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Opinions of Female Juvenile Delinquents on Language-Based Literacy Activities

Dixie Sanger, Mitzi Ritzman, Aliza Stremmlau, Lindsey Fairchild
and Cindy Brunken

A mixed methods study was conducted to examine female juvenile delinquents' opinions and reactions on nine language-based literacy activities. Forty-one participants ranging in age from 13 to 18 years responded to a survey consisting of nine multiple-choice items and one open-ended question concerning the usefulness of activities. Quantitative and qualitative findings revealed the majority of participants found the activities to be very useful. From 410 comments, five key themes emerged on positive opinions about usefulness, personal examples of use, negative opinions about usefulness, metacognitive and self regulation skills, and predictions of usefulness with future students. Examples of all activities that could be implemented through a Response to Intervention model are available on www.unl.edu/barkley/present/sanger/documents/resources.shtml under the language-based literacy activities link.

Historically, adolescent girls have been ignored or passed over in America's schools. This is evident in how girls in classrooms are denied opportunities to excel, and instead are encouraged to speak quietly, to avoid science and math classes, and to value how they look over innovation and intelligence (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). For more than fifteen years, educators and therapists have questioned why so many girls are underachieving and failing in school, why so many are in therapy, and why alcohol and drug use is so common. These same professionals have concerns about adolescent girls who were once assertive and confident but who have grown up to be passive and insecure (Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994).

Like adolescents who have been overlooked and underserved (Cole, 2007; Ehren & Lenz, 1989; Larson & McKinley, 2003), juvenile delinquents represent a population of individuals who may have "fallen between the cracks" (Leone & Cutting, 2004). Characteristics of girls involved in the juvenile justice system include academic failure (Linares-Orama, 2005), health and mental health issues, family fragmentation, and sexual abuse (Acoca, 1999; Ravoira, 1999). Moreover, female delinquents have a high incidence of language and literacy problems.

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Prevalence figures from three separate studies of adolescent girls residing in a correctional facility indicated that 34 of 173 (20%) were potential candidates for language services (Sanger, Creswell, Dworak, & Schultz, 2000; Sanger, Hux, & Belau, 1997; Sanger, Moore-Brown, Magnuson, & Svoboda, 2001); an incidence rate of over three times the occurrence of language disorders found among nondelinquents in the general population (Larson & McKinley, 2003). Because of the compelling evidence that language skills are related to literacy (Berko Gleason, 2009; Catts & Kamhi, 2005; Owens, 2008; Stone, Silliman, Ehren, & Apel, 2004; Tiegerman-Farber & Radziewicz, 2008), and the deleterious impact of language impairments on academic success, educational leaders are needed to plan programs to prevent language and literacy problems among adolescent juvenile delinquents as well as at-risk students in the general population. However, in planning programs, it is critical that the opinions of adolescents on language activities be considered (McClure, 2008; Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, Seunarinesingh, Mogge, 2007). To date, there is no mixed methods research data that focuses on quantitative as well as qualitative data involving listening to the voices of adolescents for those who potentially had unsuccessful school experiences. This study will focus on the opinions of female juvenile delinquents on language-based literacy activities that can be implemented through a Response to Intervention (RTI) model.

The call for educators to lead at-risk delinquent and nondelinquent students to be successful in school by preventing failure in language and literacy learning is necessary and justifiable. There are shortages of experts in communication disorders who are addressing the needs of students struggling with language-based literacy problems. Though the vast majority of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are women and are considered leaders in prevention, assessment, and intervention of children and adolescents with language-based literacy problems, they face a challenging workload

and caseload (Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007; Sanger, Moore-Brown, Montgomery, & Hellerich, 2004). According to a report by the Florida Department of Education (2002), many school-aged children who require speech and language services are either not in intervention programs or are being served by out-of-field professionals. Though these findings are from one state and may not be representative of other states, they are of interest. Even though SLPs and other educators recognize SLPs valuable role in planning programs and serving on multidisciplinary teams for children and adolescents involved in violence, clinicians' caseloads, scope of practice, and shortages can affect provision of services (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2001, 2004; Ritzman & Sanger, 2007; Sanger *et al.*, 2004).

