

California State University, San Bernardino

CSUSB ScholarWorks

Theses Digitization Project

John M. Pfau Library

2004

Being Sisyphus: A writing pedagogy for at-risk students

Eric David Sullivan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project>



Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sullivan, Eric David, "Being Sisyphus: A writing pedagogy for at-risk students" (2004). *Theses Digitization Project*. 2450.

<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/2450>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

BEING SISYPHUS: A WRITING PEDAGOGY

FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

English Composition

by

Eric David Sullivan

March 2004

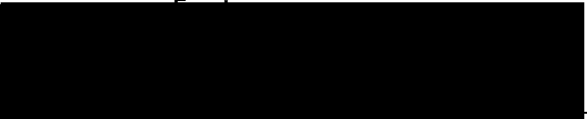
BEING SISYPHUS: A WRITING PEDAGOGY
FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

by
Eric David Sullivan
March 2004

Approved by:


Dr. Jacqueline Rhodes, Chair, English


Dr. Kimberly Costino


Dr. Mary Texeira

1/27/04
Date

ABSTRACT

The current standards-based movement was designed to ensure that all students at all schools receive the same quality education regardless of race, gender, or socio-economic background. Because of the movement's rigid structure and reward and punishment system, it fails to help the very students it was originally designed to help, the at-risk. This thesis discusses the limitations of the standards-based movement and suggests that some schools, especially those whose mission it is to work exclusively with at-risk students, need to be allowed to set local behavioral standards before any consideration can be given to setting and teaching academic standards.

This thesis focuses on Phoenix High School, a community day school in the Corona-Norco Unified School District, and discusses how the standards-based movement is not suited to meet the needs of its students. After an ethnographic account of the school and its population, a program that contains a well-defined structure for addressing negative behavior is presented. Without such a structure, it is argued, there is little to no

opportunity to address academic content in a meaningful fashion.

Academically, particular focus is placed upon the teaching of reading and writing. The argument is made that successful instruction in both areas relies upon the presence of a knowledgeable instructor, an avoidance of disruptive power struggles in the classroom, and an effort to forge relationships between the student's interests, the instructor, and the subject taught. Texts, then, are used as a vehicle to challenge students to view the world in new ways, and writing is used across the curriculum as a student's chief means of demonstrating what they have learned and, ideally, defining who they are becoming.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My gratitude goes out to Dr. Texeira, Dr. Costino, and especially Dr. Rhodes, each of whom spent a great deal of time going over my drafts and offering excellent suggestions for improvement throughout. Your time spent and patience with this project, and with myself, has been greatly appreciated.

DEDICATION

For all those teachers who took the time to make a
difference in my life-

Doug Fix, Larry Leffel, Rosemary Kowalski,
Joanne Marttila Pierson, George Davis

and especially my parents -

Dave and Andrea Sullivan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v

LIST OF TABLES vii

CHAPTER ONE: PAY NO ATTENTION TO THAT MAN BEHIND
THE CURTAIN 1

CHAPTER TWO: THE MISFITS 16

 Defining the At-risk Student at Phoenix 23

 The Barriers of Transience and Absence 34

 Conclusion 43

CHAPTER THREE: A JIGSAW PUZZLE 45

 A System 50

 To Teach 55

 Towards a Pedagogy 62

 A Reading Program 66

 A Writing Program 74

 Conclusion 84

CHAPTER FOUR: YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION? 86

APPENDIX A: SOPHOMORE WRITING PROMPT 98

APPENDIX B: PHOENIX HOUSE LEARNING MANAGEMENT
SYSTEM 101

REFERENCES 111

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Phoenix Student Placements, 2002-2003	19
Table 2.	Student Adds and Drops by Month, 2002-2003 School Year	34
Table 3.	Student Transience by Period, Fall Semester 2002	37
Table 4.	Student Transience by Period, Spring Semester 2003	38
Table 5.	Average Weekly Attendance	41

CHAPTER ONE

PAY NO ATTENTION TO THAT MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Anyone who has seen *The Wizard of Oz* will most certainly remember that revealing moment when the wizard was exposed for the fraud he was: a living breathing human being who created the façade of authority and wisdom through a menacing visage and a booming voice. The film came out over 60 years ago, but its lesson on deception and illusion still holds value today, especially when applied to the standards-based movement that currently dominates public education.

Since the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, politicians have devoted a great deal of time and energy to create an education policy that (1) Reverses public education's downward spiral in academic achievement as cited in the report and (2) Attempts to close the gap between those schools that are successful and those schools that consistently perform poorly on standardized tests. The current standards-based movement is the federal government's latest attempt at addressing both issues. The movement is propelled by the belief that standards drive quality instruction and that the quality of

instruction is directly proportional to a school's standardized test results. Buzz phrases such as "accountability," "academic rigor," and "subject mastery" are constantly employed when describing quality instruction at successful schools. What the movement implies, of course, is that those schools that consistently perform subpar on their standardized tests lack these crucial hallmarks of success. Schools that do not "get their act together" by teaching to the standards and, thus, improving their test scores will lose funding, and if they continue to underachieve, the state will close them down. Only uniform national standards, it is argued, can ensure that every child, no matter their race or socio-economic background, is receiving the education that he or she deserves. However, if one examines the standards-based movement closely, one will find that the movement's rhetoric does not match the social and academic reality of public education today.

I have been a language arts teacher at Phoenix High School for five years. Phoenix is the Corona-Norco Unified School District's school for students who have somehow failed to fit in or have been unsuccessful at the

regular comprehensive high schools. The reasons for student failure range from substance abuse, to truancy, and, sometimes, to acts of violence. It is a tough crowd in need of some tough academic and behavioral remedies, and I am pleased to have been granted the opportunity to work with these kids. The job has required me to do a great deal of reflecting upon how people truly learn and how outside factors - absent parents, substance abuse, sexual abuse - affects a student's ability to learn as best as they can. My experience at Phoenix, however, has also taught me that the standards-based movement, despite its political rhetoric suggesting otherwise, is not the correct remedy for these particular students. In fact, if anything, the movement serves only to bury these students further academically and financially deprive the school of the resources it needs in order to meet the student body's vast array of needs.

Perhaps a specific example will best demonstrate why the standards-based movement is not the educational cure it purports itself to be. At the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year, the Corona-Norco Unified School District began the process of adopting new textbooks for

its language arts program. During one particular in-service I attended, textbook salespeople dazzled the gathering of department chairs and district personnel with test-generating software, interactive workbooks, audio support materials, and the like. The main selling point behind each presentation, though, was that each textbook was aligned to the state standards. While my colleagues marveled at how every short story, essay, and poem was cross-referenced to a correspondable state standard, I took a look at each book's table of contents. I quickly discovered that the new textbooks were suspiciously similar to the old textbooks. Jonathan Edwards's *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*? It was in there. Ambrose Bierce's *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*? That, too, was in there. Shakespeare? He was there. So were Langston Hughes, Ernest Hemingway, and Robert Frost. None of the names had changed, and neither had the oft-anthologized selections that typically accompanied each author.

What, then, had changed? Basically, the primary change was that the "new" textbooks had been aligned to the California State Standards. And what exactly does

that mean? Quite simply, it means that each selection was labeled and spelled out with a corresponding state standard (or standards) that the selection was specifically selected to teach. For example, Edwards's "Sinners" was chosen as a vehicle to teach the use of figurative language and the power of persuasion. For Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," a teacher was to teach the terminology specific to dramatic pieces, the basic elements of plot, and mood. Langston Hughes's poetry was chosen to teach prosody, theme, and introduce the literary period that has come to be known as the Harlem Renaissance. Each selection was explicitly labeled for its academic value so that no teacher - from the very new to the seasoned veteran - could mistake the purpose behind each text's inclusion and teach accordingly.

On the surface, there is little problem with this change. After all, English teachers have been teaching the power of persuasion through Edwards's famous sermon for years. As for the elements of plot and figurative language, pick a story or poem. Virtually any story could be used to teach either, and this is what makes the standards-based movement so deceptive. The only thing

that has changed as a result of the movement is that states have come up with centralized standards and textbook manufacturers have "aligned" their books to highlight the standard or standards the selection best exemplifies. In short, the standards-based movement is a paper lion constructed by politicians and the business forces behind textbook manufacturing. When reports such as *A Nation at Risk* toll the bell of impending disaster, savvy politicians hear an issue upon which they can gain office and textbook manufacturers, who also happen to be the same folks that publish the standardized tests which ostensibly measure student achievement, hear a business opportunity (Levine 122, Meier 83).

Despite the blatant opportunism of politicians and textbook manufacturers, the question still remains: will the standards-based movement help children to become better students and, ergo, better learners, and, moreover, will it make educators better teachers? The answer to both questions is "no." There are several reasons why the standards-based movement falls short of helping students to learn more and teachers to teach more effectively. First, standards-based education, at its

best, merely points out a student's apparent deficiencies while providing no constructive solution for improving upon these said deficiencies. It offers neither the resources that may help students to better achieve nor the professional development for teachers to improve their teaching (Levine 118).

Second, there is ample evidence to suggest that high stakes testing does nothing to improve student achievement at all. A recent Arizona State University study of standardized tests (ACT, SAT, NAEP, Advanced Placement scores, etc.) found that test results rose and fell across states randomly and that high stakes testing appeared to have no effect on student achievement at all (Jehlen 8-9). And this stands to reason. What is often forgotten is that standardized test taking itself is a learned skill, not an unbiased means of measuring a student's mastery of certain skills and standards (Levine 182). For those students who have not learned the skill of test taking, standardized test results become more a measure of a student's ability and willingness to play the testing game rather than a reflection of what a student has actually learned (Rose, *Lives*, 98).

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, standardized testing vastly reduces the complex processes by which we as individuals come to understand what we have been taught. Just as students learn through different modalities, they also demonstrate what they have learned through different avenues, and each of these processes is shaped by the social forces from which the individual was raised (Rose, *Narrowing*, 297-298). Standardized tests themselves are biased towards those students who learn best linguistically and logically and work against those students who may learn and express what they have learned best musically, spatially, bodily, or through any of the other commonly recognized modalities. Despite these limitations, schools across the country continue to measure - or are forced to measure - their success based upon the standards movement. My school, Phoenix High School, is a prime example of the movement's limitations.

Phoenix is unlike any other school in the Corona-Norco Unified School District. It is a small school - typically less than 200 students are enrolled - in a district whose population is growing faster than it can build schools to serve it. Students are placed at

Phoenix after they have demonstrated an inability to play by the rules - either academically or behaviorally - at the comprehensive high schools. Thus, Phoenix is a storehouse for what the education establishment calls "at-risk students." It is a stomping ground for class clowns and the academically underprepared; it is a population that all too often feeds off of its own negativity. Those students who do not possess the skills it takes to succeed in our current college preparatory driven education system or tend to lack the parental support necessary in developing the confidence to acquire those skills can often be found at Phoenix. Therefore, it is the school's mission to meet the needs of this population and help them to turn themselves around. Unfortunately, it is precisely the type of school that the standards-based movement was designed to help, yet has somehow managed to fail.

Where the standards-based movement fails is in its assumption that all students want to learn and are willing to learn if properly engaged to do so by the instructor and the subject. This is a bold and sweeping assumption for schools like Phoenix. More than anything,

Phoenix students are in dire need of behavioral standards. It is not uncommon to wade through a sea of behavioral issues before any academic material can be presented on a given day. Positive role models are hard to come by, and classroom interactions among students and between students and teachers can easily disintegrate into negative verbal volleys. Some days the battle is nonexistent and easily won; other days the whole classroom blows up. Consequently, state academic standards are too often a rumor, a level of academic achievement often talked about by the staff but rarely met, and the school's poor standardized test results bear this out annually.

So what can be done about Phoenix and schools similar to it? According to those who support the standards movement, Phoenix should receive reduced funding as punishment for its poor performance, and if the school's poor performance persists, the school should be taken over by the state and closed down. However, such a plan is near-sighted and would be exceedingly costly, because the fiscal punishment would only serve to hurt the students and risks further damaging test scores.

Students would have less resources to use in their studies, their facility would lose vital staffing, and the facility itself would not receive any upkeep or repairs it may need. Moreover, this approach is not likely to motivate teachers to improve their instruction. If anything, this approach would lower teacher morale and influence the school's most qualified teachers to seek employment elsewhere, leaving the students with novice teachers who simply lack the experience necessary to provide effective instruction to the students. As Jonathon Kozol demonstrated in his book *Savage Inequalities*, these solutions risk enlarging an already swollen underclass that consistently takes from, rather than contributes to, society's growth. Obviously, other solutions need to be considered.

Perhaps the first thing that should be recognized is that not all education crises are academic. Deborah Meier suggests that public schooling is suffering from a crisis in human relations much more so than a crisis in achievement that reports such as *A Nation at Risk* cite (Meier 13). The Phoenix student body appears to be the living embodiment of Meier's claim. All too often

students arrive at Phoenix completely lacking the social skills that would permit one to interact proactively or, in some cases, to even coexist peaceably with others. Their lives tend to be barren of models of healthy, mature relationships and, instead, filled with negative, manipulative, and abusive relationship models. In order for improvement to occur - whether it be academic or social - a school must first know the clientele with whom it is dealing and be allowed the space to create a program that meets its students' needs. Towards that end I will examine the Phoenix student body through the number of students placements, the reason for student placement, the transient nature of the student population, the student body absenteeism rate, and the school's demographic make up. Next, I will define the at-risk student through personal interviews with professionals who have worked extensively with the population, relevant literature, and my own teaching experience.

