Alternative Education: Benefits At-Risk Students Academically and Socially

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EDU 600 Research Literacy

University of Southern Maine

Summer 2020

Introduction

Education is the one area that has consistently fallen short of a change in how we as educators teach. The state-mandated curriculum has been the status quo for decades. What if this isn't enough to keep the 21st-century students engaged and willing to learn? As an art teacher, I have always taught students differently through the facilitation of conversational descriptions through art and the visual impact of how it makes students feel in hopes of relating the artwork to their life experiences and becoming better observers and critical thinkers. These conversations often build positive relationships between the students and myself in the classroom. I use this same philosophy while facilitating alternative education programming in a K-5 elementary school.

During my search for similar programming articles, I found that I was limited to high school facilities that provided alternative educational opportunities for students that are unable to succeed in the mainstream school for various lifestyle reasons. Based on my own experience with the students, I chose to include social and emotional keywords coupled with alternative education. The results gave me six moderate to highly reliable studies for my final paper. Three qualitative studies, one mixed method, and two quantitative.

Design and Purpose

I chose to complete my final review on alternative education and how the programming, environment, and positive relationships benefit students academically and socially. In elementary school, I provide programming for students that the general education teacher identifies as disengaged when they should be shining, but, for many reasons, may be unable to perform at their potential. The public education teacher refers the student to the Response to Intervention (RTI) team for further review. The social/emotional team assesses all students related to alternative education programming through the referral process. When the group decides that the student will benefit from alternative education programs, I schedule a one-on-one meeting with the student where I provide a learning style interest survey for the student to fill out. Based on the survey's numbers, we discuss which alternative education learning opportunity they feel they would benefit from (e.g., dance, art, hands-on project-based, newspaper, reverse engineering, 3D printing, book group).

Two of the six studies resemble closely to what I currently provide for elementary school students. *Classwide peer tutoring in a martial arts alternative education program: Enhancing social and psychomotor skills* conducted by Shiri Ayvazo and Elian Aljadeff-Abergel in 2019 and an ABAB single-subject design. It examines the effects of the alternative education program of martial arts and shares how Classwide Peer Tutoring could advance the social and motor performance in youth in an urban school's third-grade classroom. The intervention included the entire class reciprocating learning through creative and enjoyable activities. (page 359). This

study resembles the dance learning opportunity provided to students to physically share their capability of following directions and positively working with others to achieve one common goal. Similar to my student grouping, the students in this study were chosen for CWPT intervention by the principal and physical education teacher because of their recurring antisocial incidents and overall low social abilities. (Ayvazo and Aljadeff-Abergel 2019).

In *Narratives of* **Student Engagement in an Alternative Learning Context** conducted by Jeffrey Jones in 2011, the ethnographic qualitative study examines how the offering of the learning environment interacts with the processes of engagement through the perspective of students (Jones, 2011, page 219) in high-functioning alternative high schools. This study uses verbatim language that resembles student quotes that have been shared even at the elementary school level. "I do better because of the teacher…you get things done for the teacher because you want to be respectful" (Jones 2011 page 228)

Three of the six studies were international. Two Australian studies that were environmentally and relationship-focused and one research study from the U.K. examines the psychological needs of students for engagement. *Building social and emotional efficacy to (re)engage young adolescents: capitalizing on the 'window of opportunity'* conducted by Main and Whatman in 2016 is an intrinsic case study. It focused on the program, its delivery, and theory to practice the nexus of complex relationships between the developmental aspects of the early adolescents involved in the program and the program structure at the Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia. (page 1058). The 2nd Australian study, *Alternative education sites, and*

marginalized young people: I wish there were more schools like this one by McGregor and

Mills (2012) is a qualitative phenomenological design study focused on how alternative schools

meet the needs of young people disengaged from mainstream schools in Queensland, Australia.

Both Australian studies use interviews and field observations, but Main and Whatman (2016)

went further to provide quantitative analysis through surveys and classroom auditing.

The U.K. study titled, *The Importance of psychological need satisfaction in educational*

re-engagement by Nicholson and Putwain (2018) is a qualitative phenomenological study that

examines the re-engagement of initially disengaged students that attend an alternative provision

secondary school. Students attend only for a fixed period and return to mainstream schools after

a positive intervention outcome. This study used the self-system model of motivational processes

examining three psychological needs of the students that may be inhibited by teachers and staff

(e.g., autonomy, relatedness, and competence) (Nicholson and Putwan, 2018)

In study six, a quantitative multilevel meta-analysis titled *a meta-analysis on*

adolescents' outcomes at risk for school drop-out attending nonresidential alternative

educational facilities conducted by S. Pronk et al., in 2020. Through the integration of studies,

they focused on the outcomes of adolescents with complex problems at risk for school drop-out

attending only nonresidential alternative educational facilities (page 163).

