

Research: The Test-Taking Strategy

Overview

Two studies were conducted to investigate the effects of instruction in the Test-taking Strategy on student performance on tests. In the first study, six students with learning disabilities (LD) participated; in the second study, six students with emotional and behavioral disorders (BD) participated. All of the students were enrolled in grades 7 and 8. Their reading achievement scores ranged from the fourth- to the seventh-grade levels. Students were asked to take test-wiseness tests that measured their use of a variety of test-taking behaviors. These tests looked like typical tests that students would take in their general education courses with multiple-choice, matching, and short-answer questions. Students earned points on these tests according to the behaviors they used while taking the tests. The students* grades earned on actual tests taken in general education classes were also gathered. A multiple-baseline across-students design was used in both studies with three students taking part in each repetition of the design across three conditions: baseline, instruction, and maintenance.

Results

During baseline, students with LD in Study 1 earned an average of 30% of the points available on the test-wiseness tests. On their posttest, they earned an average of 90% of the points. In Study 2, students with BD earned an average of 32% of the points available on the test-wiseness baseline tests. On their final posttest, they earned an average of 95% of the points. In all cases, the students did not show improvement in test-wiseness scores until the intervention was implemented. When maintenance tests were given, students with LD earned an average of 85% of the points, and students with BD earned an average of 88% of the points as long as 12 weeks after training was terminated.

On their tests in mainstream classes, students with LD earned average scores of 57% during baseline and 71% after strategy instruction. Students with BD earned average scores of 57% before instruction and 68% after strategy instruction on their general education tests. LD students* letter grades on their report cards in the targeted courses improved by one or two letter grades. Most BD students' letter grades improved by one letter grade in the targeted courses. One BD student's letter grade showed no improvement, and one BD student's grade improved by three letter grades.

Conclusions

These studies showed that both students with LD and with BD can benefit from instruction in the Test-taking Strategy. Not only did they learn to use a strategy comprised of a number of test-wiseness behaviors, but they were able to generalize their use of the strategy to tests taken in their general education courses in such a way that their test grades and their report card grades improved.

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