Alternative High School Educators' Perspective: Factors Used in Assisting At-risk Students.

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LIU Post
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Personal observation while working in Rosedale Alternative HS (Pseudonym)
Students did not behave the way the “transfer school” described them.
Excessive truancy, extreme behaviors, academic failures

- There is a lack of research that concentrates on what has worked for at-risk youths in an alternative school setting.
  - Numerous research on what has failed
    - Zero tolerance, suspensions/expulsions, Behavior modification,
  - Numerous literature on “new” techniques and approaches to use
    - Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS)
Literature Review

- **Authentic relationships.**
  Slaten, Irby, Tate, and Rivera

- Teachers’ & administrators’ perspectives of social & emotional learning. Semi-structured interviews

- Alternative HS, 175 students 30% had committed armed robbery or burglary

- **Results:**
  - needed to encourage students,
  - know students personally, and believe that **relationships are a pre-requisite to learning.**
  - Be vulnerable with students, sharing personal struggles and triumphs that related to students.

  - aided students in the ability to communicate candidly with staff

**School Connectedness**

Chapman et al. (2014)

- Teachers’ perspectives Relationship between school connectedness and risk-taking

- 14 teachers, 2 staff, 2 high schools. 1-affluent neighborhood, 1 low socioeconomic area.

- All participants were interviewed

- **Results:**
  - when a student feels connected to his surroundings, there is a greater sense of trust and respect.
  - Providing positive reinforcement and their involvement in constructive activities encouraged them and reduced their involvement in negative behaviors

- **This connectedness helps in the student-teacher relationship and helps reduce delinquent behavior within the school**
Factors Build Student Capacity Lind(2013)

What builds student capacity in an alternative setting?

- Two school years study, Eight researchers (school principal, two teachers, four students & Lind) 10 focus groups and 2 individual interviews.

Results:

- The school provided a safe place to develop mutually supportive relationships.
  - Students were allowed to speak freely and were encouraged to use critical thinking skills.
  - Taught students activism and leadership skills.
  - Students participated in decision-making enabled them to engage within the school community.
  - Students experienced a sense of confidence and capability, extending into long-term positive effects.

Comparison Schools of Low and High Dropout Rate Christie, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007)

Characteristics related to Low and High Dropout Rate?

196 high schools, specific variables & correlations between dropout rate, academic achievement, school attendance rate, rate of successful transition to adult life, and percentage of students of white ethnic background.

Results: schools with lower dropout rates better physical condition, cleaner and more orderly

8 schools, 4 high dropout rates and 4 low dropout rates. (840 students with 30 staff & administrators)

Surveys, staff interviews, & direct observation

Results:

- Schools that had a lower dropout rate
  - higher staff-student ratio,
  - more teacher-student interactions,
  - more instructional strategies,
  - more student engagement,
  - an overall higher general mood and impression.

- “This finding supports the observation that students who feel a sense of belonging and are connected to school are less likely to drop out of school” (p. 333).
Methodology

- This exploratory study utilizes a mixed-method design using a qualitative and quantitative approach.
  - Creswell (2011) related that by using a mixed-method approach of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study assists to better understand the research problem.

- Sample of convenience $N=15$
  - **General education and vocational teachers.**
    - The general and vocational teachers who participated in this study worked at this alternative school and worked at the county jail. Most of the teachers were assigned two to three days a week at the school and the remainder of the work week they worked with adolescents and adults in the jail.
  - **Administrators and social workers.**
    - The administrators and the social workers were full time staff at the alternative school.
Research Questions:

- **RQ1** - What factors do alternative high school educators perceive as assisting at-risk students in succeeding academically?
- **RQ2** - What factors do alternative high school educators perceive as hindering at-risk students in succeeding academically?

**Survey questionnaire**
- Several **demographic** personal questions to establish their professional education and experience,
- Three **open-ended questions**
- Seven **scaled questions**. The instrument’s 6-point Likert-type scale was anchored at the low end with the descriptor “Do not use/Do not know,”. At the high end with the descriptor “Extremely Important,”
- All survey questions were designed with **ERG theory** and **Bandura’s self-efficacy** as the framework.

Educators’ perceptions as reported by their responses were reviewed several times and **significant words and statements were noted and categorized**.

The categories began to emerge into themes that also coincided with ERG and self-efficacy. These categories were then arranged into themes.
## Demographics

*Descriptive Statistics for Educator Gender, Position, Years Experience, Education (N=15)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Doctorate Degree</td>
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Results
RQ1-What factors do alternative high school educators perceive as assisting at-risk students in succeeding academically?

RQ1 responses prior to coding

Nancy - While working with a student it was brought to my attention that he was in a very abusive household. He had missed a lot of school and I later discovered that he often stayed home to provide protection to his mother and sister, from his father. He confided in me and we were able to work towards placing them into a DV shelter. This student was then able to concentrate more on his schoolwork and bring up his grades.

