WhyTry? A Program Evaluation

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Introduction

In Minnesota, one out of every five students fail to graduate from high school (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). Long before students decide to drop out of school, a host of risk factors or early predictors undoubtedly emerge in childhood. The purpose of this research project was to determine the efficacy of the WhyTry? program in helping to reduce some of those risk factors such as:

- Truancy
- Behavior problems in school
- Low academic achievement
- School disengagement

The WhyTry? Program uses a strengths-based approach to help youth overcome their challenges and improve their outcomes at school. WhyTry? is based on sound empirical principles and uses (Moore, 2001):

- Solution Focused Brief Therapy
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Social and emotional learning strategies
- A series of 10 visual analogies
- Experiential activities
- Movies and video with positive lyrics

Program Description

The WhyTry? program uses a series of ten pictures or visual analogies. Each visual teaches a specific principle and is reinforced through music, videos, and physical activities related to the principle. The major learning styles — visual, auditory, and body/kinaesthetic—are utilized throughout the program. The goal of the WhyTry? program is to help youth answer the question “Why try in life when they are frustrated, confused, or angry with life’s pressures and challenges?” (Moore, 2001, p. 9). The WhyTry? program teaches youth that trying hard in life and putting effort into challenges at home, at school, and with peers is worth the effort. The principles include (Moore, 2001):

1. The Reality Ride - staying on track to achieve goals
2. Tearing Off Your Label - focusing on strengths
3. The Defense Mechanisms - using positive coping skills
4. Climbing Out of the Pit - peer pressure
5. Jumping Hurdles - problem solving
6. Desire, Time and Effort - importance of time and commitment
7. The Motivation Formula - turning challenges into positive opportunities
8. Lift the Weight - self discipline
9. Getting Plugged In - importance of having support systems
10. Seeing Over the Wall - accumulation of all analogies to reach goals

Literature Review

Others who have implemented the WhyTry? program with youth have reported the following outcomes:

- Granite School District in Utah, September 2003 - significantly improved understanding of key social and emotional principles, including self-motivation, consequences, peer pressure, and obeying laws and rules (Egiert).
- Los Angeles County Office of Education, October 2003 - less attendance problems, lower negative attitude toward teachers and school, and a higher locus of control indicating they were more personally responsible for their behavior (Egiert).
- Apache School District in Logan, December 2003 - increased grade point averages, increased attendance records, fewer incidents of failure, and higher graduation rates (Bushnell & Card).
- Yakima School District Learning Center, March 2007 - 33% increase in the cumulative GPA (Walker).
- South Los Angeles Resiliency Project, April 2008 - resiliency increased significantly a positive change was found in the students’ willingness to “keep trying to succeed” (Anuza, Vega, Maza, Margariz, & Vera).
- California therapeutic residential home, 2008 - self efficacy improved, optimism about accomplishing challenging tasks increased, and decreases in internalizing behavior, social problems, attention problems, thought problems, rule-breaking behavior, and aggressive behavior (Blaker).

Future Implications and Recommendations

When compared to other studies of the WhyTry? program, the present study produced similar outcomes such as increased GPAs, decreased behavior problems, improved self-efficacy, and an increased willingness to persevere. In addition, the present study did increase student’s positive perception of the future. However, the present study was not consistent with other studies with regards to having a positive outcome related to attendance as students from the present study did not increase their attendance. Based on the findings of this evaluation, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Implement the WhyTry? Program at GWFMiddle School next year and expand the program to GFW High School and Elementary School.
- Use a control group for future implementations to increase the validity of the study.
- Use the WhyTry Checklist to assess the variables and isolated and can be measured as intended. Fidelity also allows for replication of the study, which in turn will strengthen the outcomes of research.
- Follow the present study participants through to high school and provide continued support to ensure they graduate.
- Ensure school staff are knowledgeable about the program and enlist their support for future implementations.
- Improve program assessment plan by locating other measures that have the potential to more accurately gather data.

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<th>Pre</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean Change</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Five of the WhyTry? Measure Questions

- I know how to I have a dream or a goal for my to keep myself I am happy or a goal for my to keep myself I know how to There are lots

| Life | - | 50.0 | - | 75.0 | - | 25.0 | - | 0 |

References

Available upon request