervention program evaluated in this research, can reduce the dropout rates through early intervention and close monitoring.

“Structural changes in the life experiences of children and an increasingly diverse school population call for additional choices and options in public education” (Leone & Drakeford, 1999, p. 87).

The qualitative findings for this research revealed that the theoretical framework for this research, Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory, was appropriate. Participant responses provided insight into each need and illustrated the accomplishments at each of the hierarchy level. Meeting the needs of the at-risk student at each hierarchal level is critical in fulfilling each need of the hierarchy.

Children come to the school setting with various traits and characteristics of resilience. Although educators may be unable to affect these characteristics directly, they can create classroom and school climates that embrace the child,

ensure a sense of safety and security, foster resiliency, and enable each child to participate and learn more effectively. (Christiansen, Christiansen & Howard, 1997, p. 87)

The counseling intervention proved to be effective in meeting the at-risk students' need at each hierarchy level. The success of the program was evident through the collected data provided through quantitative and qualitative methods. "Regardless of perspective, a clear understanding of the relationship between problem behaviors and academic achievement will help generate appropriate assessment, prevention, and intervention strategies for at-risk or troubled youth" (Barriga, Doran, Newell, Morrison, Barbetti, & Robbins, 2002, p. 233).

Conclusion

The following conclusions were reached based on the quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

1. A statistically significant difference was found in the academic achievement of at-risk students who participated in the counseling intervention program, the BETA Program, as demonstrated by an increase in the mean score from the pre-test to post-test on the K-TEA in reading.
2. A statistically significant difference was found in the academic achievement of at-risk students who participated in the counseling intervention program as demonstrated by an increase in the mean score from the pre-test to post-test on the K-TEA in mathematics.

3. A statistically significant difference was found in the behavior of at-risk students who participated in the counseling intervention program as demonstrated by an increase in the mean score from the pre-test to post-test on the BBRS in the category of low deviant behavior.
4. A statistically significant difference was found in the behavior of at-risk students who participated in the counseling intervention program as demonstrated by a decrease in the mean score from the pre-test to post-test on the BBRS in the category of moderate deviant behavior.
5. A statistically significant difference was found in behavior of at-risk students who participated in the counseling intervention program as demonstrated by a decrease in the mean score from the pre-test to post-test on the BBRS in the category of high deviant behavior.
6. The ways in which a counseling intervention program impacts seventh grade at-risk students aligns with the attention the program provided in addressing students physiological, safety, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization.

Recommendations

Implications for Practice

Findings from this study suggest that a counseling intervention program provides academic and behavioral benefits for alternative education settings. The data revealed that the intense counseling and staff support played a pivotal role in the at-risk seventh grade students' school year. The results showed significant differences in the pre- and post-test mean scores in reading, mathematics, and behavior. It is possible to mirror this

program design into other school districts and states. In an effort to reduce dropout rates across the country, unconventional programs must be implemented that support and foster at-risk students.

Based on the findings of the study, interventions must be considered to assist the at-risk seventh grade population. A stand-alone counseling intervention program should be in place to provide immediate feedback and assistance when needed. Constant communication and encouragement by individuals who are within arms reach can make the difference in the life of an at-risk student. This recommendation is made based on the positive responses received from participants who responded to the anonymous questionnaire and described the impact the counseling intervention program had on the students.

Further Research

Based on the findings, this study should be replicated in other middle schools in urban settings for more generalizability. Future studies could look at similar programs for at-risk middle school students in a larger setting. A longitudinal study could also be implemented to follow the students and track their academic achievement and behavior throughout high school to determine the long-term impact of such a program.

This research can be a model for others who want to improve the academic achievement and behavior of at-risk students in a public school setting. This study should be replicated before the counseling intervention program is utilized as a guiding program to improve the academic achievement and behavior of all at-risk seventh grade students.

This study attempted to look at the impact of a counseling intervention program on the academic achievement and behavior of at-risk students to prevent school failure. Future research should focus on how to impact at-risk middle school students in a normal class setting, as opposed to a controlled environment.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the study and provided the summary of the quantitative and qualitative findings. All three null hypotheses were rejected by the researcher based on the data that was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 12.0 (SPSS-12). Themes and patterns were created utilizing the Moustakas' (1997) Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of data analysis for the qualitative research method. Limitations of the study were discussed, and these limitations may prevent generalizability to a larger population. Recommendations and implications for practice and further research were also discussed to further the knowledge of counseling intervention programs and at-risk seventh grade students.