Once I have defined the nature of the Phoenix clientele, I will set a school-wide plan for meeting its students' needs. Most research on low performing schools

maintains that a consistent school-wide structure needs to be in place for student achievement to improve. At Phoenix, and I suspect at schools similar to Phoenix, specific local standards need to be created and enforced in order for state standards to have any opportunity of being taught. I will briefly discuss how a system that minimizes power struggles and employs instructor attributes such as a suspension of the ego and a willingness to work with at-risk students needs to be the foundation of any school that hopes to be successful when working with at-risk students.

Moreover, I will argue that the focal point of any system designed to meet the needs of at-risk students must be squarely on student attitude. More often than not, at-risk students are reactionary figures; they are in a constant battle with teachers, the subjects being taught, and with their own fears and insecurities. At-risk students need to be challenged to alter this attitude through the materials they are asked to read and write. At-risk students need to be introduced to new stories and new possibilities for living, and they must be tasked to process these stories and their behavioral

choices through their writing and challenged to arrive at constructive solutions in making better choices for themselves in the future. Reading and writing, then, will become the tools through which at-risk students not only learn about the world but, ultimately, about themselves.

What will emerge, finally, is a call for a return to a very old philosophy of learning. I will conclude that learning for at-risk students is best achieved not through drill and kill measures and constant high stakes testing but through forging positive relationships between teachers and students and the subjects being taught. I will argue that real education (i.e. an education that continues to grow and serve one throughout one's life) is only achieved via the spark of self interest and nurtured by one's exposure to new ideas, concepts, and experiences. It is a journey illuminated by reflection upon new materials taught and through guidance from a responsible adult who is willing to discuss the materials freely and openly (Smith, *Learning*, 30-34). In the end, reading and writing will become the chief means a student uses to bridge the academic to the

personal, and it is the teacher's job to influence this journey to begin. No standardized test or political mandate can inspire this journey's pursuit or accurately measure its depth.

If the life of a democracy is dependent upon the education level of its people, as Thomas Jefferson so believed, and if public education is to be the leveling agent of class disparity, as Horace Mann so proclaimed, then a close examination of the failure or success of the pedagogical practices employed at schools like Phoenix are of the utmost importance.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MISFITS

Without knowing what I am
and why I am here,
life is impossible.

Leo Tolstoy

The Great Thoughts

Eastvale, California is a nonentity. Its dominant defining trait is the dairy farms that dot its landscape. Black and white swirled cows dot the fields, though track housing is starting to encroach upon them in spots. It is an area that neither Corona nor Norco felt was worth including in their ever-expanding boundaries, and the reason for the omission is simple enough: the air stinks of cow feces and the area is filled with an inordinate number of flies. If the season is right, it is not at all uncommon to leave your car or truck parked for a short period of time and return to find it covered with flies. It is in this no man's land, amid the cow dung and the relentless influx of flies, that one will find Phoenix Community Day School.

Phoenix Community Day School is a part of the Corona/Norco Unified School District, though its distant locale would suggest otherwise. Despite its putrid surroundings, Phoenix enjoys a spacious, well-kept campus. Large tracts of full, green grass surround the campus, and a large quad area umbrellaed by lush poplar trees rests at the heart of the school. Each tree base is framed by a group of four faded blue picnic tables that, upon close inspection, reveal a history of former colors through their chipped corners. A sparse arrangement of rose bushes line the chain-linked fence next to the main office, and three basketball courts and two large softball fields comprise the backside of the site.

The school buildings themselves are quite modern. Each classroom in the main bank of rooms has tinted storefront windows to help keep the classrooms cool, and the paint on each of the buildings is fresh. Portable office buildings line the quad area and handicap ramps constructed of bright, clean cement offer full access into every room in the school. Virtually no graffiti,

apart from the occasional pencil doodling, can be found on the school's exterior.

Phoenix receives its students from the district's four large comprehensive high schools for one of four reasons: (1) They have been expelled from the district; (2) They were caught with drugs or alcohol on their person or in their system; (3) They have displayed a pattern of disruptive classroom behavior that is no longer tolerated at the comprehensive high schools; (4) They are excessively truant. The fact that students are placed at Phoenix is fundamental in defining the overall attitude of the student body. By being placed involuntarily, a student is deprived of choice, and this lack of choice usually leads to an initial reluctance to buy-in to the program. Despite a dramatic increase in voluntary placements in recent years, the student body's negative perception of the school has largely remained unchanged. Table 1 below shows the raw number and percentage of student placement by violation for the 2002-2003 school year.

Table 1. Phoenix Student Placements, 2002-2003

Violation	Number Placed(Percentile)
Fighting	18 (9%)
Defiance	47 (22%)
Illegal substance	32 (15%)
Expulsion	33 (16%)
Harassment	2 (1%)
Excessive truancy	10 (5%)
Voluntarily placed	67 (32%)
Total	209

For the 2002-2003 school year, 37% of students assigned to Phoenix involuntarily were the result of defiance (22%) or the possession of an illegal substance (usually marijuana - 15%). Only a small portion of the Phoenix placements (10%) arrive because of fighting, but it is important to note that this percentage is complemented by the expellee population, most of whom are placed due to weapons violations (e.g. carrying an illegal knife on campus, etc.). Thus, it could be argued that as much as 17% of the school's incoming students had a history involving violent acts.

The number of students who volunteered to place themselves at Phoenix was far and away the school's largest percentage. This is a troubling reality for the school, because there is an underhanded reason for this. Some school administrators at the comprehensive high schools feel that placement standards for Phoenix are too high, so they try to circumvent the system. Students whom site administrators deem "trouble" students are offered an option that sounds something like this: the student can either volunteer to go to Phoenix, or he can wait until the administrators at the school site build a case against him and send him anyway. The deal is sweetened by the promise of a credit recovery program designed to help those students who have fallen behind in their credits an opportunity to catch back up.

The ramifications of this choice greatly benefits the school sending the student "voluntarily" to Phoenix. District policy holds that students who voluntarily attend Phoenix must attend for a minimum of a year, whereas students placed at Phoenix are eligible to petition to return to their home schools by the end of the semester in which they were sent. The reasoning

behind the creation of this rule is unclear, but it is blatantly clear why students are not informed about the rule until they arrive at Phoenix. What further frustrates students is when they discover that the carrot that lured them - the credit recovery program - does not actually exist at Phoenix. Naturally, this deceit leaves students and parents frustrated and angry, neither of which serves to benefit the school environment or the student.

Perhaps even more deceitful is the clear socioeconomic, gender, and racial bias created by the seemingly objective placement criteria. Phoenix has long been a school for the economically underprivileged and has always maintained a visible Latino male dominance. The student body as of this writing bears this out. As of 16 October 2003, 97% of the student body was eligible for free or reduced lunch. Of the student population as of 28 October 2003, 77.9% of the population was male, which, historically, is a low number. There was a time when the school's population was virtually all male. As for race, 61.3% of the student population was Latino, while 30.3% of the student body was Caucasian. The

district-wide demographic is a somewhat more balanced 47% Caucasian and 38% Latino (National Center for Education Statistics).

These factors support the current research available on at-risk students. In the most basic sense, an at-risk student is one who is in danger of failing in school; however, it is important to recognize that the term "at-risk" is a contested one and the reasons for labeling a student as such are often politicized and rather complex. In some instances, research defines them as those students who tend to be second language learners, doomed by low teacher expectations, and victims of institutional racism (Nieto 127, 139, 142-143). These are students whom the system has not given a fair opportunity, and they are suffering academically and socially as a result. At-risk students are also viewed as those who find school dull or boring because the teacher chooses to teach in a traditional manner that manages to disengage the student. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire has named this traditional approach the banking method because it is centered on the teacher as the "giver" of knowledge and relegates the student to an

empty vessel in need of "filling" (52-53). In this instance, the student is being taught the subject in a manner that is condescending and, as Freire has argued, oppressive, for the student becomes nothing more than an object to be conquered. For others at-risk students struggle with or openly confront problems with the curriculum itself. These students are unable to find themselves anywhere in curriculum or decry the curriculum as being overtly racist and, thus, dismiss it as something completely irrelevant to anything in their lives (Nieto 127, Kohl, *Won't Learn*, 32). Phoenix students, it seems, are no exception to the current research.

Defining the At-Risk Student at Phoenix

Larry wears his intensity on his brow. He is a squat mass of energy whose enthusiasm seems relentless. Larry has worked with at-risk students for his entire 25 year career in public education and defines the at-risk student as "one who is capable of success in school but because of economic, social, behavioral, or academic deficiencies requires extra support and intervention to enhance the possibility of success" ("Larry" 21 Jun 03).

At the heart of Larry's definition is a concern for social and behavioral deficiencies, which is primarily reflected in Phoenix's high number of students placed due to defiance.

The students sent to Phoenix for defiance are oftentimes volatile and tend to be negative risk-takers. They are battlers, and they rarely give in when an audience is present. My experience at Phoenix suggests that these students thrive off of their confrontations because each battle serves as a means of coping with situations that are out of their control. Instead of making a choice they would rather not make, these students defy authority and attempt to bully their way out of the situation. This defiance is often demonstrated via verbal abuse (i.e. excessive profanity) towards a teacher, but sometimes this defiance is manifested in more underhanded ways such as by stealing a teacher's personal pictures from her desk or damaging costly classroom equipment such as a computer hard drive. At the end of the 2002-2003 school year, for example, over half of the computers in Phoenix's computer lab needed to be repaired due to damaged hard drives. In the

student's mind, each act of resistance contains the same message: preservation of dignity against a seemingly remorseless authority figure. Each battle helps the student to earn the respect of their peers and serves to preserve their integrity as a young adult who has the right to act as they please.

Another form of defiance that Phoenix faces is through a student's choice to not learn. In most instances, a student's choice to not learn is based upon a fear of failure and a fear that their failure may embarrass them in front of their peers. By choosing not to learn, a student automatically circumvents their fear and embarrassment. It is simply a face saving ploy. Herb Kohl, however, has identified a very different reason for a student to choose not to learn. In his book *I Won't Learn from You*, Kohl differentiates between a student's fear of failing with that of actively choosing not to learn due to ideological or cultural reasons. Instead of fueling feelings of inadequacy and a loss of confidence, Kohl argues that a student's choice to not learn on cultural and ideological grounds serves to develop a student's self discipline and self-satisfaction while

strengthening a student's resolve (6). I have rarely witnessed this form of defiance at Phoenix; however, it does indeed exist at times and needs to be recognized for what it is.

Sandy is rarely without a smile. Supportive and conciliatory, she has been a school counselor for 22 years, 17 of which have been spent working with at-risk students. She was named San Bernardino Counselor of the Year in 1997 and Riverside County Counselor of the Year in 1999. She has also worked as a drug and alcohol therapist. Being a counselor, Sandy gets the opportunity to view at-risk students from a slightly different perspective than a regular classroom teacher. Though she is spared the classroom context that can often negatively influence a student's behavior, her viewpoint is no less valid; in fact, it may even be more powerful as her contact tends to be on a more personal level. She defines the at-risk student as one who "makes poor choices, may come from a family where there's some dysfunctional [sic], divorce, alcoholism, drug use, [and] doesn't really have the structure or the foundation [the at-risk student] needs [...] to manage each day in a

consistent way" ("Sandy" 21 Jun 03). Sandy's definition highlights a typical at-risk student's need to be connected to something or someone; unfortunately, the structure of their lives has crippled their capacity to create and maintain healthy relationships. Instead of creating caring, trust-based relationships, at-risk students all too often find themselves mired in relationships based upon betrayal, fueled by anger, and filled with emptiness. In this context it is easy to see why an at-risk student might give up on school or simply become apathetic towards life in general since each response serves as a barrier against further betrayal and hurt. Into this empty void steps drugs and alcohol, which serves to assuage the pain of loneliness and anger and acts as a social lubricant. The number of students sent to Phoenix for substance abuse supports Sandy's claim.

Students placed due to substance abuse are generally easy to find on the Phoenix campus. Marijuana, it seems, is more an idol than a mere vice to this segment of the population. Most of these students are openly proud of their association with the substance. Students are

typically not afraid to make off-hand drug references during class time, and students are not at all bashful about discussing their substance abuse exploits or advertising the acquisition of new drug paraphernalia they intend to use immediately following school. Moreover, many of these students take an extraordinary amount of time to draw elaborate pot leaves on their folders and etch "4:20" and the number "13" onto desktops and loose sheets of paper. (Note: "4:20" is a symbol for "smoking out" in the marijuana culture, and the number 13 represents the letter "M" which signifies marijuana.)

Given the intensity of their vice, it is not at all uncommon for these students to bring their habit to school. During my tenure at Phoenix, students have been caught smoking marijuana in the bathrooms, behind school buildings, at the bus stop before school, in the bus to and from school, and even inside classrooms when teachers are present but engaged with other students. As if this illegal activity were not bad enough, not to be overlooked is the hangover effect the substance has on a student's nerves and the negative impact this tends to have on his ability to cope with stressful situations

when coming down from a high. This abuse can lead to some awfully erratic and disruptive classroom behavior, which can easily undermine the best-conceived lesson plan.

