

Knowledge Link >>>

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF DROP-OUT PREVENTION PROGRAMMES IN CANADA

Objectives

This systematic review of the literature from 1990 – 2006 sought to explore the following global questions:

- ▶ Have drop-out prevention programmes in Canada resulted in an increase in student retention rates? If so, to what extent?
- ▶ Can we identify programme and instructional features that explain the effects of dropout prevention programmes on dropout rates and other performance outcomes?
- ▶ What does the evidence point to as potential instructional and non-instructional “best practices” for effective drop-out prevention?

Locating Relevant Studies

Studies included in this review were retrieved by the following means:

- ▶ Databases searches for scholarly material.
- ▶ Web-based searches for grey literature.
- ▶ Personal contact with government, community, research agencies and Canadian researchers working in related fields.

Two hundred and forty Canadian studies were retrieved for possible inclusion, of which 38 met all of the criteria. Thirty additional American studies were analyzed for comparison purposes. There were a considerable number of “irretrievable” unpublished reports.

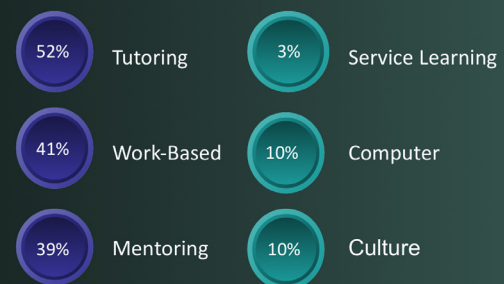
Results

Although close to two-thirds of programmes in the studies reviewed provided some evidence of programme effectiveness, poor reporting and documentation of how instruction was designed and delivered limited our ability to explore relationships between outcomes and specific programme features that might be described as “best practices”. Our findings highlight the need for researchers and practitioners to provide significantly more detailed reporting of the instructional design and delivery of interventions and to ensure that rigorous methodological standards are applied to the collection, analysis and reporting of the information.

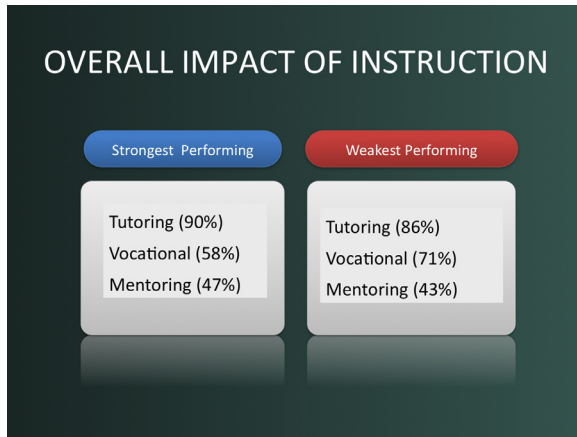
Some Highlights:

- ▶ Programmes with more wrap-around services were not linked to significantly improved student outcomes.
- ▶ Overall, interventions resulted in small positive changes in physical outcomes (e.g., student absentee rates, graduation rates, dropout rates).
- ▶ Traditional instructional strategies continue to be the most frequently reported.

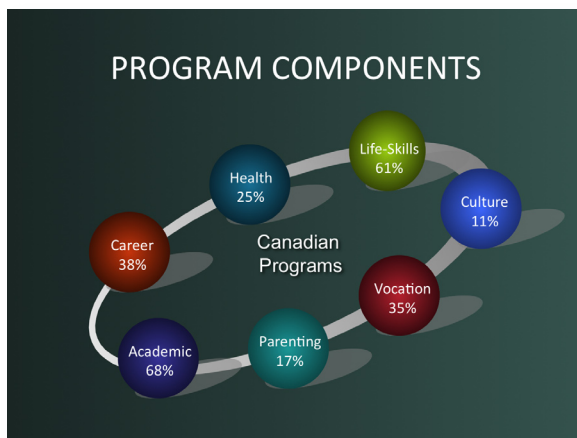
CANADIAN INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES MOST/LEAST REPORTED



- ▶ High and low performing programmes did not differ significantly in the instructional strategies used.



- ▶ There were a variety of programme components reflected in the Canadian programmes.



Implications for Future Evaluation Practices

- ▶ Create a national database or clearinghouse of programme evaluations which apply common standards for reporting.
- ▶ Link interventions directly to desired outcomes (i.e., measure enrollment and graduation rates).
- ▶ Use a common formula for calculating “dropout” or “graduation” rate.
- ▶ Examine long-term trends in data.
- ▶ Review existing evaluation practices to identify conflict of interest and potential bias.
- ▶ Make school-board based research and programme evaluations more publicly available (i.e., publish via ERIC, journals, websites, etc.).
- ▶ Report on funding requirements, specific curriculum being used, individual characteristics of participants, geographic location and instructional strategies used.
- ▶ Work with agencies outside of a school which provide “dropout interventions” to share programme design, delivery and impact information.

Implications for New Research

- ▶ Explore the impact of other factors on dropout rates more generally (e.g., employment opportunities).
- ▶ Examine dropout prevention successes specifically for high-risk populations (e.g., rural communities, aboriginal students, males).
- ▶ Examine the impact of large scale curriculum/whole school reform initiatives on dropout rates.
- ▶ Investigate the impact of non-instructional factors (e.g., absenteeism policies, credit recovery, co-op credits, student transfer).
- ▶ Consider the value of intervention versus prevention initiatives specifically for school completion.