Though the services of SLPs are highly valued (Ritzman & Sanger, 2007; Sanger *et al.*, 2004; Shaughnessy & Sanger 2005) there is not sufficient awareness among school leaders and administrators of how academic success is rooted in language skills. Women in leadership positions can clarify the connection between language, literacy and academics and can help to promote this message to educators in schools and correctional facilities. Examination of any textbook or research study focusing on reading, writing, and spelling cites the language connection (Snow, Porche, Tabors, & Harris, 2007; Stone, Silliman, Ehren, & Apel, 2004). However, less obvious in texts, is the acknowledgement of how language skills are fundamental to academic success. Language provides the skills that are needed to understand information in textbooks, and students with language problems can struggle with the teacher's language used to convey classroom lectures. Unfortunately, too many at-risk students have language and literacy problems, continue to struggle and are unsuccessful in school.

A survey of opinions of thirty-one juvenile delinquents revealed that girls did not understand information and directions conveyed by their teachers because it was "too hard." This included teachers' length and complexity of lecture, organization of ideas, ease of listening, and teachers' tone of voice. One-third to more than one-half of participants indicated the language load of the curriculum was too difficult and not sufficiently understood (Sanger, Deschene, Stokely, & Belau, 2007).

For more than twenty years SLPs have addressed how vocabulary, figurative language, understanding directions, complex sentence structure, prefixes and suffixes, and narratives are interrelated language skills fundamental to academic success (Ehren, 2002; Ehren & Lenz, 1989; Nippold, 2007; Simon, 1985; Wiig, Secord, Glaser, Prendeville, & Sotto, 2006). Nevertheless, the professionals who do not understand these connections are at a disadvantage if they do not understand these important relationships to plan programs (Shaughnessy & Sanger, 2005). Moreover, educators may not be sensitive to the importance of knowing the opinions of older students on language-based literacy activities prior to planning programs.

It is important to understand what types of materials are motivating to

older students. Understanding if older students value literacy materials as motivating is critical in order to know if they will participate and “give it their best shot” (Sanger, Ritzman, Schaeffer, & Belau, 2009). Studies have found that students prefer to have input about activities used during intervention (McClure, 2008). When students perceive language and literacy activities to be uninteresting or irrelevant, they may choose not to participate (Pitcher *et al.*, 2007). This was evident from a survey of 41 adolescent delinquents who provided their opinions on a reading program, START-IN (Montgomery & Moore-Brown, 2006). In that study, some of the older students who were uninterested in the reading activities indicated they would participate in those tasks they did not find interesting, but “would not try” (Sanger, Ritzman, Schaefer, & Belau, 2009). Though the vast majority of the participants found the reading activities interesting, the study findings also revealed the importance of obtaining input from older students prior to planning intervention.

Minimal, if any, research documents the views and perceptions of adolescents on language-based literacy activities prior to implementing these tasks through an inclusive service delivery model. Activities including vocabulary development, figurative language, understanding stories, inferencing, visual strategies, written language, test modifications, paragraph organizers, and self rating scales are important to consider in designing programs to enhance language, literacy, and academic skills. It is important to know if adolescents would find the activities interesting, motivating and useful.

The purpose of this mixed-design study is to utilize both quantitative and qualitative survey information and examine female juvenile delinquents’ opinions and reactions on language-based literacy activities that are rich in academic relevancy. Information from this research will be useful for planning programs for delinquents as well as typical students in the general population. Ultimately, the activities could be implemented through a RTI model at the secondary level because at the advanced school levels of middle and high school more social and academics challenges persist. Additional information on RTI models and how they relate to the language-based literacy activities included in this study will be described later in this study.