In watching Robert, one would think that every move he makes and every word he states occur only after careful consideration. He is a deliberate and measured man and a thirty-five year veteran of the Corona-Norco Unified School District. He has spent the last seventeen years working with at-risk students at the various manifestations of alternative education schools within the district. He has also spent 20 years working as a counselor at Riverside County's juvenile hall. According to Robert, at-risk students are "kids [...] brought up in a gang or raised in a gang area [where] school's not really important" ("Robert" 21 Jun 03). Gang integrity and individual respect through gang affiliation, then, become the center of importance in a student's life and completely overshadows any merit school may hold. As with Sandy's definition, the student population at Phoenix supports Robert's view.

The presence of Latino gangs is palpable on campus, and its influence cannot be denied. It can be seen in painted over graffiti, through the slang names - "Gizmo," "Buddha," "Sicko" - etched into the desktops in my classroom, and by the clothes the boys wear to school. Loose shirts buttoned all the way up the torso, baggy denim pants, and white tube socks pulled tightly up the shin are a gang member's dress of choice, and this style can be found throughout the entire Phoenix campus. Their dress is a source of pride, and there is a daily tension between teachers and administrators trying to enforce the school district's dress code (e.g. no gang affiliated clothing, no "wife beater" tank tops, no visible undergarments) and a gang member's insistence on wearing his colors or street number.

Through conversations with students and colleagues and my school's association with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, I have come to learn a great deal about the psychology and structure of the gang culture. This knowledge is not easy to come by and not to be dismissed easily. Life on the street directly affects life in the classroom and the more one knows about what

is going on out on the streets the more effective a teacher of this population is likely to be. There are seven gangs located in the City of Corona, all falling under the umbrella of the moniker "Corona Varrío Locos South" or "CVLS," each occupying a specific street (i.e. Fourth Street, Sixth Street, Thirteenth Street, etc.). While race is a strong aspect to gang identity, it is one's geography that ultimately determines whether a person can earn membership into a specific gang. People from Orange County - whether they are black or Latino - are not welcome on Corona turf. As of this writing, each of the CVLS branches are in harmony with one another, which is important in keeping the day to day climate at Phoenix safe for all its students. Unfortunately, it only takes one incident at school or on the street to jeopardize that peace.

Each Latino gang has a surprisingly sophisticated structure. Each gang has its own charter that defines the positions of president, vice president, and sergeant-at-arms as well as a list of bylaws by which each gang member is to abide. (E.g. Rule #1 stipulates that all gang members shall never accept blacks.) Dues are

collected, and the gang decides via vote how the dues are to be spent on gang functions (e.g. parties, personal matters such as funerals, etc.). In addition to camaraderie, one of the main functions of the gang is to get respect from individuals outside of the gang. For each gang, respect is earned by its demonstration of power through violence or intimidation. Just like those students who choose not to learn or openly defy authority, it is the front one gives that is important, and respect and dignity are always a vital part of that front.

While Latinos enjoy the strongest gang presence at Phoenix, it should be noted that other gangs or gang-like entities exist on campus. There is typically a small white supremacist group on campus, usually no more than half a dozen students, each of whom subtly express their supremacist viewpoint by wearing Independent brand t-shirts, whose logo is the German Iron Cross, and drawing the occasional Swastika upon a desktop. African Americans also maintain a small presence on campus, but their numbers are usually so slight as to not excite much attention. However, their ranks do swell occasionally

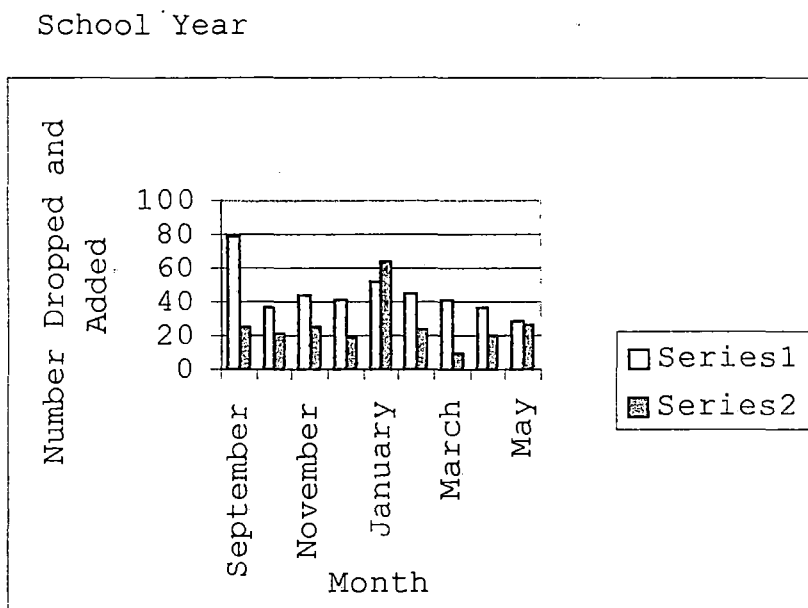
and major fights between the Latinos and the blacks have occurred on campus in the past as a result. The tension between these groups is constantly monitored and always a cause of concern for the Phoenix staff.

Anger, apathy, and the drive to avoid failure and preserve dignity, these are the elements the Phoenix staff battles on a daily basis. It is the lure of the street and its all too available vices, the promise of easily gained respect through gang affiliation, and the dearth of positive, nurturing adult relationships in its students' lives that makes the teachers' job at Phoenix so difficult. In a large sense, Phoenix's role in the Corona-Norco Unified School District is one of an educational M.A.S.H. unit whose mission is to receive "sick" students, patch them up as quickly as possible, and get them back to their home high school. Simply stated, Phoenix's main objective is to break the cycle of negative behavior and academic failure its population has experienced and come to expect of themselves, which is a mission much easier said than achieved.

The Barriers of Transience and Absence

The at-risk student's cycle of failure is especially difficult to break when one considers the school's excessive turnover rate. As Table 2 illustrates, Phoenix averaged adding 48.4 students per month, while it averaged dropping 27.1 students per month for the 2002-2003 school year. During this time, the school's peak enrollment was 189, while its lowest enrollment was 149. This means that the school averaged adding its own peak enrollment every four months and dropping its own enrollment approximately every 7 months.

Table 2. Student Adds and Drops by Month, 2002-2003



(Note: Series 1 denotes students added; series 2 denotes students dropped.)

The reasons for the high student transience at Phoenix are multiple. Perhaps the most poignant reason for student transience is the district's apparent reluctance and the school site's inability to enforce truancy laws. Despite the school's poor attendance, there have been no instances, at least to my knowledge, of the district taking parents to court over their child's poor attendance. Moreover, the school has little to no working relationship with the City of Corona's truancy task force. All Phoenix has to combat its excessive transience is a child welfare specialist who is legally allowed to do little more than visit homes and issue threats stating the parental consequences of not forcing one's child to attend school. The welfare specialist has no legal right to do anything more.

But the district's reluctance to employ outside truancy enforcement measures is only one reason for Phoenix's high transience rate. Students locked up in juvenile hall for violation of their parole, for example, are dropped from the school's rolls and added again upon the student's release. This add/drop procedure means that a student may be added several times throughout the

school year, thus inflating the school's transience rate. The same practice is applied to students reported as runaways. It is not rare to have a parent phone the school and inform them that their child is a runaway. When this occurs, of course, the school takes that student off its rolls. What often occurs, however, is that the student had not run away at all but had simply not been home in days and the parent assumed that their child had gone for good. Again, the school's transience rate is inflated as a result.

The nature of this school-wide transience is best viewed through the context of a specific classroom. Table 3 and Table 4 below show the number of students added and dropped from each of my classes with the percent of class population change provided in parenthesis.

The message suggested in each table is actually more complex than the numbers show. For example, while nine students did indeed drop from my original period 1 enrollment in the spring, they did not do so right from the beginning of the course. Some of the students never attended, while others attended for varying portions of

Table 3. Student Transience by Period, Fall Semester 2002

	Period 1	Period 3	Period 4	Period 5	Period 6
students enrolled originally	18	17	14	17	12
students who dropped	5 (28%)	2 (12%)	5 (36%)	7 (41%)	3 (25%)
adjusted class enrollment	13	15	9	10	9
students added	13 (100%)	8 (53%)	7 (78%)	6 (60%)	6 (67%)
readjusted class enrollment	26	23	16	16	15
students who quit attending	6 (23%)	10 (43%)	4 (25%)	3 (19%)	6 (40%)

(Note: Period 2 was my fall preparatory period.)

Table 4. Student Transience by Period, Spring Semester

2003

	Period 1	Period 2	Period 4	Period 5	Period 6
students enrolled originally	19	5	24	14	18
students who dropped	9 (47%)	0	13 (54%)	4 (29%)	8 (50%)
adjusted class enrollment	10	5	11	10	10
students added	7 (70%)	14 (280%)	12 (110%)	11 (110%)	7 (70%)
readjusted class enrollment	17	19	23	21	17
students who quit attending	2 (12%)	6 (32%)	5 (22%)	7 (21%)	2 (12%)

(Note: Period 3 was my spring preparatory period. Period 2 began as a junior language arts class, but scheduling difficulties led to it becoming a reading course on 3/17/03. Table 4 reflects the changes made while the period was a reading course only.)

the course before dropping. Moreover, when students were added it was not on a specific day of the week.

Orientations throughout the year were scheduled from

the beginning to the end of the school day; therefore, it was not at all uncommon for new students to trickle into my classroom throughout the day at any given time. On the other hand, it was not at all out of the question for me to get bombarded with as many as four new students in one class period. One never knew what one would get on a given day, so flexibility and advanced preparation were always key to assisting these students in becoming acclimated into my classroom procedures.

Lastly, the above tables only reflect my first week and last week's attendance sheets for each semester. There were a small number of students added and dropped from each of the periods within this window whose names were not present on the roll sheets examined. All told, the unstable nature of this population underscores the difficulty any instructor will have in establishing an academic environment that nurtures student confidence and allows students the safety to take positive academic risks because there is always a new student body with which to contend.

Within the window of student transience is student attendance, which only serves to exacerbate the unstable

nature of the classroom. Transience differs from attendance in that transience means complete removal from the school's enrollment, whereas attendance reflects a student's presence or absence while still on the school's enrollment. Traditionally speaking, daily attendance at Phoenix fluctuates depending on the time of the year. School-wide attendance in September, for example, usually averages around 70% or slightly better because the year is young and student hope for a successful year is strong. October and November generally see a drop to the 60-65% range. With the exception of December, which is a short month due to the Christmas break, school-wide attendance remains in the 60-65% range.

Again, a look at my roster for a given period may shed some light on how attendance challenges a teacher's ability to create a safe learning environment. Table 5 shows my attendance during the period of September 16 until October 18, my attendance peaked at 72.6% (the week of 9/16/02) and bottomed out at 62.5% (the week of 9/23/02). My overall attendance during this period was 65%, which is a disturbingly low percentage since this is

the time of year when school-wide attendance traditionally tends to be higher.

Table 5. Average Weekly Attendance

Week	Number of Students Enrolled	Number of Attendable Periods Possible	Number of Periods Absent	Attendance Percentage
9/16/02	67	335	92	72.6
9/23/02	90	450	169	62.5
9/30/02	79	395	144	63.6
10/7/02	80	400	144	64.0
10/14/02	81	405	144	64.5

(Note: Table 5 lists student attendance for my classroom only and not Phoenix as a whole.)

Why do students not attend Phoenix regularly?

Certainly, the school's distant locale and fly infested stench dominated surroundings plays a part, but the most prominent reason is probably apathy. Many students placed at Phoenix no longer feel that the cost of putting forth an honest effort will pay off in any meaningful way for them one day. They have played the school game unsuccessfully for years, have tired of "playing the game," and have given up. For others the case is not so much that they have given up but that they have missed much too much school and have no chance of passing their classes in a given semester. Instead of attending school

and getting into trouble, they rationalize that it is better to stay home or hang out on the streets.

Moreover, these students often have a parent or guardian who sympathizes with, wholeheartedly agrees with, or is not present enough in the home to discourage this sentiment and make the student attend on a regular basis.

Apathy, however, is only one reason why students choose not to attend school regularly. Some students do not attend because they are avoiding accountability for a poor behavioral choice, while other students do not attend because peer pressure has lured them away to do drugs or just play hooky. Still other students do not come to school because they are afraid to. They do not feel safe because they are being verbally or physically harassed by a student or a gang, and they do not wish to be subjected to their harassment. Some quit attending because they were involved in a physical altercation, had lost the battle, and wished not to suffer any further humiliation. Thus, in order to preserve some dignity, they stop attending school completely.

Not all the blame for Phoenix's poor attendance, however, can be limited to student apathy, avoidance, or

immaturity. For some students the district's poor bussing system is reason enough not to attend. Busing at Phoenix has been an issue for years, which is why the daily start of school has been pushed back from 8 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. Yet, students are still dropped off late by the buses, and it is not at all uncommon for buses to skip entire stops on their routes. The return trip home is no better. It is an all too common occurrence to hear the final bell of the day ring at 3:23 p.m. and see few to no buses lined up in the school's parking lot. Students and staff have been known to wait as late as 5 p.m. for buses to arrive and take students home. Naturally, this leaves the staff frustrated and the students angry and bitter about coming to school.

