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Dulce M. Carmona
California State University, Monterey Bay

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Helping Academic Struggling Elementary School Students Succeed

Dulce Carmona

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Senior Capstone

Advisor: Dr. Paoze Thao

Abstract

There is a push to focus on academics for struggling elementary school students to be successful. Research has shown that teachers and tutors who use various teaching methods have helped students to be successful in their academic performance. This senior capstone project explores how struggling students can achieve success in school and at the same time can catch up with their classmates. Through a literature review, interviews and surveys conducted with two elementary school teachers, a coordinator and students in Monterey County, the results reveal how beneficial it is for students to have extra help from teachers and tutors. In particular when they receive one-on-one assistance. The results from interviews and surveys also reveal how teachers in the Monterey County can help struggling students to succeed in their academics. In addition, extra help from tutors can also be very beneficial as it provides additional academic assistance for struggling students.

Keywords: *academics, struggling elementary students, success, tutors*

Capstone Advisor: Dr. Paoze Thao

Introduction and Background

When I first learned about what are some of the common reasons students struggle academically in schools in the U.S, I wondered what states and local schools districts have established to help the students in need. Helping struggling students is an important aspect of society since the beginning of its time. Within the domain of finding ways to help students, there are many different methods that states and schools have established to help students that are struggling academically.

For example, the No Child Left Behind act of 2002 was signed by then President George W. Bush into law on January 8, 2002. This reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act it also included applying provisions to disadvantaged students. Additionally, it established standards-based educational reform, with the ultimate objectives and strategies that could improve individual outcomes in education. Such strategies based on helping meet the educational needs of the students who traditionally have struggled the most in school. However, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by then president Barack Obama into law on December 2015. The law ultimately replaced the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) objectives included, but not limited to providing an equal opportunity for students who need special services and to hold schools accountable for student's academic achievement. Achievement objectives includes ambitious goals for groups of students who are the furthest academically behind.

These students are often labeled as “struggling”, “at risk”, “disadvantaged” and “educational deprived” Johannessen (2004). Some of these students came from disproportionately low

social-economic status families. Mandates from the (NCLB) had greater negative consequences in teaching and learning environments in children from low-income schools (Dennis 2016). The (NCLB) required extensive testing for students, with the belief that extensive testing improved academic achievement. Therefore, teachers were stripped from their professional academic teaching strategies. Teachers and districts were discouraged from adapting instruction and curricula that met individual students' academic needs such as in reading and writing.

On the other hand, the ESSA (2015) called for comprehensive literacy based instruction which focused significant importance for the continued professional learning for teachers. The (ESSA) provides an opportunity to support teachers expertise's and continued professional development. Acknowledging the importance of teachers to continue their development as effective teachers. It takes deep understanding for teachers to determine a student's academic difficulties (Afflerbach 2008).

Teachers highly value academic supportive programs that provide many opportunities to study; students work and behaviors (Allington 2011). These programs provide a systematic way for observation and interpretation of the behaviors and actions of the students. Professional development programs are highly influential in the development as teachers. For example, one valued professional development program for teachers was training for Reading Recovery (Alligton 2011). This program was designed to teach an specific framework for observing and designing instructional responses for students struggling in reading. Teachers would then be able to apply these strategies in after school supportive programs and be able to push students to the next level.

Having supportive programs for students in school helps them receive additional academic support from teachers that are able to use their own teaching strategies. Teachers face constant

pressure to ensure that all students can demonstrate their learning at the expected level and to embrace the models that would provide the support of their students in a short period of time. Johannessen (2004) further states that, "In order to be a successful teacher for students who are struggling to learn, you need to understand that these kids are not necessarily less intelligent or less capable than other students" (p. 1). It is important for teachers to understand the child's learning process and not to judge themselves in any way. Having an extra help in the classroom, such as teacher aids and tutors, will result in a good support for students. Having this extra help will benefit the students in their academic learning since the teacher can't split herself to teach students individually. In addition, every child has a different style of learning.