Gill- I believe I have made a difference in a young man's life that was heading for disaster. I encouraged him to focus on his future and to avoid destructive behavior. I tried to offer alternative perspectives for him to see and from what I have learned he did remove himself from negative influences.

Maria- I had the privilege of working with a young lady who had been in and out of foster care and had no place to call her own home. Her goal was to be on her own. While we worked on her academics we also worked on her life skills and were able to set her up in her own place with the assistance of social services.
Results
RQ1 - What factors do alternative high school educators perceive as assisting at-risk students in succeeding academically?

- **Being approachable** for the student which allowed the student to confide in them.
- **Being a mentor** and providing the student individual attention.
- **Individual attention** appeared to come in two different forms,
  - **Tending to the students personal issues/needs**
  - **Their academic needs assignments.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educator Made a Difference</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gender and Degree</td>
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<td>Approachable/confides in</td>
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<td>Female Master's degree</td>
<td>Literacy issue/confides in</td>
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<td>Mentor/extra attention</td>
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<td>Self-confidence/confides in</td>
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<td>Educational tools</td>
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<td>Male Master's degree</td>
<td>Mentor/extra attention</td>
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<td>Approachable/Educational tools</td>
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13.3% providing food, 33.3% made themselves approachable/confide in them
26.7% mentored 20% extra academic help
RQ2. What factors do alternative high school educators perceive as hindering at-risk students in succeeding academically?

RQ2 responses prior to coding

Yvette- I think one of the challenges educators face when dealing with at-risk youth is not having a good understanding of what this student is going through.

Becky- Students are preoccupied with thoughts of their own problems.

Jill- As consistent and positive you try to be in the class, there are so many outside influences after school to work against them.
RQ2. What factors do alternative high school educators perceive as hindering at-risk students in succeeding academically?

Key challenges for educators

- Poor attendance
- Inability for a student to catch up on missed credits.
- Lack of programs like credit recovery
- Student’s preoccupation with personal issues
- Educator lack of understanding on what the student is going through.
  - This lack of understanding leads to frustrations and difficulties on both the educator’s part and the student’s.

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<tr>
<th>Educator’s Challenges</th>
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20 % poor attendance. 20 % the student’s preoccupation 20 % lack of understanding on the educator’s behalf. Mix of resources, undiagnosed, relationship building…
Theme 1: Administrators and Social Workers Work Effectively With ERG and Self-efficacy

Are administrators and social workers trained in different skills that would provide an explanation for the disparity among the answers provided?

- Social workers and administrators **extremely important** to:
  - Teach students to problem solve
  - Adapt academic instructions to the needs of the student
  - Promote school involvement and positive community interactions
  - Work with the students in helping them to feel like they are part of a group.
Theme 2: Gender Differences in Teaching Approaches (?)
Male educators answered the quantitative questions that were associated to Relatedness and Existence, at an overall lower sense of importance.
Theme 3: Male Educators Work Effectively With Existence and Growth Needs according to their qualitative responses.

(Triangulation)

Survey question 13. “Tell me about a time you felt you made a difference in a particular student’s life.”

Luke shared “I felt I made a difference in a student’s life when he told me he wanted to be an auto mechanic. I was able to help him with this goal by guiding him through the academics that he would need in order to work at a shop after school.”

Harry a vocational teacher stated “I think I have made a difference in the life of a student who became a father at 16 and needed to support his son. During my classes I would spend extra time teaching him more advanced carpentry skills so he could get a job in the field.”

Albert shared “I knew of a student whose family was having difficulty purchasing food and the necessities so I would provide food during the day for this student and on occasion would drop off groceries anonymously.”
Limitations:
(a) Data was collected from one setting
(b) Participants had once worked the researcher
(c) Cannot be generalizable.

IMPLICATIONS

FOR THE EDUCATOR

- Encourage educators to expand their knowledge of Alderfer’s ERG theory and Bandura’s self-efficacy theory.
- Encourage Educators to embrace a school cultural that supports social-emotional development
- Offer opportunities for relationship building and individual academic time.

FOR THE POLICYMAKERS

- Urge policy makers to develop opportunities for the educators to expand their knowledge on the importance of attending to the at-risk students wide array of needs.
- Encompass programs and curriculums with the emphasis on the “whole student” and not just on the academics.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was to explore what factor’s assisted with at-risk students in obtaining academic success, through the lens of the educator’s who worked with them.

Future research should explore the at-risk students that these educators’ worked with, to get a complete picture. (Researcher’s Dissertation)

The researcher should use the same theoretical framework of Alderfer’s ERG and Bandura’s self-efficacy, to compare and contrast the two studies.

Future research should continue with other alternative schools, following the same framework, to see if similar results are obtained.
References


References cont.