Conclusion

This, then, is the Phoenix High School demographic: a minority population, generally from a lower socio-economic strata, primarily male, apathetic in regards to receiving a formal education, inconsistent in their learning habits, and deficient in their basic skills. This demographic rarely changes at Phoenix, because the social realities that helped to create it - the lure of

gang life, drug abuse, a broken home, poverty - always exist to one degree or another and are in constant tension with the expectations of a public education. In this way, the social and academic reality of Phoenix is strikingly similar to the Greek myth of Sisyphus. Like Sisyphus, teachers at Phoenix are constantly pushing against the "boulder" of negative social skills and subpar academic performance only to be seemingly stuck in the same place. Good role models - those students who have changed their negative attitudes towards learning and have worked hard to improve upon their basic skills - are always leaving, while poor role models - those students who struggle to attend school regularly or hold a negative attitude towards school - are always incoming or remain behind. These are the cold facts of schools like Phoenix, and through this realization it becomes painfully evident that the "repair" job teachers seek is always going to be much easier said than done, for Phoenix students do not arrive at their "broken" state over night. They came to be who they are over a long period of time, which suggests that a true remedy will take considerable time and effort as well.

CHAPTER THREE
A JIGSAW PUZZLE

What is the answer?

In that case,

what is the question?

Gertrude Stein

The Great Thoughts

During my tenure at Phoenix High School, I have witnessed drug deals transpire during class instruction, students throw books and chairs from across the room in fits of anger at their classmates, and bonafide fights that required me to physically pick up and move students from the classroom. I have been shocked by a student who exposed her breasts for the benefit of cheering young boys and stunned to discover that a student had somehow turned a juicy red apple into a pipe and had smoked marijuana through it. More than once I have left the classroom steaming with anger, my hands visibly shaking with frustration, and mentally drained from combating the insolence and immaturity of students whose sole task seemed to be nothing less than to get under my skin.

In his book *Lives on the Boundary*, Mike Rose describes the complex social dynamics that often exist in a classroom that leads students to exhibit such behaviors.

There's probably little any teacher can do with some kids in some high schools: the poverty and violence of the neighborhoods, the dynamics of particular families, the ways children develop identities in the midst of economic blight.

You rely on goodwill and an occasional silent prayer to keep your class from exploding, hope that some wild boy doesn't slug another, pray that your authority isn't embarrassed. (137)

Rose's description highlights how the world outside the classroom directly influences the behaviors visible inside the classroom. Authority is openly challenged, power is always negotiated, and identities based upon respect are constantly seeking to be preserved. Such classrooms are a tinderbox for confrontation and can quickly erupt into a combat zone, no matter the experience of the teacher or the strength of a lesson plan.

When I think of such a classroom, I immediately recall a senior class from my first year at Phoenix, then known as Horizon Continuation School. The class enrollment was 23, a rather large number for the type of population to which Phoenix caters. The class was my last of the day, and it was hopeless. Most of the seniors did not have a prayer of graduating, and each was well aware of it. Still, they arrived en masse every day. Their goal being, ostensibly, to socialize. Snide sexual innuendoes, obvious drug references, idle chatter, and blatant challenges to my authority were the norm. As best as I could tell, the boys attended simply to try to get with the girls, the drug dealers attended in order to meet their clients' needs, and the rest, well, they attended simply because they had nowhere else to go.

I first tried directed teaching (i.e. lecturing, reading aloud from the text, facilitating classroom discussion), but the struggle became too much. It was all I could do to get the students to realize that I was in the room with them, let alone that I was actually trying to teach them something. I then tried collaborative work. I put them into groups, but I

quickly discovered that this only better served to satisfy their desire to socialize. Rote individual bookwork was met with outright refusal to even attempt the assignment. With the assistance of a colleague, I invited some of the more influential students into my classroom during lunch. We bribed them with pizza and sodas while each of us chastised them for acting like rude, immature children. That tongue-lashing resonated in their collective memory for about one day. I was at a loss as to what to attempt next. The turning point occurred when my principal, Dave Long, asked me if he could make a presentation to the class regarding some physical changes the school was about to undergo. Naturally, I was all too happy to oblige.

The school was set to go through modernization the following summer, and since I had the bulk of the student population run through my classroom throughout the course of the day, Mr. Long wanted to share the plans with each of my classes. The presentation took about 20 minutes, and all went well, until he arrived at my door to meet the seniors. Like myself, Mr. Long had difficulty getting the class's attention. They talked continuously,

peppered him with rude remarks, and basically ignored any authority his presence might demand in the classroom. He spent 25 minutes with that class and made it through approximately half of his presentation when he gave up, packed his materials, and left the classroom. I was both mortified and relieved. Here was the school's principal - a man who had been in public education for 30 years - receiving the same treatment as a first year teacher. It was now abundantly apparent to me that the class was irreverent and apathetic to anyone who dared to teach them, and it was too late to make a favorable impression on many of them.

The moment Dave Long gave up on his presentation to that senior class was - and continues to be - a watershed moment for me. I learned that the problem was not me, that I was not an utterly incompetent teacher. It was the system by which the school was run and the culture that surrounded the kids that made the ultimate difference and fueled them to act as they did. The context made them feel entitled to be irreverent and rude. They feared no repercussions, because there really were not any. After all, what could possibly happen to

them? If we had threatened them with suspension or even expulsion, neither would have mattered a bit because they lost nothing - except valuable social time - by either. No meaningful learning could possibly hope to occur until a change in the school's system, and especially its culture, came about. This is the first requirement for any pedagogy where the population is involuntarily placed at its site. A well-defined system needs to be set up and enforced in order to help minimize classroom disruptions, remove negative classroom conflicts, and allow for the opening of a window of opportunity to teach and learn to exist.

A System

The French philosopher Michel Foucault argued that knowledge is an entity that is created by one's interaction with the world around him (44-45). Our context - the schools we attend, the neighborhoods in which we grow up, our religious faith - intermixed with ourselves - our behavior patterns, our personality, the manner in which we perceive the world - creates our individual truths. For Foucault, discourse is the tool, the power, that links the individual with his context.

Discourse shapes and enacts what becomes each of our truths. In order to understand the power evident in a given context, one must examine the discourse in that context. My infamous senior class, for example, wielded their power in numerous ways. Some completely ignored me or anyone else who tried to teach them through direct instruction. Others sought to embarrass me by blurting out sexual or drug related references in an effort to elicit a response from me that they could ridicule. Their comments were designed specifically to belittle me and undermine my authority, thereby shifting power to the student making the inappropriate comment. Those that chose to remain silent only served to act as accomplices for the rest. Regrettably, my experience was not limited to me; other staff members experienced similar situations with different classes. One colleague left her room in tears after being bullied by a number of boys. Over time it became clear to the staff at Phoenix that a school-wide structure was needed to minimize these negative interactions and remove them from the classroom as quickly as possible so the possibility of meaningful instruction might take place.

A great deal of the literature regarding the schooling of at-risk students mentions structure (e.g. clear expectations for teachers, students, and parents; clear curricular choices; consistency in implementing and following through on program guidelines) as a necessary component to their education (Carter 14, Reeves 188). There are a number of reasons for this. As stated before, structure is needed to manage negative classroom behaviors. No matter the experience of the teacher - from the very green to the seasoned veteran - in-class disruptions are going to occur in a school that works with at-risk students for all the reasons discussed in the previous chapter. When these disruptions do occur and the rules have been violated, there can be no room for argument, for arguments grant students the opportunity to manipulate the teacher and the classroom as a whole and risks escalating the situation into a large power struggle, which, in the end, only serves to excite the other students and rob the class of valuable instructional time. The goal, then, is to minimize these disruptions and remove them from the classroom before they become instances of "modified chaos."

Secondly, at-risk students require structure in the classroom because, more often than not, they lack it in their home lives ("Sandy" 21 Jun 03). All too often, at-risk students push the boundaries set in school because they are accustomed to having no boundaries and no consequences in their personal lives. Structure, then, becomes a means of socializing students so that they might exist and function well in a classroom setting and, ideally, in their own lives as well.

Lastly, structure is essential in establishing a safe academic and social environment that promotes mutual respect amongst its students and staff. It is a prime component in creating a context that the educator Jaime Escalante refers to as "ganas" or desire (*Stand and Deliver*). Students of all kinds will not strive to learn in those places and from those people who they do not respect, and nobody - students, teachers, and parents alike - respects a school that is visibly inefficient, disorganized, and out of control. Structure is the building block upon which such a scenario can be avoided.

Phoenix High School, for example, has created a clearly defined system designed to proactively manage its

student disruptions and protect the instructional integrity of the classroom (see Appendix A). I have provided the Phoenix House Learning Management System (HLMS) here as a model for discussion and nothing more. Any specific structure a school chooses to employ as a management system must come from the site itself and be an extension of the school's mission and vision. Moreover, the structure should be constructed after a careful analysis of the student body's needs and in conjunction with the strength and weaknesses of the school's staff.

The Phoenix HLMS separates the entire student body into four houses of approximately 50 students and three teachers. All staff and students meet in their houses to start the day. It serves as a time for students to eat their breakfasts, complete any homework, and work on basic skills in math and reading. It is also a time for teachers to check that students have brought a folder, paper, and a writing utensil to school. If they are not adequately prepared, the necessary materials are provided or appropriate disciplinary measures are enforced, for once a student has made the decision to attend school on

a given day, then they also have made the decision to be active learners in each of their classes. There are to be no excuses.

Most importantly, the House provides a space for mentoring opportunities. The House affords students the time to talk with an adult about the issues inside and outside of school that concern them or are affecting their ability to learn in school. The House also provides a space for teachers to tutor students whose basic skills are exceedingly poor and to counsel with those students who get into trouble on a near daily basis. The goal is to provide multiple opportunities for students to process their behaviors and thought patterns. This type of processing, of course, is not easy to engender in students, for it requires a wide array of skills and self awareness that is not found in all teachers.

To Teach

According to the Heritage Foundation, "the inadequate training of teachers is the single most debilitating force at work in American classrooms today" (Carter 17). The need for well-trained teachers is even

more acute in schools for at-risk students where teacher quality is the single greatest indicator of student success (Carter 3, O'Neil 21, Reeves 195). I believe that most students who attend comprehensive high schools will learn despite the presence a poor teacher in the classroom. I believe as much because these students are fairly well disciplined, goal oriented, and possess support systems - friends and family - who can offer advice, guidance, and encouragement when times get tough. They are survivors in life and, ergo, academic survivors as well. At-risk students are not. Poor teachers will be run right out of their own classrooms if they do not learn some vital teaching skills, and the entire school's program - no matter how well thought out it may be - will suffer as a result.

The successful implementation of any program meeting the needs of at-risk students demands an instructor who has great reserves of patience, the courage to take curricular risks, and a vast degree of subject knowledge. But these are just the beginning. These skills are essential to any successful teacher who works with any population of students. What sets the teacher of at-risk

students apart from the rest of the pack is their ability to earn their students' respect and their overt desire to work with students whom many would rather not work with ("Robert" 21 Jun 03). Such teachers must be models of respectable behavior and be willing to risk interaction with those students who may shun interaction, act extremely crude and vulgar, suffer from a deficiency in their basic skills, are blatantly racist, or are exceedingly immature. Desire, then, is the first quality; beyond that, teachers of at-risk students also must have the ability to suspend their egos, possess an extraordinary confidence in themselves as a capable teacher, and be willing to participate in mentoring-like relationships. Each is a must not only for the possibility of student success but for a teacher's well-being to remain intact; therefore, a closer examination is necessary in defining each of these qualities.

Suspension of the Ego

Amongst the first things I noticed upon working with the at-risk population is their overuse of profane language. What I noticed shortly after that was their sheer willingness and complete lack of shame in employing

their vulgar verbiage towards me. These attacks became the basis for my first lesson in working with at-risk kids: when a student directs profanity or anger towards me, they are doing so under the mindset that I am every teacher that they have ever had before. I am the teacher who always yelled at them, the teacher who always got them into trouble, the teacher who always ignored them, and maybe even the parent who neglects or abuses them. In short, I am the adult representative of all that is bad in their life up to that given moment, and they are displacing their anger and frustration with them out on me. Their verbal assault is their means of getting even or of manipulating a situation that has always left them feeling powerless, and they are firing back.

While none of this behavior is acceptable by any means, it happens, and a teacher of at-risk students has to realize that when a student's anger explodes, they are not going off on them personally, though it may certainly feel like it. In most instances the student usually does not know the teacher personally at all; the student only knows them as a teacher, an adult in a position of authority. Therefore, a teacher of at-risk students needs

to lose his ego and not fire back at the student in a likeminded fashion. When a teacher responds to a verbal attack with a verbal attack, the student has won in manipulating that teacher, because the teacher has stooped to the level of the student instead of being a model for how to handle conflict and aggression positively. Power versus power interactions (i.e. combating yelling with yelling, cussing with cussing, etc.) only vindicates the student and gives them power in that situation. Teachers of at-risk students need to avoid these scenes by minimizing the power struggle and removing the student from the classroom. Ideally, administration should handle these cases and, if the school structure permits it, the verbal burst should somehow be used as an opportunity to teach students anger management skills and positive adult interpersonal skills. Making these instances a battle of egos, however, will rarely if ever solve anything, and the negative behavior will continue to exist and reappear another day.

A Willingness to serve as a Mentor

If schools are indeed suffering from a crisis in human relationships, as Deborah Meier has argued, then at-risk students are clearly this crisis's most notable casualties (Meier 13). At-risk students are not only disconnected from school, as their failing grades suggest, they are also lacking positive role models in their lives ("Sandy" 21 Jun 03). Their lives are often barren of those individuals who will not only listen to their problems and frustrations but offer them constructive solutions that might help them to overcome their problems.