This research will be of interest to school districts, specifically for teachers and students. In addition, this paper will provide information for parents, so they can see what research says about helping struggling students to succeed in their academics.

Primary and Secondary or Related Research Questions

The primary research question that this senior capstone research project seeks the answer to, is: *How do teachers help elementary struggling students succeed in their academics?* Additionally, some secondary or related questions are: (1) *Are there existing programs that help struggling elementary school students succeed in their academics in the Monterey Bay area? If so, what are they?* (2) *Are there legislations and programs that impact struggling students in their academics according to teachers?* (3) *How do teachers implement the programs and to what extent, their programs have helped their struggling students?* (4) *Are there resources for teachers to help their struggling students to bring them up to par with their regular classmates? In another words, what needs to be done to bring struggling students to the same level as their*

regular classmates? The purpose of this research paper is to find out how teachers help struggling students succeed in their academics and what resources are available to help both teachers and students.

Literature Review

To understand the subject at hand, a literature review was conducted to find out the struggles that every student at the elementary level face. Through literature review, an instructional intervention program was found to help struggling students. The program focuses on subjects, such as reading and math. It is also designed to monitor the student's progress.

Without doubt there is an increasing concern in the United States regarding the students least likely to succeed in school. Certainly a major factor of U.S President Bush's legislation No Child Left behind (NCLB) of 2002 was designed to meet the educational needs of students who have traditionally struggled the most in school and often labeled. As Johannessen (2004) states, "Variously labeled as "struggling," "reluctant," "at risk," "disadvantaged," "alienated," "resistant," "educationally underprepared," these students come disproportionately from low socioeconomic status families and from ethnic and linguistic minority backgrounds." (pg. 1). Indeed there are various student background factors that overall influence students not succeeding in our schools which is very unfortunate. As Johannessen (2004) states, "According to the national Center for Education Statistics (1999) the dropout rates in 1999 were 25.3% for Hispanic, 13.4% for black, and 7.6% for white students, and these figures only hint at the numbers of students who might graduate from high school without having experienced much or any success at all." (Pg.2).

Mandates from the (NCLB) had greater negative consequences in teaching and learning environments in children from low-income schools (Dennis 2016). The (NCLB) required extensive testing for students, with the belief that extensive testing improved academic achievement. Therefore, teachers were stripped from their professional academic teaching strategies. Teachers and districts were discouraged from adapting instruction and curricula that met individual students' academic needs such as in reading and writing.

Nevertheless, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Barack Obama into law on December 2015. The law ultimately replaced the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) objectives included, but not limited to providing an equal opportunity for students who need special services and to hold schools accountable for student's academic achievement. Achievement objectives includes ambitious goals for groups of students who are the furthest academically behind.

The ESSA (2015) called for comprehensive literacy based instruction which focused significant importance for the continued professional learning for teachers. The (ESSA) provides an opportunity to support teachers expertise's and continued professional development. Acknowledging the importance of teachers to continue their development as effective teachers. It takes deep understanding for teachers to determine a student's academic difficulties (Afflerbach 2008). Teachers highly value academic supportive programs that provide many opportunities to study students work and behaviors (Allington 2011). These programs provide a systematic way for observation and interpretation of the behaviors and actions of the students. Professional development programs are highly influential in the development as teachers. For example, one valued professional development program for teachers was training for Reading Recovery (Allington

2011). This program was designed to teach a specific framework for observing and designing instructional responses for students struggling in reading. Teachers would then be able to apply these strategies in after school supportive programs and be able to push students to the next level.

There are various basic approaches for dealing with low achieving or “at-risk” students. For example, breaking students into small groups, providing short activities and instruction with the assistance of a tutor. Likewise, covering material thoroughly, at a moderate pace and taking note of student’s feedback that can later be used in additional supportive programs. Also, allowing time to call on everyone and allowing the student to answer the question being asked (Emmer, Everston, & Worsham 2000). Teaching the basics through strategic skills-based instruction allows educators to reach these at risk students.

