

Zena's House 2009-2010 Evaluation of Tutoring Program

In the United States (U.S.), there exist substantial education achievement gaps that have lasting impacts on students. Tutoring has been shown to be an effective supplementary method of increasing academic achievement (*Jason, Betts, Johnson, Smith, Krueckeberg, & Cradock, 1989; Nvernizzi, & Juel, 1996*).

It is imperative that empirical evidence on the effectiveness of such tutoring programs be disseminated for replications and adaptation. The specific purpose of this report is to evaluate the effectiveness of a tutoring program offered by Zena's House, Inc. Zena's House is a non-profit youth development organization that provides academic support, life skills training, and positive reinforcement to middle school students in Clayton and Fulton counties in Georgia. The main purpose of the tutoring program is to improve students' math, reading and language arts scores on Georgia's Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT). The test measures students' skills and abilities in major school subject areas. With literature supporting that tutoring provides academic improvement in middle school children (Ritter, Barnett, Denny, & Albin, 2009; Kamps, Greenwood, Arreaga-Mayer, Veerkamp, Utley, Tapia & Bannister, H., 2008), it is hypothesized that students participating in the Zena's House tutoring program will achieve significantly higher standardized test scores in the English/Language Arts, Math, and Reading subject areas compared to what score they obtained before participating in the tutoring program.

Method

Participants

Participants included 36 middle school students who were part of the Zena's House tutoring program during the 2009-2010 academic school year. The 36 students attended various public middle schools in Clayton and Fulton counties in Georgia. Eligibility criteria for participation in the Zena's House tutoring program are as follows: 1) the student must be eligible for free or reduced lunch; and 2) attend a school that is classified as Needs Improvement (NI). SES, under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, requires school districts to fund tutoring services to students from low-income families (i.e. eligible for free or reduced lunch) attending Title I schools that are academically underperforming (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Zena's House, Inc. is a state-approved SES provider.

Tutors

Tutors consisted of college students, teachers, and degreed professionals. Tutor candidates were interviewed, had satisfactory background and reference checks and participated in a five-hour mandatory training.

Materials and Procedures

Zena's House utilizes a holistic approach to capturing a students' academic success. The primary indicator of students' academic achievement is the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) standardized test. This test was used as the pre/post assessment of grade-specific academic proficiency from spring 2009 to spring 2010. Secondary indicators of students' academic success is the Zena's House academic

pre/post assessment of their basic academic ability (math, reading comprehension, reading ability, and parts of speech).

Due to its potential influence on academic success, self-esteem is assessed using the Abbreviated Hare Self-Esteem Scale (Kelly, 1997) at pre and post. The Abbreviated Hare Self-Esteem Scale captures the level of self-esteem in three environments: at home, in school, and among peers. Additionally, a parent assessment of student achievement and overall satisfaction with tutoring services was also administered pre and post to investigate parent perceptions of the effectiveness of the tutoring program, and their child's academic and behavioral abilities and areas of need. Data collection was completed via paper and pencil survey upon students' enrollment in the tutoring program, then re-administered upon the student exhausting their allotted hours of SES-sponsored tutoring. The data were then analyzed using paired samples t-tests using SPSS Version 18 software.

Program

Tutoring was provided using a 1:1 or 1:2 tutor/student ratio and completed in the students' home or at their local library. Tutors used the students' pre-assessment scores to devise an individual student learning plan that covered the length of the time the student was in the program. Each student received 30-64 hours of tutoring for the 2009-2010 school year depending on which county they resided in which equated to approximately 1.5-2 hours per session per week for 3 months. Tutors emailed the students teachers to introduce themselves and to request that the teacher share any noted academic weaknesses or behavior issues that may be affecting the students' academic achievement.

As the students improved throughout the tutoring program, students were sent an incentive of either \$5 cash or a \$5 gift card.

Results/Discussion

Demographics

A total of 20 participants were included in this analysis; students that did not complete both a pre and post assessment were excluded from analysis. Four participants were male and 16 were female. The majority (n=19), were African-American students. Two students were Hispanic males.

CRCT Assessments Results

Reading

CRCT reading scores of participants increased by 15.44 points, which was statistically significant ($p=.000$).

Math

CRCT math scores of participants increased by .85 points and was not statistically significant ($p=.879$).

English/Language arts

CRCT English/language arts scores of participants increased by 4.56 points although not statistically significant ($p=.135$).

Zena House Battery

Math

The Zena's House Battery included items related to multiplications, fractions, decimals, percentages and algebra. The mean differences between pre and post scores were all statistically significant except for multiplication ($p=.086$). Moreover, the results from this analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant increase of 15.84 points between pre and post for the total overall math average for students.

Reading and English/Language Arts Assessment Results

This section included three categories: parts of speech, reading ability, and reading comprehension. For parts of speech assessment, there was an increase in the mean score between pre and post of 8.70, which was statistically significant ($p=.005$). For reading ability, there was an increase in the mean score between pre and post of 4.45 but this was not statistically significant ($p=.203$). For reading comprehension there was an increase in the mean score between pre and post of 1.74 but this was also not statistically significant ($p=.744$).

Post-Qualitative Assessment

All parents completed the post parent assessment. Parents listed benefits of program included better CRCT scores, better grades and getting on honor roll. Improved study skills, math, and reading/language art skills were also reported. Parents also listed behavioral improvements such as increased confidence and better attitude. One parent however indicated that their child had worse CRCT scores and little improvement in grades.

Discussion

The purpose of the tutoring program is to improve students' math, reading and language arts scores on the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT). We hypothesized that students participating in the Zena's House tutoring program would have higher CRCT scores as a result of participating in the intervention. We found that there was statistically significant change in reading scores in participants, however this was not observed in math and language art scores.

Implications

Structured tutoring programs are effective in increasing students CRCT scores, grades and improving study habits. Structured tutoring programs have consistent communication with the student's parent and teacher and encourage students to increase their daily study/homework time and decrease TV viewing time. Tutors also come prepared with lesson plans and not just help them with homework. Tutors provided homework consistently as well as incentives for improved grades, study habits and behaviors. Parents were encouraged to reinforce what the tutor teaches on the days that tutor is not tutoring. Our findings are consistent with previous research on tutoring and provide further evidence for the importance of implementing tutoring programs to decrease the achievement gap.

References

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