Many would argue that public schooling is not the place for such activities to occur, that these are "touchy-feely" approaches to educating and that this form of socializing should take place in the home. Ideally, those critics are right. However, when students have a negative or absent parental figure and do not possess the minimal social skills needed to function in a classroom, then the basic job of educating - the teaching of reading, writing, and mathematics - cannot even begin to be undertaken. At-risk students need adults who are

willing to hold them accountable for their actions and serve as mentors who will assist them in processing their behavioral choices ("Larry" 21 Jun 03, Rose, *Lives*, 235-236). At-risk students need to know that somebody cares about the choices they make as well as their overall well-being. They need to know that somebody believes in their ability to be successful academically and as a responsible young adult ("Sandy" 21 Jun 03). Especially effective mentors are open-minded, genuinely responsive to a student's needs, and practice empathy, and many at-risk students will not be successful without teachers who possess these traits.

Confidence in the "Self"

I am not sure how I could have possibly survived my first year of teaching - and especially that tough senior class - if I did not have confidence in my ability to teach and genuinely believe that my approach to teaching was based in genuine concern for my students' well-being. At-risk students will constantly push boundaries and persistently challenge classroom authority. They can make any instructor question the very foundations upon which he bases his teaching. That, after all, is what

they have been taught to do. That is how they get respect from their peers and how they wield power and control. It is what they know best. One cannot be rattled by the personal insults, back down from challenges to authority, or be hurt by criticism of one's knowledge. One must be resolute and assured without being arrogant. It is what is best for the students and for one's own nervous system.

Towards a Pedagogy

Throughout his book *To Think*, Frank Smith argues that all people are thinking constantly. At no time are we not comprehending, analyzing, synthesizing, or evaluating the world around us. Our individual storehouses of knowledge are built by this continuous thinking; it is natural and occurs largely without our being aware that it is happening, and we learn to apply each thinking skill effortlessly and fluently. In *The Book of Learning and Forgetting*, Smith hones his claim somewhat. Not only are we thinking all the time, he asserts, but we are learning all the time as well, and this learning occurs freely and effortlessly through our associations with those around us. Despite many people's

perceptions otherwise, at-risk students are no different, and a pedagogy that seeks to address their needs has to embrace this fundamental belief if it is to have a chance of being successful.

Where at-risk students tend to fall awry is in the application of their thinking skills. They are constantly analyzing new students on campus, evaluating their social contacts, and synthesizing what they are seeing and hearing with what they already know. They do this effortlessly. But if you ask them to apply these so called higher order thinking skills (i.e. analysis, synthesis, evaluation) to academic pursuits - poems, math equations, biological classifications - they will more than likely miss the mark because they do not understand how to apply this level of thinking to academic pursuits. Poems, math equations, and biological classifications are foreign territory, disparate bits of information that do not fit in with what they already know.

A pedagogy for at-risk students, then, needs to be structured so as to give students the confidence and support necessary to influence them to take the risk of learning and guide them into bridging the gap between

their thinking and its application to the academic. A program can begin to do this by examining, acknowledging, and accepting - no matter how unsavory - the academic and behavioral beliefs and values a student brings to school (Lee 9-10, Malinowitz 158). Next, students need to be instilled with the belief that what they are being asked to do academically and behaviorally by the school and the instructor is possible for them to achieve. The foundation for this belief can be laid through a reinterpretation of the meaning of error and failure. Instead of each being a sign of one's inability to learn and a reason to quit, at-risk students need to be taught that failure is sometimes - perhaps even oftentimes - a necessary step in learning and that failure is always an opportunity for growth ("Larry" 21 Jun 03, Horner 209). More often than not, at-risk students need to be encouraged, nudged, and sometimes even pushed into accepting this precept, and they should be visibly shown their growth when it does indeed occur.

Once a student starts to believe that academic and behavioral success is possible, a trust should begin to develop between the student and the teacher and, ideally,

within the student himself ("Larry" 21 Jun 03). This trust can be nurtured via a pedagogy that blends the *affective* - informally talking with students to learn who they are and where they are coming from - and the *academic* - a marriage of basic skills instruction and higher order thinking skills. Such a pedagogy must entice students into relationships with the subject matter by demonstrating subject relevance to its students' lives (Rose, *Lives*, 102, Ronald and Roskelly 621). In order for this relationship to grow, multiple opportunities for individual improvement and multiple avenues for assessment need to be available, and, again, each aspect needs to be visibly evident to the student (Reeves 189-190).

In its medley of the affective and the academic, a pedagogy for at-risk students symbolizes the Gertrude Stein quote that prefaces this chapter. Stein reportedly uttered the quote on her deathbed to Alice B. Toklas, who, of course, was seeking the answer to the meaning of life. Unfortunately for Toklas, Stein offered no easy solution, only another question. The case with teaching at-risk students is similar. The question, of course, is

the student. Each student is her own question, and the answer or answers to a student's particular needs will vary from student to student. It is the instructor's job to recognize those needs and the school's job to implement a program that somehow challenges the student's intellect while remaining mindful of their academic insecurities.

A Reading Program

It has been argued that literacy is a trope, a political term whose orthodox meaning is up for grabs (Lu 173). History certainly supports this view. Literacy has graduated from a definition as simple as a person who can sign his name to a person who could read excerpts from the bible. Today we have a myriad number of literacies, computer literacy perhaps being the best known specialized example. Literacy, then, is contextual, and it is only through its specific context that it is best understood (Rose, *Lives*, 237). Phoenix students' literacy, for example, is one of the street - hand signs, gang colors, bald pates, baggy clothing - of the drug culture - its coded language, safe places to smoke out, who's selling?, what's a fair price?, - of

avoiding academic failure or embarrassment - playing the class clown, cussing out a teacher, being too cool for school. It is a literacy of violence, greed, and dehumanization, and it pounds loud and clear through the thick beat of the attitudes they convey and the profane language they employ. If literacy is indeed our tool for handling the complexities in life, then these are the tools Phoenix students employ. This is the knowledge by which they live their lives. It is a literacy sustained by who they are - the gang member, the substance abuser, the academic failure - more so than the truth they know about each image (Brice Heath 290).

Many, perhaps most, educators maintain that reading improvement should be the prime objective of any low performing school (Carter 28, Reeves 191). Through the texts they read, a student is exposed to new worlds and ideas, is granted her first model of textual possibility, and is provided the basis, and perhaps even the initial influence, to learn to write (Smith, *Essays*, 84). If reading well is indeed the skill that opens the door to different ways of being in the world, how, then, can an at-risk student's literacy of violence, greed, and

dehumanization be untaught? I believe it can be "unlearned" the same way it was first learned: through stories. All forms of literacy begin through storytelling, and the only way to alter the negative literacy at-risk students tend to employ is to expose them to new stories (Ronald and Roskelly 625). Students need to see different worlds and feel as though these different worlds are viable and accessible ways of knowing and being in the world (Clifford 255). Stories allow that possibility to exist, and the best way for students to access these stories is to guide them by any means necessary into choosing to read them.

I have learned that teaching reading to at-risk students is largely about addressing student attitude and applying vast reserves of patience. By the time students reach Phoenix, the high school game is about over for many of them. As mentioned earlier, apathy is rampant and many have simply given up. The only thing that keeps a number of these kids in school are legal issues: they have a probation officer who demands their attendance, they are not yet 18 years of age, or their family welfare check relies upon some degree of student attendance. An

effort to learn to read seriously is typically not a thought that enters their young, frustrated minds.

During my tenure at Phoenix, students have demonstrated one of two overriding sentiments concerning reading: fear and hatred. The two attitudes are not mutually exclusive. Many Phoenix students fear reading because they fear being exposed as poor readers, embarrassed by their low skill level in front of their peers, and ridiculed. Those students who have come to hate to read do so because they have grown to hate their fear of reading. Many will often refuse to read when asked to do so for the first time in my class. It is this attitude, this fear, vehemence, and stubbornness, that I attempt to address first in every class.

As a member of the Inland Area Writing Project during the summer of 2001, I was asked to create a writing autobiography, which meant chronicling my development from a child struggling and experimenting with letters and words to an adult who wrote cogently and copiously. An alternative assignment to that essay was the creation of a reading autobiography. It is my reading autobiography that I share with each class on the

first or second day of the semester. I like to share it because it places me in my students' shoes. It recounts my struggle and embarrassment as a poor reader in the low English class from the first grade on up to high school. I relate the story of the time I lost my place reading a biblical passage over the school's intercom in the 7th grade and was ridiculed by my friends. I also recount the time I returned home from the navy and found myself lost in my friends' conversations because they were discussing ideas and stories they had read while in college, and I, having gained a different education, was left out of the conversation.

The point of sharing my autobiography, of course, is to expound a few lessons. First, I want them to understand that good readers are not born, they are created. Nobody can make anyone a good reader; good readers create themselves through practice. Second, we talk about how good readers create themselves by reading about those things that they feel compelled to read. For me it was a love of comic books and a desire to read the daily sports page. These things exposed me to new words and compelled me to practice reading without my being

aware that I was doing any learning at all. Third, we discuss the struggle to read, that it is not a natural act and that errors will occur. My stories are vivid, and I often catch my students nodding in agreement as I read about my struggles. We then discuss that making errors is normal, that I - a college graduate with a degree in English - make errors all the time, and how it is through the errors we make where we learn to improve our reading. This approach helps me to establish an environment free from student reprisals when the inevitable errors do indeed occur. Laughter, mockery, chatter, none of these things are allowed. Each is considered rude and disrespectful to the reader, and maintaining respect for the reader is always sacred.

My reading philosophy and program, then, is based upon my experience as a once poor reader. By sharing my reading autobiography, my students and I have something in common when it comes to struggling with reading, and I point out this common ground in our very first meeting and stress it often throughout the year. I have found that this helps to gain my students' trust and loosens their negative attitudes concerning reading.

Once this common ground has been established, I challenge my students' negative attitudes on reading by encouraging them to read to their interests. I have long believed that students who hate reading feel so because they do not read well, and they seldom read materials of interest. When students read something of interest, they are then practicing reading without realizing that they are doing so, and reading surreptitiously becomes fun. Therefore, it is imperative that students be allowed the leeway to choose their own material to read and even reread if they so choose, because it is an opportunity to empower them in a process where they have traditionally felt powerless. Moreover, it is only through reading to their interests that a student will opt to read freely on their own, and it is through this voluntary reading - not through having a student read aloud for a minute or two in class - where substantial improvement will occur (Malinowitz 158). In order to realize this ideal, students should be allowed time to silent read daily and be encouraged to read anything they can get their hands on at home.

Student reading, however, should not be limited solely to individual interest and whim. At-risk students should be challenged to expand their realm of interest by reading materials new to them, and all academic reading - anthologized short stories, core novels, historical texts etc. - should be done in class. This may seem to contradict the laissez-faire approach suggested above, but my reasoning for this more structured approach is simple enough: apart from the rare exception, most students will not read the material otherwise. At the very least, this approach guarantees me that the material is being read, which gives the text a chance to engage my students. Furthermore, it grants me the opportunity to help students when they struggle reading, to guide and stimulate their thinking, and to answer any questions they may have concerning the text so that they may understand it to the best of their ability.

The key to helping students better understand those texts with which they struggle is through a process Herb Kohl calls "sprache," or the time and space for meaningful conversation in the classroom (Kohl, *Minds*, 112). "Sprache" is that portion of the class where

Foucault's theory of discourse can be exercised to uncover textual possibilities and forge intertextual and interpersonal relationships. It is a space where student's can sharpen their critical thinking skills, subject relevance can be demonstrated, and new subject interests may be illuminated. Ideally, through the discourse possible during "sprache," at-risk students can be challenged to consider other possible ways of existing. Instead of following a life rife with violence, greed, and dehumanization, at-risk students might be influenced to reshape the contextual truths that govern their lives to include mutual respect, generosity, and tolerance. This is the power that conversation and text can begin to engender.

A Writing Program

In his book *A Researcher Learns to Write: Selected Articles and Monographs*, Donald Graves maintains that effective writing teachers are those who are writers themselves. They write with their students and wrestle with the writing process, showing students the process, warts and all (135). Effective composition instructors, then, need to process exactly what they are doing while

they are writing and make this process visible for their students, because most students are typically unaware of the complex processes that occur while they are writing (Lunsford 450, Lee 252). In constructing a writing pedagogy for at-risk students, I realized that I needed to practice Graves' advice and consider my own writing process, and I thought it best to do this by analyzing the creation of this document.

In order to write this thesis, I needed time to write, revise, reflect, and revise again. I needed material, specifically a subject, to write about. I drew from my experience, a specific interest, and from a diverse amount of material that I had read previously. I needed to set a schedule that allowed me the time to write daily, and I had to construct a context that encouraged me to write and allowed me the time to think about what I had written. I spent a great deal of time reflecting upon what I had written, and I revised accordingly based upon comments from outside criticism. I had my thesis committee, friends, and colleagues read excerpts and, in some cases, whole chapters of my work in progress in order for me to test what I had written and

improve upon it. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, I had to want to write this, which is deeper than simply having a subject of interest. I have many interests, but I do not wish to write in depth about them all. With this project, I had to want to pursue my interest, challenge my assumptions, analyze my experience, and synthesize it all into one large paper.