Early intervention for students who are struggling academically improves students’ chance of making it through their education. There are many strategies that teachers can use to address specific needs, and could also gave them a chance of not falling behind, but become a motivations for them as they continue with their education. As Ray (2012) states “A 2012 Eye on Education report, notes that most young students respond positively to early intervention strategies, such as one-on-one time with teachers, coordination with tutors and additional materials for use at home” (Pg.3). Having these types of programs is an important asset for students to succeed academically. It has an advantage because a tutor or teacher can help students on one-to-one basis and will increase students’ academic performance. It is also beneficial for teachers because they don’t have time to help students individually in the regular class session. When students don't have the support one one-on- one basis, students may become more frustrated with their inability to keep up their academics in class, and so they start to lose their desire to learn.

Supportive programs for students in school helps them receive additional academic support from teachers that are able to use their own teaching strategies. Having an extra help in the classroom, such as teacher aids and tutors, will result in a good support for students. An extra help will benefit the students in their academic learning since the teacher can't split herself to teach students individually. In addition, every child has a different style of learning.

Methods and Procedures

In order to find out more on how to help struggling elementary school students, an individual research was conducted. Data was collected through the California State University Monterey Bay Library database and peer reviewed articles. The additional methods and procedures that were used to conduct this research project were interviews with teachers (See Appendix A Teacher Interview Questions), survey with students (See Appendix B for Anonymous 6th Grade Student Survey Questions) and interview with a coordinator of the existing program in the Monterey County (See Appendix C for Program Coordinator Interview Questions). Each interview was conducted in person and for the students surveys it was given to the teacher to give out to the students in their own spare time. Interviews were conducted with two (2) teachers, survey with fourteen (14) students, and interview with one (1) program coordinator of the Salinas City Elementary school District. Two (2) responses were received from teacher's interview; seven (7) from a 5th grade class and seven (7) from a 6th grade class-along with one (1) interview with a program coordinator. The two teachers have been in the educational system for about 15 years.

Long hours were dedicated to compile the research project, especially when seeking out articles and journals on the subject matter. Even more hours followed when I had to schedule appointments with teachers and coordinators. As they are professionals, I needed to ensure that I was fully prepared with my questions because they only had a limited time to respond. Furthermore, I was ensure to respect their time and left time for additional information that they wanted to share. I visited two local schools, wherein I had the opportunity to interview one coordinator from the existing program they have. Oral conversation was used to collect data from teacher and coordinator. Teachers were interview in different times and place. As for coordinator it was conducted where we agreed on the place to meet. The surveys were given to teachers to hand them out to students that included six question, see Appendix B for list of full questions.

All this approach helped me answer my research questions because I was able to gather the information and see the different point of views of each individual that I used in this study. Lastly, the method I used to conduct this research paper gave a rationale for the material I used to assess in this study because it gave the answers to my research questions. This approach was needed, together with the methods and procedures listed above, in order to become aware of the programs that were offered in schools for students in needs. In fact I truly impulse to expand on a holistic approach to my primary question, “How do teachers help elementary struggling students succeed in their academics”?

Results and Findings

Through an extensive review of academic literature and by collecting survey responses, all the secondary research questions presented in this paper were answered. The answers provide insight into how teachers help elementary struggling students to succeed in their academics.

(1) Are there existing programs that help struggling elementary school students succeed in their academics in the Monterey Bay area? If so, what are they?