Method

Survey Development

A mixed methods research design involving a survey of nine items and open-ended questions was used to sample the opinions and reactions of participants on language-based literacy activities. Each participant had their own packet containing the nine activities. Directions for completing the survey were on the questionnaire form and were read and explained by the researchers: “Please evaluate the usefulness of the following lan-

guage-based literacy activities for students like yourselves. Assume these activities were available and used by your teachers or special educators in the schools you last attended.” Participants’ opinions were surveyed on: (a) Vocabulary development, (b) Figurative language, (c) Characters and setting in literature books, (d) Inferencing, (e) Visual strategies, (f) Written language, (g) Test modifications, (h) Paragraph organizers, and (i) Self rating scales. These activities were developed by Cindy Brunken, a Speech-Language Pathologist in Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln, Nebraska (Ritzman, Sanger, & Coufal, 2006), and are further described in the Procedures section.

After each activity was demonstrated, a survey item with three optional choices on the usefulness of the activity was provided. Each activity included a survey item with three identical and optional choices for participants to consider as they provided their opinion on the usefulness of the activity. For example, the activity “illustrating vocabulary development” was followed by: (a) Not very useful, (b) Somewhat useful, and (c) Very useful. Evaluation of the nine activities was followed by an identical open-ended question, that was, “When could teachers have used activities like these to have helped you with school work?”

Participants and Procedures

The opinions and reactions of 41 participants were surveyed. Adolescents resided at a correctional facility, and ranged in age from 13 to 18 years ($M = 16.63$; $SD = 1.33$ years) and were in grades 7 through 12. School records indicated 11 (27%) repeated one or more grades in school and 15 (37%) had received special education services during or prior to their commitment. Ethnicity records revealed 19 Caucasians, 5 Hispanics, 6 Native Americans, 4 African Americans, and 7 of mixed backgrounds. According to scores from the Wide Range Achievement Test 4 (Jastak Associates, 2006), on the subtests Word Reading and Sentence Comprehension, 14 students were two or more grades below grade level for one or both measures.

The mixed methods research allowed investigators to validate and support statistical results with qualitative findings. Experts agree that implementing mixed methods allows researchers to achieve a more complete understanding of the problem and research question being addressed, rather than relying on either approach alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008). For example, this methodology allowed the researchers to collect both quantitative and qualitative data in the same study. By combining the research designs, collecting data through a survey and conducting the interviews containing the open-ended questions, the researchers were able to analyze and merge data into a single study. According to experts in mixed methods research this type of a single study can provide a better understanding of the research problem than using either approach alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

First, participants were seen in groups of five and a certified Speech-Language Pathologist explained the purpose and instructions for

completing the questionnaire form. Second, each participant was given a packet of the activities that were defined and demonstrated. Examples were provided on how the task would be implemented in an inclusive classroom setting. Information on each activity included the purpose, materials, procedures, and additional information for providing flexibility of use for the activity. All activities are available and explained on www.unl.edu/barkley/present/sanger/documents/resources.shtml under the language-based literacy activities link.

Third, the nine activities within each packet were defined, illustrated, and demonstrated by the researcher. As activities were demonstrated several were illustrated through a variety of techniques such as defining and matching words, completing sentences, finishing crossword puzzles, generating creative language through examples heard on television and applying new ideas to school textbooks. The purposes included: (a) Vocabulary development—to work on the meaning of new words found in classroom textbooks and assignments, (b) Figurative language—to help understand that language can be used in a creative and imaginative way to mean something different than its usual meaning, (c) Characters and setting in a literature book—to aid in understanding literature books read in school, (d) Inferencing—to work on extracting the intended meaning from what is explicitly stated, (e) Visual strategies—to work on creating pictures from key points represented within the text to aid in comprehension, (f) Written language—to help determine the difference between complete and incomplete sentences, (g) Test modifications—to provide ways of modifying assessments in ways that students can be successful and indicate to educators what they know, (h) Paragraph organizers—to provide outlines for writing paragraphs in classrooms, and (i) Self rating scales—to provide students the tools to rate their ongoing communication behavior in the classroom setting.