At-risk students rarely - if ever - apply a fraction of this amount of thought and diligence to an assignment, and, regrettably, they are not granted enough opportunities to write on those interests they would be inclined to write about. Let me use a specific teaching experience to illuminate my point. Each January the Corona-Norco Unified School District asks its teachers to give a practice writing exam to its freshmen and sophomores. The rationale is simple enough: it is a good tool to determine the exact needs of the students before they have to take the statewide exit exam in the following months. The sophomore prompt for the January 2003 practice discussed how King Philip's Spanish Armada was defeated by the British (see Appendix B). The whole experience was just short of a nightmare for me. Several

students continually challenged the integrity of the testing environment by being disruptive and joking around, others put their heads down on the desk to sleep or chose to simply stare off into space. When the dust had settled, only a few of my students gave a token effort; the bulk of the "essays" turned in were blank sheets.

What led to my students' misbehavior and reluctance to take the test? A number of factors come to mind:

- (1) A lack of confidence. Some students decided to sidestep failure by not even attempting the task and risking failure, while others acted out and avoided failure by getting sent out of the testing room. Each act was a means of preserving dignity by not risking the failure they assumed they would receive.
- (2) The prompt was a poor one. The kids quickly labeled it "boring," which means that they were unable to make any meaningful connection with it. For my students - and I suspect for many others - King Philip's loss is ancient history, and nobody cares.
- (3) Attitude. A number of my students hate to write and read and that excuse is good enough for them to not

put any effort forth on a mere practice test. "I'll do a good job on the real test" is usually their reply.

- (4) A lack of knowledge in using a text to support an argument. My students have difficulty reading texts closely, picking out relevant textual evidence, and framing an argument from a particular perspective. They tend to know the difference between an argument and a fact, but they are unable to generate arguments in writing and apply appropriate facts as support.

The explanation for my students' "failure" on the test is varied and complex and is actually more a series of problems - a struggle with attitude, self-esteem, and limited skills - each requiring a different degree of attention and form of instruction. As with teaching at-risk students to read, student attitude is the first thing that needs to be addressed when teaching them to write. I have to influence my students to be open to the possibilities latent within writing rather than their viewing writing as some tortuous process schools inflict upon students as a form of punishment. I do not want my

students to immediately think of Bart Simpson scrawling "I will not..." hundreds of times on a chalkboard every time I propose a writing assignment.

Instead, I want my students to see writing as something dangerous. I want them to realize that writing defines things and influences people, because it is the tool that conveys meaning to others and affects people's judgments and that this is a power not to be overlooked or taken lightly (Brice Heath 289). I want my students to understand that when we write, we are thrusting ourselves into a breach of possibilities, we are creators and destroyers, we are risk takers. When we master this risk and come to write well, we will command respect and to command respect is power, real power, and that is something to which my students will likely be receptive.

In order to get at-risk students to effectively wield the power of writing, they need to develop their thinking skills, and this development can take place in the same manner students are helped to make meaning from the texts they read: through discourse. Just as Herb Kohl's "sprache" and Foucault's theory of discourse grants students the space and means to assist them in

creating intertextual and interpersonal relationships with the texts they read, the same practice can serve to help students to understand the thinking processes that exist behind the texts they write (O'Keefe 8-9). The time and space to confer in a group discussion on writing or in a one-on-one conference can serve as the vehicle for students to develop their critical thinking skills and enable them to tap into the complex processes behind the evolution of their own thinking and how that thinking becomes interpreted in their own writing (Elbow 49-50).

But recognizing the processes that work behind one's thinking is only the beginning. In order for at-risk students to become better writers and, ergo, better thinkers and learners, they need to have opportunities to write about what they have read, what they have heard, and what they have seen, and this processing needs to occur in each of their classes. Opportunities to write informatively, to summarize and to explain, are vital not only in their attempt at improving upon a student's writing but also in improving upon retention of what has been taught (Reeves 190; Rose, *Lives*, 143; National Commission on Writing 33). Students need to be placed in

situations where they have to plan and reflect instead of merely react to situations or regurgitate disparate bits of information, and they need to be faced with conflicting and foreign ideas and challenged to work them out in their writing (Reeves 188). In short, writing needs to be the chief tool in an at-risk student's learning.

Student learning, however, should not be limited to the academic. If we are indeed our own projects - or our own questions as Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests - then students need opportunities to reflect upon themselves as maturing young adults and to process why they act as they do (Malinowitz 154, Lee 247, 248). Writing should be the central tool students use for this self processing and can serve as the impetus for positive change in the choices they make and in their own self perceptions (Elbow 15, 46-47, Lu 173). And just as "sprache" and discourse can be employed in creating an understanding of the processes behind textual interpretation and composition, the same can be used to nurture student self-identity and growth. The need to interact, discuss, and question what students have

written about themselves, their experiences, and their behavioral choices with an adult is vital to their maturation as individuals, as critical thinkers, and as active agents in the world around them (Ronald and Roskelly 619, Lee 249). Moreover, this interaction allows for opportunities to mentor and provides an avenue for the at-risk student to connect with an adult in a meaningful, positive way.

But what of grammar? I have yet to even mention the word; however, when most people think of writing instruction, countless grammar drills and sentence diagramming exercises invariably come to mind. What needs to be considered is whether or not these drills ever served to make anyone a better writer, and I am certain that there are those who would steadfastly state "yes," that grammar drills and diagramming exercises unequivocally helped them to become better at writing. However, I doubt that anyone would admit that such drills turned him on to writing, and that is the key question concerning at-risk students in regards to writing. Sure, rote mechanics clarifies what we are trying to communicate, which does indeed serve to make us better

writers and better communicators, but grammar does nothing more than that. All too often, grammar gets confused with the writing process itself instead of the set of subskills that it in fact is (Horner 209).

Perhaps a specific example is needed to illustrate my point concerning grammar. While I was in college - as both an undergraduate and a graduate - I had only one class that focused on grammar. How, then, could grammar have been taught satisfactorily to a future English teacher through just one class? The secret is that every college course I ever took taught me something concerning grammar; it was simply taught within the context of my own writing. This made the grammar lesson unique to me, because it gave me a specific point of reference that would help me to avoid the same mistake in the future. Errors and gaffs - the inadvertent switching of homonyms, for example - are natural when writing, and we will make these mistakes as writers time and time again (Rose, *Lives*, 54). What is important is knowing how to spot these common mistakes and edit them out; that is what good writers do. They know their resources or know someone who is a good resource herself. Conferences,

again, are the key. Teachers and students need to work with a specific piece of language, discuss it, and arrive at an understanding about the error together. The more students write and the more students and teachers confer on writing, the less likely common errors in grammar will be made, and the better a student's writing is likely to be. It is the struggle with the error and the collaborative discussion that follows which counts the most.

Conclusion

These, then, are the pieces to consider when educating at-risk students to read and write. It starts with a well-defined structure that grants instructors the window of opportunity to meet a student's emotional and academic needs and requires a qualified instructor who has a desire to work with at-risk youth in a mentoring-like manner. Such a program needs to establish high academic and behavioral expectations for all its students, yet it must recognize failure as an opportunity for growth and not as a reason to give up on a student. Such a program must meet the student where they come from behaviorally and academically and form meaningful

relationships with each student through his interests while challenging him to see the world differently through the texts that he reads and writes. Such a program must employ discussion to link the text, the teacher, and the student together and use writing as a student's chief learning tool across the curriculum. The size and shape of each individual piece to the puzzle will change as the question - the needs of the student - changes, but this is merely a fact of the art of educating. It is a process that is fluid and alive and can only be worked out in the classroom each day, one student at a time.

CHAPTER FOUR

YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION?

[R]eal education must be limited to those who insist on seeking it, the rest is mere sheep-herding.

Ezra Pound

The ABC of Reading

On April 25, 2003, the College Board released a report by the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges entitled *The Neglected "R": The Need for a Writing Revolution*. In the report, the commission focused on the need for improvement in four areas: (1) Time allowed for students to write in school and at home; (2) The need for fair and accurate assessments and measuring results (3); The integration of technology into the teaching and learning of writing; (4) Improved teacher support in the teaching of writing and in the time needed to provide students with quick and accurate feedback on their writing (20). Of course, these are all legitimate concerns and the College Board should be commended for bringing them to the forefront. Writing

has long been the neglected stepchild among the three Rs, and it is time it received its due attention. However, the report leaves many concerns. For example, the committee explicitly states that they have no clout to enact these changes, only the "bully pulpit" and its association with Stanford Achievement Tests (SAT), neither of which suggests that any meaningful changes will ever occur.

The report's call for a "fair and accurate assessment" is also troubling, for it risks reducing the highly complex thought processes that go into writing into a simple numerical value allocated by some foreign party (Rose, *Narrowing*, 297-298). It risks reifying the five paragraph essay response to a prompt as the testing standard and makes highly structured writing programs attractive options in teaching students how to pass the test. Moreover, the movement completely discounts the importance of context - the physical environment in which one writes and the resources good writers employ when writing especially effective texts - and suggests that teachers are qualified to judge their own student's writing for themselves.

Another disturbing aspect of the report is that only three of the thirteen members of the committee who wrote the report were everyday classroom teachers. The bulk of the report's authors were either university presidents, chancellors, professors, or public school superintendents. In short, the report was written by people far from education's front lines and high atop the ivory tower of academia. Historically, revolutions are the culmination of grassroots movements whose goal is to overthrow the forces of oppression that plague them. The College Board's report - much like the standards-based movement discussed earlier - smacks of the same top-down patriarchal mentality revolutions are fought to topple. I do not mean to suggest that the report itself is oppressive, for it is not. However, by not including the common classroom teacher, The National Commission on Writing risks coming across as a didactic force whose mission it is to educate and guide the underqualified educators who presently work in classrooms across the United States, and a certain degree of resentment is likely to rear its head because of it. Until the common classroom teacher is respected for the experience she may

lend to projects such as this and given a representative voice in their process and outcome, the College Board's "revolution" and other "revolutions" of its ilk will serve as little more than exercises in rhetoric.

The real "revolution," of course, occurs in the classroom on a daily basis. It is waged by students and teachers and the subjects they are engaged in, and this interaction is negotiated each day in each classroom by those in attendance. The reality is that there is no easy prescription to correct the academic deficiencies of any student - at-risk or otherwise. Therefore, I have provided no concrete solutions to suggest that there may be easy remedies to improving a student's ability to read and write. Improvement and remediation in each area does not rely upon the purchasing of expensive classroom resources, the implementation of state mandated standards, or hollow political manifestos stumping for change. Nor does it rely upon better written and visually appealing worksheets or classroom activities designed to make learning fun. Each solution is an educational myth that overlooks the real and extremely

difficult work both teachers and students put into educating.

There are, however, some guidelines when teaching at-risk student to read and write that can certainly be helpful in meeting their needs and making the "revolution" a reality:

- At-risk students need to be placed in a structured environment that removes disruptions, minimizes negative encounters in the classroom, allows students to take risks without embarrassment or repercussions, has consequences for negative behaviors that are clearly defined and fairly enforced, and makes student rewards obvious and desirable. The key is to not only create an environment that nurtures positive attitude but also one that develops student desire to pursue learning as its own reward.
- A capable instructor who has a strong desire to work with at-risk students and serve in a mentor-like capacity is a must. Genuine sincerity - not pity which tends to serve as an enabling element - can go a long way in turning around an at-risk student.

- Instructors should write with and share what they have written with their students. Students should be aware that their teacher is learning about writing with them and that each is exploring the world of writing together.
- Instructors should show students the writing process warts and all by examining their own thinking processes as they write and sharing their own struggles and successes with writing.
- Schools should provide opportunities to write across the curriculum. The more opportunities students get to write informatively, the better their overall writing will become.
- Teachers should establish subject relevance. At-risk students need to know why they are doing what they are doing and how it relates to their lives. They need the dots connected explicitly. The more relevant and obvious the relationship, the more effort they will put into the lesson.
- Schools should create a reading program that allows students to read to their interests yet challenges them to read outside of their interests. The more a student

through the complexities of their lives, and this knowledge cannot be changed. Instead of pitying them, burying them, and getting frustrated or angry with them, we might consider what is salvageable from their life experiences, discuss it, deal with it, write about it, and build upon those discussions and writings. In turn, ideally, this will enhance their literacy, their power to define and shape their past, and empower them to create and shape what has yet to transpire.

But what of the tests students have to take in order to receive a high school diploma? Doesn't my student-centered, nurturing approach to educating the at-risk population ultimately undermine them of an opportunity to fully prepare themselves to pass the test? If the students placed at Phoenix are at all representative of students placed at school sites with similar missions, then the answer is unequivocally "no." In order to pass any test, one has to respect the test and believe that they can be successful taking it, and Phoenix students tend not to hold such beliefs. Most students placed at Phoenix arrive with failing grades in most or all of their classes and have not been successful on a

standardized test in quite some time. In many cases, students placed at Phoenix were not even achieving at the minimum standards to stay in school at all, let alone pass a standardized test, and, odds are, their next step was to drop out of school or get locked up in juvenile hall. Perhaps even both.

However, if I can somehow form a relationship based upon mutual respect, develop some form of trust, and tap into one of their interests, then I have a chance, a remote possibility, of reaching them and teaching them something that might turn them around and be the spark that ignites further learning. No standard can create this event, and no test can quantify it. These moments occur when they occur because a student decides - for whatever reason - that it is time for a change, and they are ready to learn something new. It is impossible to define what sparks these changes, but they occur all the same and each marks the real revolution that is possible within every teaching interaction.