The three qualitative studies resonated with the theme of capturing the programs'

elements, positive relationships between staff and students, and engaging learning environments

that focused on the students' individual strengths. The quantitative analysis studies seem less personal and to concentrate solely on the identification of numerical data, which does not best serve my exploration of students' social-emotional needs in alternative education programs.

Sampling

All six studies have clear, current, and sufficient literature reviews and a secure link to the development of the construct of the study. Five of the six items chose purposeful samples; the meta-analysis sampling is a stratified random sample of titles and abstracts from 1995 to the present.

Classwide peer tutoring in a martial arts alternative education program: Enhancing social and psychomotor skills of one class (n=41) received the 45 minute P.E. intervention twice a week. The target participants were four students (2 boys) and 2 (girls), two instructors, four observers that conducted data collection, and all observers had 6 hours of training on behavior. (page 360). In *Narratives of Student Engagement in an Alternative Learning Context by* Jones (2011), the purposeful sample of 24 students, 12 teachers, one location, one participant-observer, and one researcher who was also a teacher was conducted over 1.5 years. (page 219)

Building social and emotional efficacy to (re)engage young adolescents: capitalising on the 'window of opportunity' **Main and Whatman (2016).** Another purposeful sampling of

12-15 students in 3rd and 4th grade chosen from two sites in the Gold Coast of Queensland Australia. The students attended three days per week from 11 am to 2:30 pm for ten weeks.

The study from the U.K, ***The Importance of psychological need satisfaction in educational re-engagement*** by Nicholson and Putwain in 2018, the researchers chose a purposeful sampling of 35 students ages 14-16, and 37 staff members took part in the interviews. The final article is quantitative, ***meta-analysis on outcomes of adolescents at risk for school drop-out attending nonresidential alternative educational facilities*** by S. Pronk et al. (2020) used stratified random sampling of records identified through initial database search year 1995 to present. The researchers reviewed a total of n=516 that were quantitative and qualitative studies and reviews. Based on reading titles and abstracts, the team excluded n=496. Many did not match the criteria of nonresidential alternative educational facilities or did not meet the requirements of the study nor published before 1995. The remaining n=20, articles were thoroughly read and led to additional studies (snowball method). They excluded n=10 because these studies revealed alternative educational learning programming inside an existing mainstream school or programming was offered inside a residential alternative educational facility. The researcher's found n=10 studies yielding 87 effect sizes that met their inclusion criteria, the quantitative outcome representing a domain of adolescents functioning, the facilities focused on adolescents between the ages of 12 and 22, and the programming took place in nonresidential alternative educational facilities only. (page 163)

Data Collection

All three international studies relied on field observations, quotes, and recorded interviews. Performance record sheets, visual displays and descriptions of the 60 performance tasks, social skills checklist, and student recognition board, observer use of data recording forms, MP3 players, and two digital cameras for video recording provide reliable data collection in article 2, CWPT. Also, the clearly defined dependent variable as the students' social skills performance and the second dependent variable was motor performance (Ayvazo and Aljadeff-Abergel, 2019). The *CWPT* study has an adequate sample size (N=41) and provides a detailed description of characteristics and settings. There is the appropriateness of subject and target behaviors for treatment. The inferences were grounded in field observations, thick student narrative inquiry, detailed field notes, observational records taken, and analytical memos. Ayvazo and Aljadeff-Abergel (2019) found emerging themes and shared a reflexive account of the research process. This study offered social validity through questionnaires given to the teachers and students.

Jones's (2011) methods of inferences in the *Narrative of Student Engagement in an Alternative Learning Context* are grounded in field observations, narrative inquiry, and has detailed field notes, records, analytical memos revealing emergent themes and provided the reader with a reflexive account of his research process. In *The Importance of psychological need satisfaction in educational re-engagement,* Nicholson and Putwain (2018) used semi-structured interviews with a larger purposeful sample of 35 students ages 14-16. All

discussions were audio-recorded, verbatim transcribed, and data triangulated using staff

interviews and lesson observations. Also, in the qualitative phenomenological design study,

Alternative education sites and marginalized young people: I wish there were more schools

like this one by McGregor and Mills (2012) also documented through observations and held

30-90 minute interviews that were also electronically recorded. The quantitative study, ***a***

meta-analysis on the outcomes of adolescents at risk for school drop-out attending

nonresidential alternative educational facilities. S. Pronk et al., the data was transformed into

effect size using Cohen's d and calculated through formulas. Three random effect models

accounted for three levels of variance, and a funnel plot checked for biases. The study assessed

four variables (DV) social-emotional, academic achievement, academic attitude, externalizing,

and internalizing behavior, and multiple coded characteristics (with the overall outcome of

adolescent functioning (IV) and chose a moderator analysis on those outcomes. (page 165)