Fourth, following a demonstration of each of the activities, participants completed their survey form. After providing their opinions, they were invited to respond to the open-ended question, “When could teachers use activities like these to have helped you with school work?” A second year graduate student in Speech-Language Pathology tape-recorded and transcribed the participants’ comments.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed on the nine multiple-choice items for the language-based literacy activities. Frequency counts on the items provided an indication of the participants’ opinions. The three response options were coded from 1 through 3 and are summarized in Table 1.

Data from the comments from participants’ discussion and the open-ended questions accompanying each activity was analyzed according to a procedure described by Moustakas (1994). This included transcribing the comments provided by participants, memoing and writing the meaning of their responses, coding an assigned meaning unit to represent the main

idea(s) expressed by participants, and combining, summarizing and interpreting the meaning unit/codes into themes. Three of the researchers determined the meaning units/codes and emerging themes and reached agreement through a consensus approach. Comments could include one or more meaning units as they were analyzed either by utterance levels or by the complete response.

Results

Opinions of Female Juvenile Delinquents on Language-Based Literacy Activities

Forty-one participants provided their views on nine language-based activities. One of the 41 subjects requested to participate but chose to not respond to the survey items. Though the participant indicated she liked the tasks, she expressed that for personal reasons she would rather not complete the survey.

Table 1 indicates that more than half ($n = 21$ of 40) of the participants perceived seven out of nine tasks to be very useful. These included Vocabulary development, Figurative language, Characters and setting in literature books, Visual strategies, Written language, Test modifications, and Paragraph organizers. Half of the participants ($n = 20$) also found the activity of Self rating scales to be very useful if implemented in an inclusive classroom setting. Participants responded less favorably on Inferencing. From an examination of Table 1, it is noteworthy that no more than 6 students evaluated the 9 activities as not very useful on any one activity.

TABLE 1
Frequency of Participants' Opinions on Language-based Literacy Activities
($n = 41$ participants).

Activity	Not Very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Very Useful
	1	2	3
Vocabulary development	0	14	26
Figurative language	3	15	22
Characters and setting in literature books	3	12	25
Inferencing	6	20	14
Visual strategies	0	13	27
Written language	3	15	22
Test modifications	1	10	29
Paragraph organizers	2	12	26
Self-rating scales	4	16	20

Note: One participant requested to participate but did not respond.

A Summary of the Qualitative Reactions on the Language-Based Literacy Activities

Qualitative findings indicated participants' responses reflected primarily positive views, some negative reactions, and an overall interest in the materials demonstrated. For example, comments included, "Fill-in-the-blank is a good way to learn vocabulary." On figurative language activities, one stated, "It's very useful," and another indicated, "It would be very useful because I didn't have worksheets like that when I was in school." On Visual strategies, one remarked, "That looks like fun." Another indicated, "I would rather draw it than write it." On the Self rating scales, one commented, "I like these because you get both sides of the story. Usually they just look at the teacher's side of the story." One participant stated that the written language activities would be "beneficial, because you have to write stuff to other people in college, work, everywhere." Still a few others remarked, "The activities are boring."

A total of 36 (88%) participants provided 379 comments about the nine activities. Of the 379 comments an additional 31 contained two meaning units resulting in a total of 410 coded units. Computation of percentages is based on the 410 meaning units/codes. The six themes emerging from analyzing the meaning units/codes included: (a) positive opinions about usefulness of activities, (b) negative opinions about usefulness of activities, (c) personal examples of use for activities, (d) predictions of usefulness of activities with future students, (e) information related to metacognitive and self-regulation skills, and (f) other. Note, the theme of "other" included comments that contained brief responses from a participant that appeared to be either a duplication of a remark previously uttered, or comments that were difficult to classify. In some instances the researchers were unable to know what was implied by the one-word responses. Also in a number of instances, the information within the theme "other" was neither viewed as relevant nor pertinent to the study. Five of the themes will be described and meaning units/codes represented by their actual comments will be provided.