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APPENDIX A

Email Consent Script to Participate in a Questionnaire via SurveyMonkey™

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

I am a doctoral student at Barry University, and I am requesting your participation in my research. The purpose of the research study is to determine the impact of the counseling intervention program on the academic achievement and behavior of at-risk seventh grade students. As a teacher, counselor, or administrator in the Student At-Risk Program, more specifically the BETA Program, you can provide invaluable information on the impact of the counseling intervention on the seventh grade at-risk students.

You are asked to complete a questionnaire using SurveyMonkey™. The questionnaire has open-ended questions and you will remain anonymous. The questionnaire should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. To access this questionnaire, you will log on to <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=xLmPu4vZowH01r5v3veYwA3d3d>. Your name will not be used in any report, and the researcher will not be able to tell who answered the questionnaire. The only identifying information asked is if you are a teacher, counselor, or administrator at the beginning of the questionnaire. This information will be used for data generation purposes only.

If you decide to participate in this questionnaire, please complete the questionnaire within seven days of receiving this email. There are no potential risks to you as a participant in this research study. You will receive no compensation for your participation in this research study. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. Your name will not be used in any report. The research will be guided by strict ethical guidelines according to Barry University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

If you have any questions about the study you may contact:

CaLester Chaney,
Email: chaneyc52@hotmail.com

or

Edward Bernstein, Ed. D.
Department of Educational Leadership, College of Education
Barry University,
Email 1: ebernstein@mai 1. barry.edu

Your participation will be greatly appreciated and will have a positive impact on the future education of at-risk students.

APPENDIX B

SurveyMonkey™ Participant Questionnaire

1. What role did you serve in the BETA Program?

Administrator

Counselor

Teacher

2. In what ways did the counseling intervention program impact the seventh grade at-risk students' academic achievement?
3. In what ways did the counseling intervention program impact the seventh grade at-risk students' behavior?
4. In what ways did the counseling intervention program impact the seventh grade at-risk students from dropping out of school?
5. Based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in what ways did the counseling intervention program impact the physiological (food, water, shelter) needs of the seventh grade at-risk students?
6. Based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in what ways did the counseling intervention program impact the safety (free of danger, etc.) needs of the seventh grade at-risk students?
7. Based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in what ways did the counseling intervention program impact the social (sense of belonging, getting along with others, acceptance) needs of the seventh grade at-risk students?

8. Based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in what ways did the counseling intervention program impact the self-esteem (self-respect, achievement, competence) needs of the seventh grade at-risk students?
9. Based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in what ways did the counseling intervention program impact the self-actualization (to realize their individual potential) needs of the seventh grade at-risk students?
10. What extra information or facts would you like to add about the counseling intervention program (BETA) and the seventh grade at-risk students that I have not asked about or that you have not yet mentioned?

APPENDIX C

Moustakas' Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Data Analysis

Moustakas presents his version of the Stevick - Colaizzi - Keen method, which is constructed from his modification to methods of analysis used by three authors.

The steps for this are given as follows:

1. Using a phenomenological approach, obtain a full description of your own experience of the phenomenon.
2. From the verbatim transcript of your experience, complete the following steps:
 - a. Consider each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience.
 - b. Record all relevant statements.
 - c. List each nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statement. These are the invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience.
 - d. Relate and cluster the invariant meaning units into themes.
 - e. Synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience. Include verbatim examples.
 - f. Reflect on your own textural description. Through imaginative variation, construct a description of the structures of your experience.
 - g. Construct a textual-structural description of the meanings and essences of your experience.
3. From the verbatim transcript of the experience of each of the co-researchers, complete the above steps a to g.
4. From the individual textual-structural descriptions of all co-researchers' experiences, construct a composite textual-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, integrating all individual textual-structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole.

You will see from this how crucial the idea of intersubjectivity is both as a finding of phenomenological research and as a means to the application of phenomenological ideas to social science - or practically any - research question.

The Moustakas Modification of the Stevick - Colaizzi - Keen method of data analysis will be the driving force for the qualitative methodology portion of this study. This method will validate the findings of the quantitative portion of the study and provide a clearer insight into the counseling intervention program for the at-risk seventh grade students.

Citation:

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