Data Analysis and Results

I scored all six studies moderate to high for data analysis and results. Ayvazo and

Aljadeff-Abergel (2019) ***Classwide peer tutoring in a martial arts alternative education***

program: Enhancing social and psychomotor skills data were graphically presented, analyzed

visually, and statistically. Visual analysis based on the data's level, trend, and variability, and the

effect size calculated using the Percentage of Nonoverlapping Data (PND). (page 362) All

teachers were trained on the CWPT, modeled tasks, as well as provided feedback during the

training process. (page 362) Through questionnaires teachers were asked to assess their

perceptions of the effectiveness of goals, procedures, and outcomes of the intervention, and

students were asked three yes or no questions of enjoyment of learning from a peer and coaching

a peer and if they would like to continue participating in CWPT. (page 364) The results were

that the teacher favored the teaching strategy as it promoted leadership and positive social skill

applications. The majority of students (87%) enjoyed participating; (97%) stated that they would

like to continue CWPT in the future. (page 364) Overall results shared that three participants

improved social skills and mixed results for motor performance. (page 366) The limitations are

around the variability of the data sets. This weakens the validity of this study because of its short

duration of the intervention, insufficient stabilization of data, and the declining motivation of

student participation when additionally implementing the intervention. (page 366)

Building social and emotional efficacy to (re)engage young adolescents: capitalising

on the 'window of opportunity' by **Main and Whatman (2016)** chose to use The Productive

Pedagogies Reflection Tool (PPRT). This tool is designed for use in professional learning

communities. The results focused on the program's effectiveness from an educational perspective

and how the program aligned with evidence-based practices of social and emotional programs.

(page 1060) P.P. audits conducted over six observations in Cohort 1, one per week for six weeks,

ten observations in Cohort 2 for ten weeks, and ten observations in Cohort 3 for ten weeks (page

1060). All audits conducted by two researchers who trained to utilize the tool with daily

observational results. The data visually displays the average of all cohorts; connectedness (32%),

Intellectual quality (22%), supportive environment (24%), and working with a valuing difference

(22%). The results also reveal that the teaching within the classroom was primarily focused on

"connectedness" and that the number of students being redirected from behavior by teachers

significantly reduced over time. (page 1063)

       Alternative education sites and marginalized young people: I wish more schools like

this one by McGregor and Mills (2012) share reliable data through recorded interviews and

student quotes from five alternative education schools. The students stated that the environment

was more relaxed and that they felt a part of a community of peers with similar needs. Students

shared that the programs were more individualized, and they experienced compassion,

understanding and respectful support from teachers. The data further revealed that relationships

within each site encouraged student reconnection to learn and that the strong bonds with teachers

are particularly valuable. (page 859-860)

       Jones's 2011study, *Narratives of Student Engagement in an Alternative Learning*

Context, shares that the researcher/teacher reveals a prolonged engagement within the learning

environment. Including in the study are detailed field notes offering thick descriptions of lessons,

events, and social interactions. The observational recordings were enhanced through analytical

memos and through these memos included notes on emerging themes. (page 224) Peer debriefs,

member checks, open codes, triangulation, thick descriptions, and reflexivity notes, assist in the

trustworthiness of this study. (page 225) Student results when asked to compare their old school

versus Murray High School (seeking a change) 12/24 Social Difficulties w/peers, 16/24

detrimental academic experiences, 8/24, and social and educational issues. Murray High School's graduation rate is 93% percent higher compared with mainstream schools within the same district, 86%, and 79% in the state. (page 223) **Nicholson and Putwain (2018)** *The Importance of psychological need satisfaction in educational re-engagemen*t; the goal is to understand the meaning of lived experiences from the students' perspective. Their data analyzed was inductive, a priori concepts and themes were not imposed on the data, also, transcripts were analyzed separately, maintaining its idiographic commitment. (page 175) The student data analyzed by the first author was the primary source of data for this study and triangulated using staff interviews and lesson observations. (page 175) The second author conducted coding. Cluster themes were analyzed carefully against all data by both authors and categorized according to autonomy, relatedness, and competence, whether facilitated or inhibited. (page 175) Both students and staff reported that attendance, behavior, and academic performance improved for the majority of students yet, this study does not offer concrete evidence of objective data such as attendance, student discipline, or test score records. (page 183) The research also suggests the use of experience sampling that allows data to be collected in real-time may have assisted with the recall and reliability of this study. (page 183)