In the Monterey County, there are existing programs that can help struggling students to succeed in their academics. Schools have programs such as after school programs, in-class tutors, and intervention. California Mini Corps program is a statewide program designated to provide services for students in grade k-12 by trained college tutors. This program began in 1967, patterned after the Peace Corps Program. Mini Corps students become role models for the students. The program's main goal is to provide instructional tutorial services to enrich students' academic achievement with the help of trained college students. According to the school of education, "Mini-Corps participants work as teacher assistants in public schools providing direct instructional services to students. Mini-Corps participants work under the direction of certificated teachers and are supervised by a Mini-Corps College Coordinator". (p.1) Tutors are mandated to receive in service training through educational workshops in conjunction with the California Mini-Corps Program. Tutors give one-on-one support assistance to students who are struggling in class. In a personal interview coordinator said, "Yes definitely because M.C find ways to help the all students including migrant students. One experience I have to when I observe the tutor was that I was in a k- class where the students was having difficulty learning the letters. The M.C tutor brought an idea of using play-dough to play and form the letters. Where sometimes the teacher does not have the time to help the student that is struggling because she needs to take

care of the rest of the class”. (Coordinator, personal communication, 6 November, 2019). By these extra support, students are able to achieve a higher academic performance in school.

(2) Are there legislations and programs that impact struggling students in their academics according to teachers?

There are existing programs that have a positive impact on struggling students on achieving a higher level in their academics. In a personal interview teacher A said, “Tutors are very helpful. They help the class move a little faster by helping out the students who have questions and struggling. The work is divided in a way” (Teacher A, personal communication, 4 November, 2019). By having a tutor in a class can help struggling students to understand the material in class. Having after school programs provides academically struggling students the opportunity to get additional help. Teachers and tutors are allowed to use their own academic assistance strategies with students.

(3) How do teachers implement the programs and to what extent, their programs have helped their struggling students?

Teachers implement the programs by first identifying struggling, reluctant, at risk, disadvantaged, alienated, resistant, educationally underprepared students. Then, once they have been identified teachers are able to provide additional help to the students by them using their unique teaching strategies and intervention. Additionally, the teachers are also able to place these students in the academic support programs and/or assign an individual tutor.

(4) Are there resources for teachers to help their struggling students to bring them up to par with their regular classmates? In another words, what needs to be done to bring struggling students to the same level as their regular classmates?

The (ESSA) provides an opportunity to support teachers expertise's and continued professional development. Acknowledging the importance of teachers to continue their development as effective teachers. These is a comprehensive literacy based instruction which focused significant importance for the continued professional learning for teachers. Professional development programs are highly influential in the development as teachers. For example, one valued professional development program for teachers was training for Reading Recovery. By then, teachers would be able to apply the learned strategies in after school supportive programs and be able to push students to the next level. The interview responses overall gave a lot of insight about how teachers and schools district help academic struggling students.

Discussion

The review of academic resources showed that struggling elementary school students succeed in their academics is by having extra help such as tutors, after school program, and intervention. Having after school programs provides academic struggling students the opportunity to get additional help. Students are more likely to improve academically. Tutors help facilitate the classroom. In a personal interview teacher A said, "Tutors are very helpful. They help the class move a little faster by helping out the students who have questions and struggling. The work is divided in a way" (Teacher A, personal communication, 4 November, 2019). By this help, student's highly value the one on one focus on after school programs. Teachers and tutors are allowed to use their own academic assistance strategies. In a personal interview the Teacher B said, "Having a tutor in the class is beneficial because students have extra support that a teacher cannot give because in a class we have 25+ students and it's hard to give one-on-one assistance" (Teacher B, personal communication, 30 October, 2019). Programs have existed for

many years as of now, they have proven that students succeed by given them one-on-one assistance. The California Mini Corps Program also known as (CMC) is a statewide program designed to provide direct instructional services for migrant students in grades K-12 through a cadre of trained college tutors. In a personal interview coordinator said, “This program initiated in 1969. The expected role of a Mini Corp Tutor also known as (MC) is to serve students in the classroom. Tutors are not allowed to do critical work is a base to one-on-one assistance working with students to help them out if they are struggling in any subject” (Coordinator, personal communication, 6 November, 2019). Having an MC tutor helps students improves learning. In a personal interview coordinator said, “Yes definitely because M.C find ways to help the all students including migrant students. One experience I have to when I observe the tutor was that I was in a k- class where the students was having difficulty learning the letters. The M.C tutor brought an idea of using play-dough to play and form the letters. Where sometimes the teacher does not have the time to help the student that is struggling because she needs to take care of the rest of the class”. (Coordinator, personal communication, 6 November, 2019). Even though, teachers sometimes cannot give extra help to students, there are existing programs that can help achieve the student’s success.