Positive Opinions About Usefulness of Activities

From the qualitative information containing the comments, 102 meaning units (25% of 410) represented participants' positive opinions. One said, "I think vocabulary is very useful because you can't really read or do something if you don't know the vocabulary." Another stated, "The character setting in literature books is helpful for me." Numerous positive comments similar to the one referring to inferencing skills suggested the activities would have helped them when they were in their previous schools. One indicated the activity would have helped her in the future with pursuing her interest in psychology. Another individual offered the following prediction for one of the Self rating scale activities, "I think they are good for this facility which could affect the outcomes for some of the girls."

Personal Examples of Use for Activities

Meaning units for either personal examples or flexibility for use of activities represented 29% ($n = 119$) of the total comments coded. Participants provided their own personal examples of how to apply the information from the activity. When shown activities on figurative language, several commented that some words had different spellings [to, too, two] but sounded the same. Several others indicated that many words sound the same, are spelled the same, but have different meanings. Another stated that, "Figurative language involves using language in a creative and imaginative way rather than how it is originally used." One offered a specific example, "If you get cold feet the night before the wedding." For a personal example, one participant noted that for test modifications, she liked italicized and bold print because she skips over the directions and does not know what she is supposed to do. It was not uncommon to hear remarks such as, [the sentence] "Is incomplete if it starts with but, because or and."

Negative Opinions About Usefulness of Activity

As can be observed from the following examples of meaning units ($n = 40$ of 410; 10%), coded as negative opinions, not all remarks about the language-based literacy activities were viewed as positive. For the figurative language activities one stated, "I don't think it's useful" and another indicated, "It's boring." Several indicated, "I do not like this activity." One participant indicated, "It is confusing to use a web," when talking about characters and settings in literature books. Several others commented that some of the activities were confusing. One indicated on the inferencing activity that, "I don't like those kind of activities because then I have to think." On the self rating scales one remarked, "I don't think it is very useful because most people are going to give themselves more credit than they actually have."

Metacognitive and Self Regulation Skills

Unit meanings pertaining to this theme represented whether students expressed comments that reflected their thinking and comprehension of both written and spoken language. A total of 23 unit meanings/codes (6%) resulted in the theme of metacognitive skills. An example of a specific comment on inferencing was, "I do this while I am reading." Another indicated during the activity of written language, "I am not writing complete sentences."

It was not uncommon for students to offer their personal experiences of how they were challenged by tests and examinations in their prior school. For test modifications, one participant revealed, "I don't like the test to have a lot of points because you don't want to miss that many points with one question." Infrequently, if at all, participants offered comments representing successful outcomes of school experiences. One participant evaluated her own skills when using paragraph organizers, "I have trouble with a sentence that is at the end of each paragraph that follows into the

next paragraph.” She was attempting to explain how she wrote her paper in school.

Prediction of Usefulness of Activities with Future Students

Only 16 (4%) meaning units were coded for this theme. For figurative language activities, one remarked, “I think the activity would be helpful for people younger than us.” When the activity of Visual strategies was demonstrated, one participant indicated, “I don’t think this activity would be fun for little kids.” Another remarked that, “All of the people who know how to draw would like to do the visual strategies activity.” On the written language activity, one indicated, “I think it would be useful for people who do not have proper English. Several commented that the self rating scales would be useful for students who are similar to those currently residing at the facility.

Essence of the Demonstration of Language-Based Literacy Activities as Experienced by Participants.

Eight groups, of approximately five students each, provided researchers with their opinions and reactions to nine language-based literacy activities. As revealed in Table 1, the majority of students conveyed positive opinions about the activities and indicated they were very useful. However, some participants were less favorable in their evaluations of the materials. Participants interacted and offered their reactions to all activities, but some thought the tasks were more appropriate for younger students, though the vast majority thought the activities were very useful. Some indicated the activities would have been helpful for them when they were in school [prior to their commitment]. Others thought the activities were boring. The range of comments suggest it is important to sample the opinions of older students to determine if they would be sufficiently interested and motivated to participate in intervention programs.