My theory, admittedly, is a rather slippery-slope endeavor and guarantees no educational dividends. This, I believe, begs the question: Is a place like Phoenix

really worth the effort and financial support? When one looks at Phoenix's bottom line, the answer is "no." Phoenix never pays for itself outright, and given the high transient and absenteeism rates the school traditionally has, it is reasonable to believe that Phoenix will never cover its own expenses. Moreover, we are talking about a small percentage of students. At any given time, Phoenix serves slightly more than 1% of the total high school student population in the Corona-Norco Unified School District. It is not at all out of the question to suggest that these students simply be allowed to drop out, if that is indeed their desire, and be allowed to seek an education through other channels if they should one day decide to do so.

Examining the issue strictly from a fiscal point of view and through student malcontent, however, dismisses the philosophical undergirdings upon which public education is based. If public schools are indeed designed to serve all of society's children, then schools like Phoenix need to exist and districts such as Corona-Norco need to find a way to finance them. Closing the achievement gap does not mean pushing underachieving

students out of the system simply because they have failed to conform. When the education establishment wonders whether it is "worth the effort" to educate some of its students and picks and chooses whom it will work with and whom it will not, it is overstepping its bounds. No person is prescient enough to ever know what a student may one day give back. Sometimes what we perceive to be one of Ezra Pound's "mere sheep" is really something else entirely, and former Phoenix students have demonstrated this misperception to me time and time again.

Former Phoenix students have ended up anywhere. As of this writing, one former student was arrested for breaking and entering into a Napa parts store to steal receipts because she needed a speed fix. Another former student came back to campus and apologized to me. She felt bad for her immature behavior in high school and informed me that she was going to attend Riverside Community College to become an English teacher. Another former student is locked up for killing a man in a gang-related dispute. One young man pulled himself out of the gang life and is currently in the marines. Yet another former student works as a cashier at K-Mart. One young

lady came back and thanked me for talking her out of getting pregnant. Several others, I have learned, have become parents too young. One former student seems to have done the impossible. She went to California State University at San Bernardino for two years and currently attends college at the University of California at Riverside on a full scholarship. Many former students have graduated from the district's adult education program or from the district's other alternative education school, Buena Vista. Some have simply dropped out. Most of my former students have slipped off into the world somewhere, and they will likely forever remain mysteries to me. Yet, each one is a human being, each one is a unique story, each one is a possibility still, and that is why investing our time and energy and finances in them is vital. They are not "somebody else's children;" they are our children, and we would be remiss in not providing them a program that affords them every opportunity designed to assist them in their quest to become.

APPENDIX A
SOPHOMORE WRITING PROMPT

Response to Expository Text Writing Task Grade 10

First read the following article on the Spanish Armada. You may take notes and mark the text as you read. Then you will write an essay about the author's tone regarding King Phillip and the Spanish Armada and the author's purpose for writing the article.

The Spanish Armada: Philip's Great Plan to Conquer England

In 1587, King Philip of Spain sat in his grand palace of the Escorial planning what he called "God's great design." The Escorial Palace was a splendid home, but the room in which Philip worked was small and bare. It held one long table piled high with papers from his servants who sent him news and advice from all parts of Europe and from the New World of the Americas. He tried to read them all, working long hours and writing notes in the margins until his eyes were red and his fingers stiff. Sometimes he wrote "Nonsense," but mostly the news helped his plans to make Spain the supreme naval power in the world.

On March 23, a messenger galloped up to the Escorial Palace with letters from Philip's informers, which told him that Mary, Queen of Scots, had been executed in England on February 18. Her Protestant cousin, Elizabeth I, Queen of England, had ordered Mary's death in an attempt to save her own life and regain her throne. Mary's death meant that Philip had to change his plans. Mary had been a Catholic and the next heir to the English throne. Philip had planned to use Mary in order to gain power over England, known for its naval strength throughout Europe. Philip decided that he had to conquer England in order to make Spain's the world's greatest navy. At once he started to dictate letters to his admirals, his captains, his ambassadors, and other followers. His secretaries had to hurry; soon, messengers were galloping in all directions.

The plan was clear. A large Spanish fleet had to be gathered at Lisbon, the capital of Portugal. Portugal was then ruled by Spain; Lisbon was a splendid harbor on the Atlantic coast. Fighting ships were needed to attack the English navy and transport ships to carry an army commanded by Alexander of Parma. Alexander was the Duke who ruled the Netherlands (which at that time belonged to Spain). Because Alexander had been fighting Protestant rebels in the Netherlands, he was happy to help Philip fight the new Protestant ruler in England. Dunkirk is only 35 miles across the English Channel from England, giving Alexander a great advantage. Philip ordered Alexander to collect as many flat-bottomed barges as possible for transporting the army. The Spanish fighting ships would protect the barges.

Philip's chief admiral was a tough old sea dog, Don Alvaro de Bazan, Marquis of Santa Cruz. He had fought in many sea battles and was ready to take on the whole English navy. He started planning at once. He wanted 150 galleons and other big ships to be the main battleships. He would use four galleys and six galleasses (both types of ships to carry soldiers) to transport 64,000 soldiers. Besides these, he asked for as many merchant ships as possible to carry food and other stores and more than 3000 light, fast ships for scouting, picketing and taking messages. If he had got all these it would have been the biggest force anyone had ever seen in Europe. He also asked for weapons for the fight: guns, arquebuses, corselets, and pikes for the soldiers. He also needed enough food for the men for eight months: salt fish, biscuits, rice and oil and other staples. The war was quickly beginning to mount in costs. Although Philip would use silver from Mexico and Peru, he was always in debt and would not be able to meet all of Santa Cruz's needs. Unfortunately, these monetary problems would seal Spain's fate in their historic naval battle with England.

Monetary problems were not the only setback Spain endured when her famous Armada fought England's navy. The English summer of 1588 brought storms and unsettled winds. Despite fourteen months of preparation, Spain's new Captain General, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, asked Philip to delay the long-awaited battle until the weather improved. King Philip was more anxious than ever to defeat England and said no. First a violent storm scattered the entire fleet, making them lose another month as they regrouped their forces in the continuing tempest. Compounding Spain's problems with weather, the food and water on most ships went bad, causing soldiers to become sick with scurvy. The duke was so concerned for his men that he was emboldened to ask the king to put off the great plan for another year. Philip's reply was quick and definite: "No!" On July 22, 1588, the great Armada finally sailed for England.

Although English history books have been full for years of descriptions about the honor and fervor of their soldiers, even English historians now concede that weather and the Spaniard's poorly stocked supplies were much more reasons for Spain's defeat. Storms tossed ships back to the mainland – France and the Netherlands specifically, while the English followed the battered Spanish navy north around Scotland and west past Ireland before the remaining ships not sunk at sea made their way back to Spain. When the duke docked in Santander, Spain, he was so sick that he had to be carried from his ship, happy for saving forty-four of the sixty-eight ships that had left Spain in search of victory, but disgraced by the defeat he had handed his country and his king. Finally, Philip agreed to one of the duke's requests: the king allowed him to give up his command and return home in disgrace.

Philip never imagined that his great plan would result in the English army being dubbed the greatest naval power of its time for defeating the king's great navy. Ironically, it was his own pride that had caused the demise of his Armada – not heeding the requests of his naval leaders for more money and more time.

(Information for this article came from *The Spanish Armada*, Marjorie Reeves, Longman Group, Harlow, England)

Response to Expository Text Writing Task

In this article about the King of Spain and his Armada, the author describes King Philip's great plan to defeat the English navy. She creates a very strong tone or attitude about Philip's actions – a tone that changes over the course of the article. What is the author's purpose in writing this article? What details does she use to support her purpose?

Write an essay in which you discuss the author's purpose for writing this essay on Philip and the Spanish Armada. Discuss the tone, details, and examples that she uses to support the purpose of her essay.

Checklist for your Writing

The following checklist will help you do your best work. Make sure you:

- **Read the article and the description of the writing task carefully.**
- **Use Specific details and examples from the read selections to demonstrate your understanding of the selection's main ideas and the author's purpose.**
- **Organize your writing with a strong introduction, body, and conclusion.**
- **Choose specific words that are appropriate for your audience and purpose.**
- **Vary your sentences to make your writing interesting to read.**
- **Use appropriate tone and voice.**
- **Check for mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence formation.**

APPENDIX B

PHOENIX HOUSE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

PHOENIX HIGH SCHOOL SCHOOL-WIDE HOUSE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Purpose: To provide a safe, reduced stress learning environment which respects the rights of teachers to teach and students to learn, and which utilizes appropriate, effective intervention techniques to encourage and support at-risk student success.

Vision Statement: It is our vision that Phoenix High School serve as a short term intervention program for students who are unwilling or unable to meet the academic or behavioral standards of the Corona-Norco Unified School District comprehensive and alternative high schools. A disciplines, supportive, positive school climate in which teachers can teach and learners can learn is maintained through the application of a clearly structured and consistently applied team-based House Learner Management System (HMLS) built on mutual respect, safety, high expectations, academic and behavioral intervention support and no excuses. In combination with a curriculum which focuses on reading, writing, and mathematics across the disciplines, our learning management system empowers students to acquire and enhance the basic attitudes, values, behavior habits, and academic skills to perform successfully upon their return to the comprehensive or alternative high schools. As with the legendary bird of its namesake, Phoenix students will rise from the ashes of their failure to fly successfully once more.

Supportive Discipline Intervention Phases:

I. CONNECTIONS AND SUPPORT:

A. House Support Team: The “House” system is based on the recommendations of *Aiming High*, Donald Reeves study of 90/90/90 schools *Accountability in Action: A Blueprint for Learning Organizations*, and The Heritage Foundations’ *No Excuses*. Additionally, the “House” concept relies upon the principle of *en loco parentis* which allows for students to interact with adults in constructive dialogue and benefit from daily parental types of mentor support and intervention often lacking in the lives of at-risk students. Again, the use of this principle is supported in the literature regarding programs successful in working with at-risk students.

1. Teams of teachers and students organized to support school success.
2. Daily 1st period class meeting time, plus the last half hour the last Thursday of each month to collect progress reports.
3. EXCEL based support curriculum for five elective credits.
4. Monthly student classroom progress report processing on the last Thursday of the month.
5. Assemblies and guest speakers.

6. Outstanding performances recognized weekly by House with monthly school-wide fun Friday afternoon activities available at the discretion of each House team.
7. Regularly informing parents of student intervention efforts.
8. House Intervention Team (HIT) conferences to develop behavioral improvement contracts and provide mentor oversight and support.
9. Student Study Team (SST) conferences to directly involve parents in a second, more restricted contract with mentor support.

B. Orientation: During the 1st week of each semester each House conducts a comprehensive orientation to familiarize all students of our school programs with a special emphasis on the school-wide learning management system, including the development of a behavioral and learning contract formed between the student, parent, a House mentor, and an administrator. Before being scheduled to classes students entering Phoenix after this initial House orientation are required to participate along with their parents in a weekly orientation conducted by counseling and administration.

C. Learner Pledge Agreement: By virtue of coming to school, all students are expected to be prepared, cooperative, respectful, actively participating learners in all classes and throughout the campus. Anytime, anywhere on campus, including the bus to and from school, a student who is unable or unwilling to keep his or her contracted agreement signed during orientation and reinforced by the "Learner Pledge" posters throughout the campus, will be issued a Timeout (T.O), a referral, or a teacher suspension to Alternative Classroom Placement (ACP) or to administration as deemed appropriate.

D. Timeout passes: In keeping with educational literature regarding successful programs for at-risk students, sound parenting principles, and based on previous experience in our school, the T.O. pass system is designed to provide the staff with a tension reducing intervention technique which allows the student to exit (or not even enter) class before negatively disrupting teaching and learning. The T.O. provides the opportunity for written and oral reflection, taking of responsibility, planning for future success, and quick successful return to regularly scheduled classes. This system involves the student with caring adults through the essay review process in ACP or with an administrator/counselor and the student's House team. It provides intervention if student behavioral or academic success are not being obtained on a high level throughout the campus, including on the bus to and from school.

1. To maintain the integrity, and so as not to overload our ACP program, T.O. passes are not issued upon student request.

- Students tardy to class are to be admitted and remain in class, not sent to ACP
 - Teacher writes a T.O., briefly reminds the student of punctuality expectations, and puts the T.O. in the box of the student's Team Leader at the end of the day
 - Team mentor intervenes with student – a homework essay is assigned.
 - A second tardy T.O. following the initial mentor intervention in any calendar week results in a team referral requesting an all day ACP assignment beginning 2nd period of the day following the 2nd T.O.
 - Students in the wrong class after the tardy bell are to be issued a referral by security or administration and escorted to ACP
 - In the event of the ACP coordinator's absence, new assignments to ACP are to be restricted to behavioral referrals and teacher suspensions only – no T.O.'s please
- 2. A 2nd T.O. in any day results in student assignment to ACP the remainder of the day and all of the next day of attendance
- 3. A 3rd T.O. within a week results in a referral from House for habitual disruption.
- 4. This tool is used at staff discretion to minimize the disruption of the teaching/learning process and to alert team mentors to assist students in taking responsibility for improving behavior and participation
- 5. Please complete all sections including a concise reason for issuing a T.O.
- 6. Unless you feel necessary, send the student to ACP with a security escort. A review of the next day's Daily Administrative Intervention Report (DAIR) allows for appropriate follow-up
- 7. ACP supplies student with appropriate colored problem solving activity form
- 8. ACP records data from T.O. form onto DAIR
- 9. Student completes problem solving activity and writes an essay of clarification, responsibility, and plans for improvement
- 10. Student remains in ACP during referred class period until essay has met rubric standards, at which time student is sent to next class, sent to confer with an administrator, or sent to the counselor
- 11. ACP and the administrator forward all T.O., referral, and teacher suspension forms with attached essays to the appropriate House Leader at the end of each day for prompt mentor intervention follow-up. Essays and/or behavior patterns of concern are to be forwarded by the mentor to the counselor or an administrator

12. ACP provides a copy of the DAIR to 1.) Attendance clerk 2.) Each administrator 3.) Counselor 4.) House activities coordinator 5.) Master forms filed and maintained by attendance clerk
13. Teacher reviews House copy of DAIR to ensure proper processing of all student referred the previous day
14. House team reviews essays, mentors students, and makes appropriate entry in the student's behavioral history form and contacts parent if deemed necessary
15. House files forms in student success portfolio or designated House record system
16. Please check off appropriate boxes on the bottom of the T.O. form and the behavioral history to indicate each and every intervention taken

E. Success Recognition Activities: Behavior reinforcement principles recognizes the importance of regularly rewarding successful efforts to achieve. Students who meet the standards for successful petitioning to another school body receives special recognition through the lunch time activities program.