Problems and Limitations

There were several problems that came across throughout my research. The primary problem was getting into any school, it was very difficult due to the busy schedule they have. I contacted various schools via email, phone calls and in person. Unluckily, I did not get too many return calls. The secretaries were given me a lot of problems and they sent me from one person to another, it was difficult to get in contact with. One of the difficult problem was that I received a

response from them 1 month later and as a result, it was very small sample size to this research. A limitation to this research is that surveys were not given to the students physically. I have asked the teachers to distribute them to their students during a break time. This is to prevent any distractions during the class session. If I would have had the opportunity to distribute the surveys, this would have provided me of a visual assurance that students were completing the surveys. Last, a limitation to this research is that only one (1) coordinator of an existing program was able to answer the questions from the interview and provided me with data for my research paper. After encountering all this problems and limitations I can give my person belief throughout this research project.

Recommendation

After conducting this research about how teachers help struggling students to succeed it makes me belief that teacher use various methods to help them succeed. It is beneficial for students and teachers in the Monterey County to know the existing methods on how to help struggling students to succeed in their academics. I would recommend that all schools in the Monterey County allow programs to give extra help to students if needed. By allowing tutors to give an extra help that a regular teacher can't give due to the many things they need to do with the rest of the students. Allowing programs that helps students can be very proactive way on helping them to succeed. Recommend that all schools in the Monterey County allow programs to give extra help to students if needed.

Conclusion

Helping struggling students have been an important aspect of society since the beginning of its time. Within the domain of finding ways to help students, there are many different methods

Running head: Helping Struggling Elementary Students

that states and schools have established to help students that are struggling academically. How do teachers help elementary struggling students succeed in their academics? Knowing the methods on how to help struggling elementary school students, it's beneficial for students and teachers in the Monterey County to know the existing methods on how to help struggling students.

Allowing programs that helps students can be very proactive way on helping them to succeed.

Schools should properly be inform of the many resources and opportunities that exist to help students and teachers to be successful.

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Appendix A

Teacher Interview Questions

1. How do school teachers help elementary struggling students succeed in their academics?
2. Are there existing programs that help struggling elementary school students succeed in their academics in the Monterey Bay area? If so, what are they?
3. What is your opinion on having a tutor in class?
4. Are there legislations and programs that impact struggling students in their academics according to teachers?
5. How do teachers implement the programs and to what extent, their programs have helped their struggling students?

6. Are there resources for teachers to help their struggling students to bring them up to par with their regular classmates? In another words, what needs to be done to bring struggling students to the same level as their regular classmates?

7. Do you believe that by having a tutor in class is beneficial for students and teacher? Please explain.

Appendix B

Anonymous 6th Grade Students Survey Questions

1. Do you feel that a M.C Tutor helps you in a good stand when struggling in a lesson/subject?

Yes No

2. Do you feel that by having a Tutor in your classroom helps you retain the material?

Yes No

3. Do you feel that a school is doing the right decision on hiring tutors?

Yes No

4. Do you think that having 1 tutor is enough for all the class?

Yes No

5. Do you think will be best for the class to have more than 1 tutor?

Yes NO

6. What is your opinion about the tutor's job in the class? Please explain.

Appendix C

Program Coordinator Interview Questions

1. When did these program initiated?

2. What is your role as a Mini Corps Coordinator?

3. Who are the students that benefit from this program?

4. What are the expected roles that a tutor need to have when working with students?

5. Do tutors work one-to-one with students or as a group?

6. What are the trainings that the tutors get, so that they can become more helpful for students?

7. How do tutors work with the students?

8. Do you believe that by having an M.C tutor improves the student way of learning? Explain.