Approximately one-fourth of the participants reacting to the activities focusing on vocabulary development, figurative language, characters and setting literature books, inferencing, visual strategies, written language, test modifications, paragraph organizers and self rating scales provided their own personalized examples of how activities applied to their learning in school. Few comments were coded with meaning units ($n = 16$ of 410) pertaining to the theme of usefulness of activities with future students.

Interestingly, prior to the study, researchers were cautioned about the potentially dangerous behaviors of the participants. Yet, no behavior problems were observed and, instead, all girls were engaged, interested, and, some but not all, indicated they enjoyed the group activities. It was positive to have the participants leave the sessions without conveying negative non-verbal behaviors such as rolling their eyes or glaring at the researchers but, instead offering to shake the hands of the examiners, smiling, and asking if we could come back and work with them the next day!

Discussion

This mixed methods research examined the opinions of 41 female juvenile delinquents and their reactions on nine language-based literacy activities. The survey sampling the usefulness of the activities and the open-ended question of, "When could teachers have used activities like these to have helped you with school work?" primarily provided positive findings. The qualitative information offered additional insight into the views and reactions from 36 of the participants about the nine activities. The merits of designing and conducting mixed methods research has been supported by numerous researchers. They have reviewed historical information and have presented the advantages of combining methods and data analyses from quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008). By combining both forms of data, findings were interpreted through numbers and the words of participants. Listening to the voices of female juvenile delinquents who have struggled with school added to the richness of this study.

In this study, survey findings revealed that 20 or more of the participants' opinions reflected eight of the nine activities were very useful. Yet, the themes from analyzing 410 coded meaning units/codes indicated some reactions about the usefulness of activities were positive while other views were negative. Participants' personal examples of use of the activities revealed a variety of ideas about application of the activities. Their comments reflected how important it was to understand vocabulary in order to read and how inferencing was beneficial to understanding information in text books. Yet, other participants viewed the activities as boring and more appropriate for younger students, a finding that the present researches valued.

Despite these less than positive reactions from participants, some of their justifications were interesting and relevant. For example, one participant indicated that self-rating scales would not be useful because many students may give themselves more credit than they actually have earned. Interestingly, similar findings on over crediting and rating of students' behaviors have been found from previous research. From a study of 31 female juvenile delinquents and their teachers on metalinguistic and metacognitive skills, students tended to rate themselves higher on 26 of the 35 (74%) of items surveyed. Giving themselves more credit and/or rating themselves higher than the ratings offered by their teachers, was particularly evident on tasks related to reading and writing (Sanger, Spilker, Scheffler, Zobell, & Belau; 2008). In the present study, both positive and negative coded views provided researchers with important information professionals could consider when planning future intervention programs.

Few ideas were expressed for the theme of usefulness of activities with future students. Researchers found it interesting that only 4% of their comments (16 or 410) pertained to this theme, given that the open-ended question focused on when teachers at their former schools could have used

activities like these to help them with schoolwork. It appeared that participants focused on how the activities related to their own school experiences but did not apply the information to how it might have impacted them or other students their age who were struggling in school. It is unknown from the study findings whether participants had experience applying activities similar to these in their former schools. Though 14 participants performed two or more grades below grade level in reading, it is uncertain if language-based literacy activities were implemented to facilitate positive social and academic success in their former schools.

Educational leaders can consider how implementing activities similar to those in the study can positively impact social and academic achievement of at-risk students through a Response to Intervention model (RTI). Though RTI is recommended through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (U. S. Department of Education, 2004), it is not a simple solution for leaders in a school. RTI is complex and requires that principals and all educators in a school are "on board" and are involved with implementation of the model.

