

STUDY SKILLS FOR STUDENTS IN OUR SCHOOLS

STUDY SKILLS AND INSTRUCTIONAL INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY STUDENTS

**Stephen B. McCarney
Janet K. Tucci**

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H A W T H O R N E

Educational Services, Inc.

**800 Gray Oak Drive
Columbia, MO 65201
Telephone: (573) 874-1710
FAX: (800) 442-9509
www.hes-inc.com
www.hawthorne-ed.com**

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Number	
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**Behavior
Number**

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**Behavior
Number**

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Behavior

Number

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Number

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I. Introduction

The increased learning and behavior problems that are being encountered by educators in our schools are the result of the changing nature of our society. We are seeing an increased number of students being referred to as “At-Risk” as well as an increased number of problems encountered by the students we refer to as “typical” or “average.”

By anyone’s perception, it must be recognized that the number of students we consider “At-Risk” is at an alarming level. In 1998, the poverty rate was 11.8%, indicating that one in nine Americans live at the poverty level (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000). Furthermore, more than 13.3 million U.S. children under the age of 18, or approximately 18.7% of these children, are impoverished (Bennett and Lu, 2000). Thus, nearly one in five American children under age 18 is living at the poverty level. The statistics are even more grim for children living in a family headed by a single female, as these households experience a poverty rate of 50.3%, significantly higher than those children living in married-couple households who experience a poverty rate of 9% (Bennett and Lu, 2000). In addition, the poverty rate varies significantly between states and regions, as indicated by the poverty rates of New York state (24%) and the District of Columbia (45%), putting children in such areas at extreme risk (Bennett and Lu, 2000). The poverty rates are significant concerns for educators, as children who live in poverty are at a much higher risk for dropping out than those living in middle to high-income households (U.S. Department of Education, 1999a). In 1997, the drop-out rate for children living in low-income households was 12.3%, as compared to 4.1% for children in middle-income households and 1.8% of children in high-income households (U.S. Department of Education, 1999a).

Additional problems contributing to children identified as “At-Risk” include abuse/neglect, teen pregnancy, suicide, and violence. At least 900,000 children a year are victims of child abuse and/or neglect, a number which indicates a decline in the incidence of abuse/neglect, but which remains too high (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). In 1996, the overall pregnancy rate for females ages 15-19 was 98.7 per 1,000 females, a significant risk factor contributing to the likelihood of dropping out of

school and poverty (Ventura, Mosher, Curtin, Abma, & Henshaw, 2000). In 1998, 30 births per 1,000 females ages 15-17 were reported (National Maternal Child Health Clearinghouse, 2000). Violence and suicide continue to be cause for concern, as homicide ranked third as a cause of death for children ages 1-14 and second for 15-24 year olds, and suicide ranked third as a cause of death for 15-24 year olds (Murphy, 2000). The drop out rate has declined since 1989, yet the 1998 rate of 11.8% reported for 16-24 year olds is unacceptable (U.S. Department of Education, 1999b). This rate is inflated by students completing alternative degree programs such as night school and General Educational Development (GED) programs, as the rate of students receiving a regular high school diploma has remained at a relatively stable rate of 71% from 1979-1999 (U.S. Department of Education, 1999b).

These figures suggest that the student who is considered “At-Risk” is rapidly leaving the status of minority and is becoming the majority of students in our schools.

It would seem an impossibility to define “At-Risk” in a manner that would satisfy all perceptions of the “At-Risk” dilemma. It is certain that “At-Risk” means different things to different people.

To the teacher, “At-Risk” may mean the student is “At-Risk” for failure which will result in eventual retention or quitting of school at the end of the year. To the social worker, “At-Risk” may mean that an abused child is “At-Risk” for becoming an abusive parent. To a social or economic analyst, an “At-Risk” child is one who is born out of wedlock, grows up in poverty and is likely to repeat the cycle.

Study Skills for Students in Our Schools was developed in response to requests for intervention strategies for the most common learning problems encountered by regular educators in their classrooms in meeting the needs of “At-Risk” students. The study skills contained in the guide for the learning problems identified are those that regular education personnel have found most effective with the “At-Risk” student in need of more success in regular education classrooms. A wide variety of study skills interventions are provided for each learning problem contained in the guide. The variety of interventions allows the educators

involved in teaching to choose the study skills interventions most likely to contribute to each individual student's success. A primary expectation is that much more consistency of instructional intervention will be attained when the guide is used to find a common set of interventions which contribute to the individual student's success. This consistency of study skills interventions on the part of all teachers working with a student is likely to markedly enhance student success.

