SUCCEEDING IN SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

by

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DEDICATION

To My Wife, Christie, who has shown her love for me with constant support, encouragement, and affection. I thank heaven for her every day. I would never have attempted the program without her encouragement and would never have made it through without her strength.

I may not be a smart man but I know what love is. --Forrest Gump
ABSTRACT

ZYROMSKI, BRETT EDMUND-DAVIS. Succeeding in School: A Qualitative Analysis. (Under the direction of Edwin Gerler Jr. and Sylvia Nassar-McMillen.)

This preliminary, exploratory qualitative study examined data from an application of the web-based Succeeding in School Program. The ten week school counseling classroom guidance program was originally developed for a paper-and-pencil format but recently has been converted online to create a web-based intervention. Previous paper-and-pencil interventions using the program suggested positive increases in students’ attitudes towards school, increases in positive classroom behavior and increases in language arts grades (Gerler & Anderson, 1986; Gerler & Drew, 1990), as well as significant increases in students’ awareness of how to achieve school success (Gerler & Herndon, 1993).

Participants in the web-based application of the Succeeding in School Program were 77 fourth and 62 fifth grade students attending an elementary school (K-6) in southeastern North Carolina. Ages ranged from 10-11 years old for the fourth graders and 11-12 years old for the fifth graders. The main goal of this study was to illuminate perspectives of the participants by identifying themes from students’ responses to each lesson of the online Succeeding in School Program. Resulting themes were related to past quantitative results of the paper-and-pencil version of the program. Student submissions were tabulated by response length, sentence structure, and web slang.

The current phenomenological examination of the data found themes identifying family and friends as students’ role models; themes related to goal setting; and themes related to students’ need to change their mindset, focus, and work ethic to achieve success. Other themes spoke to students’ fear of various types of tests and poor academic results. Students
also expressed fear of corporal and other punishment. Themes illuminated students' responsibilities at home and at school, as well as academic skills students' gained in assorted academic subjects. Students' responded to prompts within the Succeeding in School Program with emotions such as happiness, joy, fear, anger, pride, nervousness, and embarrassment. Implications of these and other emergent themes, as well as statistical information related to sentence lengths and sentence structure of students' submissions, were discussed and future research directions were presented.
BIOGRAPHY

Brett Zyromski was born in Michigan, but raised in Sebastopol, California. His parents were among the first of their family to move out of the state of Michigan. Modeling a spirit of courage, strength and resourcefulness, Brett’s parents searched for a warmer, healthier climate in which to raise their family. From this beginning, Brett credits his parents for instilling in their children an appreciation of travel, creativity, individualism and strength. Brett began his educational career at Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon where he received his Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education.

After graduating from Linfield College, Brett traveled to Madrid, Spain in October of 1998. Brett spent three months in Madrid teaching English in businesses, homes, and schools to students of varied ages. After leaving Madrid in January of 1999, Brett headed to Dublin, Ireland. Brett worked for Adelaide Road Donore Presbyterian Church as college youth coordinator and for Dolebusters, a welfare education program based in the church. Brett discovered much about diversity, culture, education, spirituality, and friendship while in Dublin and Madrid.

Brett began his Masters of School Counseling program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) in June of 1999. In December 1999, Brett transferred to Houston Graduate School of Theology – North Carolina (now Carolina Evangelical Divinity School), a Quaker seminary located in High Point, North Carolina, to pursue a Masters of Theology in Pastoral Counseling. While pursuing his Masters of Theology and after graduating in May 2001, Brett worked at Hope Creek Church in Durham as a youth pastor. Brett returned to elementary school in August of 2002 as part time At-Risk Counselor and part time Healthful Living teacher at R.N. Harris Elementary School in Durham.
Brett attended North Carolina State University from 2004 to 2007. While at NC State, Brett worked for the Transition Program as a teaching assistant. He taught undergraduate courses, counseled students individually and participated in a research assistantship with Dr. Sylvia Nassar-McMillan. Brett created web pages for the Transition Program and Counselor Education Graduate Student Association, as well as distance course sites for the Transition Program and supervision practicum. He served as the Counselor Education Graduate Student Association Vice-President one year and President the following year. Brett also served as co-editor of Meridian: A Middle School Technologies Journal, an online graduate student journal at NC State. In addition, he served the North Carolina Association of Counselor Education and Supervision as Coordinator of Special Projects. Brett has been trained for leadership in the National Coalition Building Institute, served as a departmental ambassador, and is a member of Chi Sigma Iota.

Brett's professional development also consisted of teaching graduate courses, presenting at state and national conferences and publishing in peer reviewed journals. His research focuses on helping and empowering students and school counselors. Published manuscripts and manuscripts in-review deal with issues such as school counselors' utilization of traditional and online journaling as effective interventions and helping school counselors identify and create a support team for inner city African American and Latino youth suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Other research involves utilizing technology, such as distance course tools and videoconferencing equipment, to create ethical and CACREP accredited distance supervision environments. Brett is a member of the American Counseling Association, the American School Counseling Association, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, and the North Carolina Counseling Association.
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