Initially, considerable planning and time commitments are needed from all educators in the school. It involves training of educators, challenges in screening, progress monitoring and service delivery, as well as changes in assessment and identification of students eligible for special education. Nevertheless, it is a critical consideration for leaders and educators given that too many students are identified as disabled when in fact, they have not been taught. According to Rudebusch (2007) and other researchers (Haager, Klingner & Vaughn, 2007), traditional approaches have provided services after a student has failed rather than focusing on prevention. Additionally, RTI can decrease the overrepresentation of some minority students in special education programs. Educational leaders can share their expertise in implementing the model and demonstrate how the language-based literacy activities can be used in Tier 1, 2, and 3 levels of the model with female juvenile delinquents and other at-risk students.

The RTI model focuses on prevention and provides intervention to students prior to assessment for determination of special education eligibility (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Rudebusch, 2007) and has been described as an important consideration to serve secondary students (Cole, 2007). RTI is a tiered approach: Through Tier 1 all students can receive the core instruction, targeted group intervention can occur in Tier 2, and more intensive intervention with extended frequency and duration can be provided in Tier 3. At all levels curriculum-based instruction is stressed and progress monitoring is conducted. Though school wide implementation of RTI is initially time consuming, the model implies quality instruction for all students with more focused intervention for students who struggle.

The activities described in this study could be used at a Tier 1 level (consulting with teachers), Tier 2 level (small group intervention of at-risk stu-

dents), and Tier 3 (individual or small group instruction using classroom support that may or may not be provided through special education services). The model provides clear information and guidelines for educators and parents by explaining how RTI can document students' performance through monitoring their work on a regular basis (National Research Center on Learning Disabilities, 2007). Specifically, individuals in leadership positions can reach the population studied prior to their commitment to a correctional facility by informing educators of the following information on RTI as described by Rudebusch (2007):

1. The purpose of the model is to instruct all students who struggle, provide frequent monitoring, prevent failure in school, and identify students who need intensive intervention.
2. The essential components include evidence-based practice, universal screening and periodic monitoring of students' progress.
3. Implementation of services is delivered through a three-tiered approach of intervention and instruction.
4. RTI is needed given the number of students at-risk for school failure, and because all students do not learn at the same pace.
5. Problem solving teams and additional staff will be needed to successfully implement RTI.
6. RTI implies that services will change. Specifically, there will be quality instruction for all students, changes in approaches to assessment, and more instructionally relevant curriculum similar to the use of the language-based literacy activities described in this study.

Educators may be unaware of the need to address language-based literacy activities for at-risk secondary students through a three-tiered RTI model. However, upon examination of statistics in the Nation's Report Card and results from the National Assessment of Education Progress, there has been a decline in reading proficiency skills of older students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005; National Assessment of Education Progress, 2003). Moreover, a recent textbook about adolescent girls suggests they are still failing at school and are being overlooked for services (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009). It is frequently recognized by SLPs that language skills are related and fundamental to academic success (Ehren, 2002; Ehren & Lenz, 1989; Paul, 2007; Westby, 2006), as evidenced through collaborative and interdisciplinary team efforts, in-services and presentations at professional conferences, and through research. However, it is less obvious if school leaders and professionals from other academic disciplines understand this important connection. It is questionable if sufficient attention is focused on building language-based literacy activities in order to help at-risk students who are struggling to learn in school. Moreover, it is speculated that until more educational leaders understand the connection between language and academics it will be

difficult to meet the spirit and accomplish the objectives of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

As educational leaders strive to improve language and literacy skills, it is important that they seek input from older students as researchers have addressed the need to consider motivation in planning programs for secondary students. When students evaluate reading and literacy activities to be unrewarding, uninteresting, or irrelevant, they continue to face failure in reading (Pitcher *et al.*, 2007). Though findings are considered preliminary and are not intended to document the effectiveness of an evidenced-based intervention study, they are considered important. Findings such as these illustrate the importance of collecting and considering the opinions of adolescents prior to implementation of programs. Even though the activities are limited in number and represent only a few examples for educational leaders to consider, the directions on the activities include the purpose, materials, procedures and ideas for flexibility of use. It is the intent that activities such as these can be considered to help advance information for the planning of programs for older students at-risk for language, literacy, and learning problems www.unl.edu/barkley/present/sanger/documents/resources.shtml.

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