

Postscript: A Promising Beginning

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In this final chapter, we offer several tentative findings from our ongoing work to answer the fundamental question: What happened as a result of the Salmon program? Prior chapters presented materials on what that program was, what is the evidence on which we based the program, what principles guided its development, and what practice principles we evolved.

We are currently collecting new data and analyzing the data in hand as this book goes to press. Therefore, we offer here only limited data, in two parts. First, we present some impressions of the long-term effects of the Salmon experience on students who had graduated from the program a year ago. Next, we examine students still in the program.

Sample

The first sample of sixth graders consisted of nine experimental students (six girls and three boys) who had received 1 year of the Salmon program at the Mission and nine control students (six girls and three boys) who did not.

Measures and Hypotheses for Group

Measures for this group of 18 students were school report cards, middle school teacher comments, and school attendance records.

From the literature, we predicted (1) that youth who had the Mission/Salmon experience would attend school more frequently than children who did not. (2) Youth who had the Mission/Salmon experience would have higher academic performance as measured by school report card grades than children who did not—particularly in subjects that required reading, which was a program emphasis of the B. P. Learned Mission, the site at which the program was developed and implemented.

Results for Group

1. The hypothesis that students who had participated in the Mission/Salmon program would have better attendance than students who did not was not supported. Unverified absence from school ranged from 1 day to 31 days for Mission/Salmon students (mean, 7.6 days) and from 1 day to 16 days for students in the control group (mean, 5.6 days).
2. The second hypothesis that students who participated in the Mission/Salmon program would perform significantly better in school than controls was supported in reading ($p < 0.05$), English ($p < 0.05$), and science ($p < 0.05$). Whereas students in the Mission/Salmon program outperformed controls in math and social studies, this performance did not reach statistical significance.
3. The brevity of teachers' comments did not permit a comparison of student behavior on prosocial behavior.

Discussion

First, a cautionary statement is warranted on the small size of this exploratory sample. With this caution in mind, children who graduated from the Mission/Salmon program appeared to perform better academically in the year after their departure from the program than their peers who did not have the same opportunity. This was an encouraging finding, but given the size of the sample, merely invites further study.

Interestingly, school attendance of former Mission/Salmon students was not better than that of controls. Having the benefit of knowing the children in the Mission/Salmon program, we explored the reasons for this high absentee rate. The reason given by the students and parents/guardians for most absences was the need to care for other family members, such as younger siblings, so that the parent/guardian could go to work. Thus, this interpretation of some of the absences turns out to have a prosocial and family-oriented meaning. However, we accept the negative findings and are prompted to explore ways of aiding families in need of caring for family members.

Sample

The second sample of first through fifth graders consisted of 28 students (14 girls and 14 boys) who were active in the Salmon program at the Mission. This sample consisted of all children enrolled in the program who did not leave prematurely.

Measures for Group

Teachers in the New London schools complete report cards on individual pupils each quarter. Portions of this information are relevant to our work promoting the prosocial behaviors of respect, cooperation, kindness, and self-control. In addition, this program had a specific focus on improving reading skills and work habits. Thus, a content analysis was performed on the written statements by teachers with regard to the four prosocial behaviors plus reading and work habits.

1. From the literature, we hypothesized that children who had the Mission/Salmon experience over the course of the school year would show measurable improvement in work habits.
2. We hypothesized that children who had the Mission/Salmon experience would show over the course of the school year measurable improvement in their reading skills, which was a program emphasis of the B. P. Learned Mission, the site at which the program was fully developed and implemented.
3. We hypothesized that over the course of the school year, we would see school teacher comments supporting the appearance of the certain prosocial behaviors. Those behaviors were kindness, respect (for self and others), cooperation, and self-control.

Results for Group

In undertaking the content analysis of teachers comments, we observed that teachers did not always focus on academic and social behaviors or comment on the variables of interest to us. However, reading the entire paragraph directed to parents or guardians, we were able to make some relevant inferences and establish coding rules in regard to those inferences.

These rules were the following: First, we used the school's system of providing information for parents, but attached numbers to it for ease of analysis:

Unsatisfactory; U = 1

Minimum/insufficient performance; M = 2

Progress (appropriate to grade level); P = 3

Good [some behavior is identified positively by name]; G = 4

Very good [that behavior is further described by the teacher as more than Good]; V = 5

Excellent [that behavior is given the highest accolade by the teacher]; E = 6

Second, if no mention was made about a given prosocial behavior, we assumed that it was not poor enough to call attention to the need for improvement nor

good enough to receive a positive description. We gave such behaviors the score of 3, progressing at grade level.

Third, if the teacher did not mention a given prosocial behavior in the following quarter, then we assumed that the same level of grading was maintained as before for that behavior.

Fourth, in some instances, no information was available. Perhaps the pupil moved into the class in midterm; other times, a pupil may have been discussed directly with the parent and no notes made on the report card. In these cases, we entered a dash, no information, and computed mean scores over the remaining grades.

Thus, we read the teacher's notes on a pupil and looked to see if there were any direct mentions of the four prosocial behaviors of interest to us as well as references to reading and work habits. We made a determination of the level (1 to 6) for a given pupil over each of the six variables. Then we averaged these scores over the entire experimental group of 28 pupils and placed these figures in a table:

Variable	1st quarter	2nd quarter	3rd quarter	4th quarter
Respect	2.89	3.15	3.04	3.42
Cooperation	2.84	3.07	3.14	3.17
Kindness	3.11	3.37	3.32	3.32
Self-control	2.84	3.11	2.96	3.04
Reading	2.65	2.75	3.46	3.46
Work habits	2.50	3.00	3.29	3.36

1. The hypothesis that students who participated in the Mission/Salmon program would show measurable improvement in the development of work habits was supported ($p < 0.05$).
2. The hypothesis that students who participated in the Mission/Salmon program would show measurable improvement in their reading ability was supported ($p < 0.05$).
3. Of the four prosocial behaviors that the Salmon program emphasizes, only one behavior, respect, reached statistical significance ($p < 0.05$). Results for the other three prosocial behaviors were in a positive direction but did not reach statistical significance.

Discussion

We would interpret these data as being encouraging with regard to the experimental intervention, although we do not have any explanation for why respect should reach statistical significance, where the other prosocial behaviors only

show trends in that direction. It may be that we are observing generally positive changes in these young schoolchildren as part of their ordinary progress in school. On the other hand, these children are from very disadvantaged homes for the most part, and any positive changes, especially statistically significant ones, are worth paying attention to. Until we do further data analysis, including the other bodies of data we have on these students, all that we can say at this moment is that these data are encouraging and that the experimental intervention should be continued.

Summary

We close this postscript with a fragment of conversation among several students that was not intended for the ears of any adult and represents a miniature picture of the kind of outcomes we sought. Several students were lying in the dark on the Mission's theater stage after a rehearsal, where several softly lit Christmas trees cast their colored light; one of them was heard to say, "I wish, right now, I could live here forever. I don't have to worry about nothing. I can be me and respected for that here. I don't have to prove nothing to nobody. Here, we are different. We respect each other. Outside, it's different." The grunts emanating from others on the stage echoed these remarks.

The objective data suggests that something good may be happening with the Salmon program. But it is these kinds of anecdotal comments that make our entire effort worthwhile, that the youths themselves understand something special is going on here, and they have a rare and beautiful chance to become a respected member of the B. P. Learned Mission and, indeed, of society. Further evaluation will better determine the extent to which this may be happening.

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