In the quantitative study, *a meta-analysis on outcomes of adolescents at risk of school drop-out attending nonresidential alternative educational facilities* by S. Pronk et al. (2020). The analysis of the five domains of adolescent functioning outcomes found no significant differences except that the longer the student remained at the facility, the more positive the

academic results and prevented students from dropping out of school. (page 168) The quantitative meta-analysis of outcomes and domains are (k) 10, (#ES) 87, N=1,868 adolescents within the literature, effect (d=.15, p<.05) Egger's Test T=3.38, p<.001 Trim and Fill for the overall effect of d=.15, d=.31. The small effect size is due to the low amount of studies and only a few characteristics tested. A commonality among the ten studies was that the longer the placement, the smaller the effect size. Therefore, it may not be adequate for the adolescent to receive long-term instruction in an alternative education nonresidential facility. (page 168) It would be prudent to invest in the development of high-quality nonresidential alternative education facilities as the programming does appear to decrease the percentages of high school drop-outs. (page 168)

Quality of Research

Overall, I gave moderate to a high quality to the three qualitative studies. Ayvazo and Aljadeff-Abergel (2019) are strong in theory and treatment. This study shares a precise description of the intervention by the researcher (IV), the exact specification for target behaviors (D.V.s). The sampling scored strongly for the adequate sampling size (n=41), and the detailed description of characteristics and setting. Also, the appropriateness of subject and target behaviors of treatment assisted in the high rating as well as the use of precise specifications of D.V.s and an apparent baseline description utilization as the control condition. There is consistent recording and graphing of data and provides the depiction of level, trend, and slope.

Jones's (2011) research scored overall moderate to high. The credibility of data is average for the prolonged research setting and researcher/teacher's observations. The dependability of data analysis and transferability I scored high. Both scored high because of the multiple data sources, emergent themes, and reflexive account of the research process. The transferability is also high in this study due to the thick descriptions, the verbatim language of participants, and the documented selection of settings. I also scored the transferability moderate for the mixed-method qualitative research by Main and Whatman (2016). ***Building social and emotional efficacy to (re)engage young adolescents: capitalising on the 'window of opportunity'***, the mixed method study, the data collection offers a full description of the research project, participant interviews, thoughts, actions, and shares their verbatim language. There was evidence of quantitative analysis, multiple data sources, and various observers highly trained in the PPRT audit tool. I found that the meta-analysis scores are similar to the mixed-method study. In ***a meta-analysis on the outcomes of adolescents at risk for school drop-out attending nonresidential alternative educational facilities*** by S.Pronk et al., the theory and treatment scores are strong as the intervention (IV) is supported by a research review of at least ten studies. There is an accurate description of the intervention (IV) and target behaviors domains of the adolescent functioning (DV). In the sampling and data collection in this study, I scored moderate (n=10) due to the participants' poor reporting practices, program elements, poor control groups within the reviews, and because only one form of the facility was measured. This

study reveals that more research is required regarding effective programs to meet the individual needs of students with complex problems fully (page 169). In Nichoson and Putwan's (2016) research study of the ***Importance of psychological need satisfaction in educational re-engagement***, the trifecta score is high. The high score for trustworthiness, dependability of data, and transferability are because of the prolonged research settings, persistent observations, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, thick descriptions, and an audit trail. They use multiple data sources and observers as well as peer reviews for accuracy and inferences. McGregor and Mills's (2012) study, ***Alternative education sites and marginalized young people: I wish there were more schools like this one.*** I gave trustworthiness, dependability, and transferability a score of moderate. I felt that although the evidence of recorded interviews, onsite observations for five sites, and the socio-economic factors shared positive outcomes. And although the students and staff interviews share verbatim quotes, the time spent during each onsite observation seems insufficient. Also, they offered no indication of a high-quality curriculum in the data to warrant a higher score.

Summary

This assignment has provided valuable information and tools that has expanded my ability to collect valuable data within the alternative educational learning programming provided to younger students. I was pleasantly surprised to find six primary research articles in alternative

education that were relatively timely. I feel as though alternative education is somewhat new in

the educational field and based on my search for articles for this review it seems unheard of at

the elementary school level. Although I was somewhat limited to high school alternative

education and social-emotional studies within my initial search, the information within these six

studies has enlightened my understanding extensively.

The qualitative data revealed in these research articles shares that the social-emotional

culture of students often affects their educational performance. Additionally, building mutual

respect, presenting student interest learning opportunities, and forming flexible, caring learning

environments for at-risk students is vital for them to become life-long learners. Maybe by

assisting them in finding their learning styles earlier, teaching them how to accept and utilize

their strengths throughout their educational careers, will keep students on track throughout their

education, as well as continue to build positive relationships throughout their lives.

This research assignment has reinforced my aspirations to become an educator of

alternative learning for younger students. It provides effective data collection strategies that will

offer credibility to the alternative education programming that I am currently implementing.

Also, these studies have encouraged me to move forward in my plans to continue to offer

positive alternative educational learning experiences to younger students.

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