1. Music of students' choice broadcast via the intercom during lunch.
2. Eventual clubs such as chess or intramural sports.
3. Fun Friday participation standards:
 - 90%+ attendance for the entire month
 - No suspensions on or off campus
 - Complete progress report submitted to House on last Thursday of month
 - Passing 6 of 7 classes

F. Substitute Support: Established procedures are in place to provide daily orientation and support to substitute teachers so that they may continue normal daily instruction and support our school-wide learning management system. During class, the substitute's on campus team members, neighboring classroom teachers, as well as security and administration regularly visit classrooms to ensure appropriate attendance and cooperation of all assigned students.

G. House Team Support Communities: The counselor, an administrator, and activities coordinator develop a series of global issue activities, including guest speakers, for bi-weekly presentation to each House thus allowing the team teachers time for collaborative planning and conducting House administrative business.

II. Parent Contact:

- A. **Positive Phone Calls:** As time and the availability of limited phone lines allow, all staff members are encouraged to call parents/guardians or send a blue "AT-A-Boy" card regarding acts of positive behavior, respectful citizenship, good attendance, and improved or outstanding academic classroom performance. It is the intention of our system to reduce stress by having classroom teachers responsible for initiating only positive contact with parents regarding classroom performance. To further reduce stress, all calls of concern for excessive T.O.s are to be made by the House team acting as partner advocates with the parents for student improvement.
- B. **Referrals and Teacher Class Suspensions:** In the event of serious violations of our norms, classroom, school, or district rules, and/or state education codes or laws for which a staff member deems it necessary to require administrative intervention, these standard tools are to be used. Records for this level and all subsequent levels of involvement are placed in the student's official behavioral history Cum Folder as well as in the student's House behavior record portfolio.
1. Call security to escort the student to ACP unless the student is out of control or a danger to the safety of himself or others which requires direct escort to admin 2.
 2. A thorough completion of the referral or teacher suspension form is necessary, including a written statement of previous interventions.
 3. ACP follows procedure for normal T.O. then:
 - Call attendance clerk to alert administrator of need for intervention.
 - Require essay and keep student until sent to or released by administrator.
 - Administration contacts student's parent or guardian if referral is issued.
 - The attendance clerk and ACP confer daily to ensure that all referred students are reported on the DAIR.
- C. **Administrative Suspension Notification:** Parents are called to inform them of the behavior offenses resulting in, and the duration of, an administrator all day ACP or at home suspension.
- D. **House Intervention Team (HIT) Conferences:** This process is designed to provide the opportunity for more structured intervention when deemed necessary by the student's team. A student-centered conference based on specific data from the student and his teachers as well as student behavior portfolio records, is held with at least one team member, the House Activities Coordinator, and/or administrator or counselor. This meeting results in the development of a Student Success Contract which will be maintained for at least a three week period under the supervision and guidance of a student selected team mentor.

1. House Leader:
 - completes a "HIT/SST Request Form" and submits it to the House Activities Coordinator.
 - notifies parent/guardian and probation officer, if applicable, of HIT meeting to be held with student – parent attendance not necessary – parent required to review and sign weekly contract.
 - provides activities coordinator with student portfolio and behavior records.
 - assigns one or more team members to escort up to 2 students to admin 2 by 8:50 and assist in the conference.
2. Activities Coordinator:
 - sets a date for the 1st period HIT conference and alerts attendance intervention clerk to coordinate with possible SART/SARB interventions.
 - requests student schedule, transcript, and attendance records.
 - requests "Standards for Success" evaluations from the student and teachers
 - completes "Standards for Success" histogram.
 - prepares initial Student Success Contract
 - prepares copies and organizes conference materials for efficient processing
 - along with one or more team members, conducts the conference
 - provides students' teachers, assistant principal, and counselor a copy of the histogram and the contract.
 - provides mentor with 6 blank contract forms in team color.
 - maintains master copies of original evaluations, histograms and contract forms.
 - coordinates with mentor contract performance review processing.
 - coordinates with counselor the records processing of HITs and SSTs.
3. Student chosen House team mentor:
 - supervises and supports student daily contract completion
 - collects parent signed contracts weekly each Monday, issues new form, and forwards signed contract to House Activities Coordinator for review by the counselor, administration, and placement in student's HIT/SST file.
 - informs teammates of student contract performance.
 - requests immediate team, administrator, or counselor intervention if needed.

III. **Student Study Team (SST) Parent Meeting:** This process is designed to provide the opportunity for more focused intervention and support when deemed necessary by the student's team, the counselor, administration, or as a natural consequence of a HIT intervention which has been unsuccessful in assisting the student to improve behavior and/or academic success. A student-centered conference based upon specific data from the student, his teachers, and student success portfolio records, as well as parent input, is held with at least one team member, the counselor, an administrator, the student, and a parent or guardian. This meeting results in the development of a more restrictive Student Success Contract which will be maintained for at least a three week period under the supervision and guidance of a student selected team mentor and the parent or guardian. With administration authorization, in the event the parent or guardian is unavailable or unable to attend in a timely fashion, the counselor may act En Loco Parentis, thus allowing the implementation of the SST intervention process to continue without unnecessary delay.

1. House Leader
 - completes a "HIT/SST Request Form" and submits it to the counselor.
 - provides counselor with student portfolio and behavior records.
 - assigns one or more team members to assist in the conference.
2. The counselor:
 - coordinates with the parent/guardian, administration, probation officer, and attendance intervention clerk, for SART/SARB purposes, to set a date for the SST meeting during 1st period.
 - requests student schedule, transcript and attendance records.
 - distributes "Standards for Success" evaluations to the student and teachers to obtain updated information.
 - completes "Standards for Success Histogram."
 - obtains original processing forms for any previous HITs.
 - prepares initial Student Success Contract.
 - prepares copies and organizes conference materials for efficient processing.
 - along with one or more team members, conducts the conference.
 - provides mentor with 6 blank contract forms in team color.
 - provides student teachers, assistant principal, and activities coordinator a copy of the new histogram and contract.

- maintains master copies of original evaluations, histograms and contract forms.
 - coordinates with mentor contract performance review processing.
 - maintains master copies of original evaluations, histograms and contract forms.
 - coordinates with counselor and records processing of HITs and SSTs.
3. Student chosen mentor:
- supervises and supports student daily contract completion.
 - collects parent signed contracts weekly each Monday, issues new form, and forwards signed contract to House Activities Coordinator for review by the counselor and administration, then placement in student's HIT/SST file.
 - informs teammates of student contract performance.
 - requests immediate team, administrator, or counselor intervention if needed.

IV. **Recommended Suspension:** Although it is under the purview of the administration to decide on and issue full-day student suspensions, and even though a focus of our House Learning Management System is to assist students in improving their failed behavior and/or academic choices through one-on-one mentoring so as to minimally disrupt the student's daily class participation, there are circumstances under which it is prudent to remove the student from daily campus activities. Options for this removal include placement in our ACP program, on campus community service, or at home suspension. A poll of the students and staff has been used to establish the standards and appropriate suspension site for twelve behavior offenses which warrant automatic suspension. All of these offenses coincidentally are supported by school district and/or state educational codes.

1. ACP placement or on campus community service for part or all of one or more full days:
 - theft, robbery, extortion, knowingly receiving gains from, and/or failing to report knowledge of these acts.
 - purposeful damage to school or private property, including tagging
 - physical harassment, threats, intimidation, racial slurs, inciting the disruption of normal school procedures.
 - truancy, including ditching class or leaving campus without appropriate permission.
2. At home suspension or administrator assigned "cool down" time for the remainder of the day, one or more full days:

- fighting, inciting violence
- weapons possession or sale – including imitations
- under the influence of, possession of, sale or intent to sell controlled substances (i.e. drugs, alcohol, or tobacco products) and related paraphernalia.
- sexual harassment, engaging in sexual activities on campus or on the bus
- obscene acts, habitual profanity or vulgar language
 - House mentor writes a referral upon 3rd obscenity T.O. in any week.
- habitual disruption – including classes and teacher efforts to discipline.
 - House mentor writes referral upon 3rd disruption T.O. in any week.
- disrespect or defiance of school personnel
- threatening, intimidating, or committing violence toward staff.
- any assignment to ACP or referral to administration while under SST assigned contract.
- students referred to administration by ACP coordinator.

* A teacher class suspension issued by ACP will require the student be under the supervision of an administrator for the periods designated by the ACP coordinator.

V. Recommended Expulsion: In addition to traditional, required expulsion offenses, a student who receives the allowable minimum number of suspension days while on an SST contract are to be recommended for expulsion from our campus. If, and as soon as possible, before expulsion request is initiated, an appropriate available alternative should be sought and encouraged.

REFERENCES

- Carter, Samuel Casey. *No Excuses*. Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2001.
- Clifford, John. "Enacting Critical Literacy." *The Right to Literacy*. New York, MLA, 1990.
- Elbow, Peter. *Writing without Teachers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon, 1972.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1998.
- Graser, Elsa P. *Teaching Writing: A Process Approach: A Survey of Research*. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1983.
- Graves, Donald H. *A Researcher Learns to Write: Selected Articles and Monographs*. Exeter: Heinemann, 1984.
- Heath, Shirley Brice. "The Fourth Vision: Literate Language at Work." *The Right to Literacy*. New York, MLA, 1990.
- Horner, Bruce. "Discoursing Basic Writing." *College Composition and Communication*. 47.2 (1996): 199-223.

- Jehlen, Alain. "High Stakes Questions." *NEA Today*.
21.4 (March 2003): 8-11.
- Kohl, Herbert. *Growing Minds: On Becoming a Teacher*.
New York: Harper & Row, 1984.
- - -. *I Won't Learn from You*. New York: New Press,
1994.
- Kozol, Jonathan. *Savage Inequalities: Children in
America's Schools*. New York: Harper Perennial,
1991.
- "Larry." Personal interview. 21 June 2003.
- Lee, Amy. *Composing Critical Pedagogies*. Urbana: NCTE,
2000.
- Levine, David et al eds. *Rethinking Schools: An Agenda
for Change*. New York: The New Press, 1995.
- Lu, Min-Zhan. "Redefining the Literate Self: The
Politics of Critical Affirmation." *College
Composition and Communication*. 51.2 (1999): 172-
194.
- Lunsford, Andrea. "Cognitive Development and the Basic
Writer." *College English*. 41.1 (1979): 449-459.

- Malinowitz, Harriet. "The Rhetoric of Empowerment in Writing Programs." *The Right to Literacy*. New York, MLA, 1990.
- Meier, Deborah. *Will Standards Save Public Education?* Boston: Beacon, 2000.
- National Center for Education Statistics. 23 Oct. 2003. <<http://www.nces.ed.gov.globallocator>>.
- National Commission on Writing. *The Neglected "R": The Need for a Writing Revolution*. 28 Apr. 2003. <<http://www.writingcommission.org>>.
- Nieto, Sonia. *Language, Culture, and Teaching: Critical Perspectives for a New Century*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002.
- O'Keefe, Virginia. *Speaking to Think, Thinking to Speak*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995.
- O'Neil, John. "Credentials Count." *NEA Today*. 21.4 (January 2003): 21.
- Pound, Ezra. *The ABC of Reading*. New York: New Directions, 1960.
- Reeves, Donald. *Accountability in Action: A Blueprint for Learning Organizations*. Denver: Advanced Learning Press, 2000.

"Robert." Personal interview. 21 June 2003.

Ronald, Kate and Hephzibah Roskelly. "Untested Feasibility: Imagining the Pragmatic Possibility of Paulo Freire." *College English*, 63.5 (2001): 612-631.

Rose, Mike. *Lives on the Boundary*. New York: Penguin, 1989.

- - -. "Narrowing the Mind and Page: Remedial Writers and Cognitive Reductionism." *College Composition and Communication* 39.3 (1988): 267-98.

"Sandy." Personal interview. 21 June 2003.

Seldes, George, ed. *The Great Thoughts*. New York: Ballantine, 1996.

Smith, Frank. *Essays into Literacy*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1983.

- - -. *The Book of Learning and Forgetting*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1998.

- - -. *To Think*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1990.

Stand and Deliver. Dir. Ramon Menendez. Perf. Edward James Olmos, Lou Diamond Phillips, Rosana de Soto, and Andy Garcia. Warner Brothers, 1987.