This guide offers teachers various ways to improve the study skills of students who are "At-Risk" and, at the same time, improve the study skills for all students. Contained herein is an individualized program designed to meet the needs of those students who are slipping between the cracks or, of greater concern, will fail to develop the basic skills of learning in the school and post-school environment.

In the sophisticated school and post-school environment today, developing successful study skills is a must for any student. It is an absolute survival skill for the "At-Risk." While the study skills strategies contained in this guide apply particularly to "At-Risk" students, they are generally applicable to improving the academic success of all students in our schools.

Thanks to all those educators who have shared strategies used to help their students succeed; and to all the teachers who face the insurmountable task of helping our students succeed, "God bless you."

Stephen B. McCarney, Ed.D.
Janet Tucci, M.Ed.

The data references were collected from the following sources:

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II. Using the Study Skills for Students in Our Schools

- The materials and strategies included herein were carefully designed to provide a systematic, easy approach to the complex process of learning. It was our intention to reduce the difficulty encountered by many students in the educational setting by providing teachers, parents, and students with a systematic approach to learning how to learn.
- This section contains sample materials and explanations of suggested use. We fully realize that those who are learning and teaching have individual styles and preferences. We encourage both the student and the teacher to search for the best match of method and content.
- In Section III, specific behavioral interventions are provided for teacher or parent use. Studying is a complex process; therefore, we purport to reduce its complexity by breaking it down into manageable steps. Teachers and parents should choose interventions that will work for their student. Although several interventions can be implemented simultaneously, each intervention requires adequate trial time to determine its effectiveness.

IV. Interventions

1 Has difficulty following oral instructions

1. Provide clearly stated oral instructions (e.g., make the instructions as simple and concrete as possible).

2. Make certain that oral instructions are given at the level at which the student can be successful (e.g., two-step or three-step directions are not given to students who can only successfully follow one-step directions).

3. Provide the student with a written copy of oral instructions.

4. Tape record instructions for the student to replay as necessary.

5. Maintain a consistent format for oral instructions.

6. Speak to the student to explain (a) what he/she is doing wrong (e.g., not following oral instructions) and (b) what he/she should be doing (e.g., listening to and following oral instructions).

7. Reinforce the student for following oral instructions based on the length of time he/she can be successful. As the student demonstrates success, gradually increase the required length of time spent following oral instructions for reinforcement.

8. Reduce distracting stimuli to facilitate the student's ability to follow oral instructions (e.g., place the student on the front row, provide a carrel or "office space" away from distractions, etc.). This is used as a means of reducing distracting stimuli and not as a form of punishment.

9. Structure the environment in a way that provides the student with the increased opportunity for help or assistance on academic tasks (e.g., peer tutoring, directions for work sent home, frequent interactions, etc.).

10. Write a contract with the student specifying what behavior is expected (e.g., following oral instructions) and what reinforcement will be made available when the terms of the contract have been met.

11. Evaluate the appropriateness of the task to determine (a) if the task is too difficult and (b) if the length of time scheduled to complete the task is adequate.

12. Choose a peer to model following oral instructions for the student.

13. Have the student question any oral directions, explanations, instructions, etc., he/she does not understand.

14. Choose a peer to work with the student to help him/her follow oral instructions.

15. Teach the student verbal direction-following skills (e.g., listen carefully, write down important points, use environmental cues, wait until all directions are received before beginning, etc.).

16. Give directions in a variety of ways to facilitate the student's probability of understanding (e.g., if the student fails to understand oral instructions, present them in written form).

17. Interact frequently with the student during an activity to help him/her follow oral instructions.

18. Work the first few problems of an assignment with the student to make certain that he/she understands the oral instructions accurately.

19. Provide alternatives for presenting oral instructions (e.g., tape record instructions, summarize instructions, instructions given by peers, etc.).

20. Have the student practice verbal direction-following on nonacademic tasks (e.g., recipes, games, etc.).