Evaluation of the North Carolina “Baby Think It Over” Project

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ABSTRACT: The North Carolina “Baby Think It Over” (BTIO) evaluation was conducted during spring semester 2000. Data were collected from participating teachers, students, and parents. Twenty-five teachers were selected randomly from different counties in North Carolina. Each randomly selected teacher coordinated the evaluation in conjunction with the intervention. Student surveys determined whether using the BTIO doll changed perceptions and attitudes toward teen parenting. Information also was collected on the veracity of each student’s participation based on data provided from the computer in the baby. Surveys were sent home to the parents of participating students so information on communication, disruption of the household, and parenting perceptions could be obtained. Each teacher completed a survey that sought information on topics discussed throughout the intervention, hours of the program, and perceptions of program effectiveness. Parents and teachers were offered participation incentives. Overall, support existed for the BTIO intervention by parents and teachers. Most teachers and parents felt the program was effective at increasing communication about parenting and changing teens’ attitudes in a desired direction. Most teachers reported that the intervention was not disruptive to their classes; however, results from student surveys did not reveal the same support. Student changes in attitudes and beliefs about parenting after the intervention were minimal. (J Sch Health. 2002;72(5):178-183)

Sexuality education receives substantial attention in the literature and society as a whole. Programs differ in focus, content, and methodology, and funding for these programs and their respective evaluations exist across the country. Some “safer sex” programs and activities consist of condom distribution programs; inner city AIDS interventions; behavior skills training; application of theoretical constructs such as Social Cognitive Theory, Theory of Reasoned Action; and Protection Motivation Theory; and activities such as visiting a retail store for information about birth control.

Along with “safer sex” programs, abstinence-only programs are being implemented. These programs are either in the midst of being evaluated or their evaluations have been published recently in the literature. Initial research on these programs was weak and tended to reveal limited effects. However, two recently published studies suggest these programs are effective in reducing risky adolescent sexual behaviors. A different type of program uses infant simulators as tools for teaching about parenting and pregnancy. “Baby Think It Over (BTIO)” has been used with “safer sex” interventions and “abstinence-only” programs. One of the first reports in 2000 on the use of BTIO was published by Kleveski and Stevens-Simon. Their results showed that use of a BTIO doll did not improve learning about the difficulties of parenting and that no effect on the intent of students to become teen parents occurred. Another study by Somers and Fahlman in 2001 reported minimal effectiveness on attitudes toward parenting and sexually related behaviors.

This BTIO study differs from the previous studies in three ways: 1) expansiveness of the study geographically, 2) number of components evaluated, and 3) type of outcome measures analyzed. Through this type of replication, practitioners and researchers can begin to feel more confident about the results. Additionally, because this study is larger and more comprehensive, it is more generalizable and therefore can withstand potential scrutiny about the validity of the effectiveness of this type of intervention. Using these findings in conjunction with the other two studies, decision-makers will have solid information from which to base decisions regarding their sexuality related curricula. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to add to the existing information on BTIO.

METHODS

Planning for the evaluation began approximately one year prior to implementation in spring 1999. The first stage of program planning involved identifying the components of the evaluation. The evaluation was designed to be multifaceted by involving not only the students but the teachers and the parents. Data collection instruments were created, or revised if existing instruments were available, and approved by the North Carolina State Department of Health and Human Services and the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction. During summer 1999, BTIO training sessions for teachers were conducted in four sites covering the major geographical areas of North Carolina (Greenville, Asheville, Salisbury, and Raleigh). The principal evaluator was present at each training session. Time was allotted for the evaluator to assess potential evaluation participation sites. Sixty-three teachers, each representing a different county in North Carolina, indicated interest in conducting the evaluation at their school site. From the pool of counties, 25 were randomly selected to participate in the evaluation.

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