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The Use of Alternative School Placements for Disciplinary Interventions With At-risk Students

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THE USE OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL PLACEMENTS FOR DISCIPLINARY

INTERVENTIONS WITH AT-RISK STUDENTS

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of

Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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by

Tammie N. Feathers

December 1999

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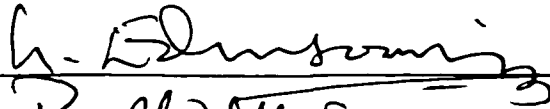
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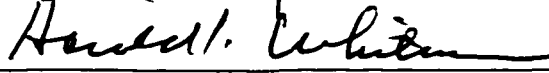
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The committee read and examined her dissertation, supervised her defense of it in

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of the Graduate
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Dean, School of Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

THE USE OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL PLACEMENTS FOR DISCIPLINARY

INTERVENTIONS WITH AT-RISK STUDENTS

by

Tammie N. Feathers

The purpose of this study was to investigate effective ways of providing educational services for at-risk students who are repeatedly placed out of the regular classroom into an alternative school. Characteristics of both settings were investigated in terms of meeting student needs to determine what ingredients might be missing from either or both settings that should be implemented to help these students succeed.

The research was qualitative and used a case study design. Primary data were gathered from interviews with five students placed in an alternative school setting and interviews with teachers and administrators in both the regular school and the alternative school. Cumulative student records were also used.

The researcher concluded that students who are repeatedly placed in the alternative program are a very small percentage in each school; however, there is a need for better resources in both the regular and alternative programs to meet the needs of these students. Key ingredients are better communication between the two settings and a better understanding of the role of the alternative program in serving these students. There is also a need for transition planning and follow-up with students who are not finding success when placed back in the regular classroom and are being pulled back and forth between the two programs.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Anthony Feathers, to whom I owe a great deal of gratitude for his continued love and support in whatever I endeavor to accomplish in life. He makes my goals our goals. I could not have completed this program without his encouragement and his belief in me. I thank him for being the most important part of my life.

I also give honor and thanks to my parents, Ruble and Othela Norton, for instilling in me the values of the importance of education and the ability to believe in myself. I thank them for the unconditional love and encouragement they have always given me.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The number of public school students who are labeled "at-risk" is increasing. These students are more prone to delinquency, substance abuse, adolescent pregnancy, academic failure, and dropping out. Our country has the potential to lose one-fourth of its youth who will most likely never become productive citizens unless they receive immediate interventions (Dryfoos, 1990).

Delinquency potential is often identifiable at an early age. Young children who are aggressive in early grades are at high risk of behavior problems and possibly even delinquency. Early initiation or occurrence of any inappropriate behavior predicts heavy involvement in the behavior and more negative consequences (Dryfoos, 1990). Many of today's young people are victims of poverty, violence, neglect, depression, and abuse. These students are becoming more prevalent in our schools and more difficult to handle. Goodlad (1990) indicated if we cease trying to teach difficult and uninterested students and allow them to drop out of school, we shift the responsibility for their education elsewhere and there is no elsewhere.

Many of these at-risk students meet the criteria through testing and evaluation to receive special programs such as Title 1 and special education programs which provide individual attention and academic work geared to their ability level. However, many of these students do not qualify for these programs and are served in the regular classrooms which have higher expectations of performance both academically and behaviorally. When

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these students become frustrated, they often "act out" and create chronic discipline problems. Consequently, they interrupt the educational environment for themselves and for others.

Many of these students are often served in alternative programs such as in-school suspension or alternative school placements. Alternative school placements are defined for this study as those programs designed to provide a separate facility for working with students who demonstrate chronic discipline problems. Because these students often show signs of disruptive behavior beginning at the elementary school level, they tend to use these "out of class" programs repeatedly throughout their school years. There seems to be a need for an option to help these students find success in the educational system other than through the revolving door of alternative placements.

Statement of the Problem

One way schools have chosen to deal with disruptive students is through the use of alternative programs. These programs are usually located within the school, separating students socially, or at separate sites which may serve a whole school district. Alternative programs generally provide small, supportive, and more structured environments with goals to positively influence student performance. One problem with alternative programs is the time or length of service for students placed in them which may range from a few days to an entire school year. Often the same students shuffle back and forth between the regular program and the alternative school program throughout their school years. This causes students to lose a sense of connectedness to the learning environment. According

to Maeroff (1998), connectedness is part of the support system that most students need in order to achieve success. Schools need to provide the resources to prevent this constant disruption of the student's learning environment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine effective means of providing for at-risk students who are repeatedly referred from the regular school program to the alternative school program. Risk factors that may influence behavior and disciplinary procedures that have been implemented to improve inappropriate behavior were analyzed to determine student characteristics and purposes for referral to the alternative school. This was done through a descriptive case study of students currently being served in an alternative school setting. Analysis of the students included observations, interviews with the students, use of cumulative records, and a functional behavior assessment interview.

The study also included an analysis of the classroom environments these students experienced in both the regular schools and alternative school settings. Interviews with teachers in both settings were conducted as well as interviews with administrators. An assessment was conducted to determine what transition plans were in place for the students when moved from one setting to another.

Research Questions

The questions to be answered through this research included:

1. What are the characteristics that identify students as at risk?

2. What is the disciplinary history of the students in terms of referral to alternative placements?

3. What are the characteristics of the regular school environment and the alternative school environment in terms of meeting these students' needs?

4. What ingredient seems to be missing from either or both settings to help the students succeed?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was the determination of the common characteristics of the students in terms of disruptive behavior and discipline referrals and how the school system can meet these students' needs in a more effective manner than through repeated referral to alternative placements, either in-school suspensions or the alternative school program. Johnson and Johnson (1995) identified academic failure and alienation from schoolmates as at-risk factors for students. Both of these factors relate to the educational environment of students and indicate a need for change in both the regular and alternative settings for the benefit of the students.

Many researchers theorize that schools place students at risk through stress, regimentation, competition, and unfair rules and policies (Blount & Wells, 1992; Manning & Baruth, 1995; Mayer, 1995). Some agree that many school disciplinary policies are counterproductive and even add to the problem (DeRidder, 1991; Wehlage, 1991). Teachers and administrators support the use of alternative programs for disruptive students despite concerns about factors such as stigmatization of students, the

effectiveness of the programs with students, the lack of appropriate staffing and additional services such as counseling, and plans for successful integration of the students back into the regular program.

Limitations

Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Research takes place in natural settings, with an attempt to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). By its very nature, qualitative research is particularistic, focusing on a particular situation, event, or phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). The sample is small and purposeful with the students, staff, school system, and community context fixed by circumstances of the study site.

The use of field setting studies generally provides an opportunity to examine a situation in depth but does pose limitations. These limitations include subject selection, generalizability, time period limitations, and specified location. This study was limited to one alternative school site and included a limited number of students being served in this setting. Time limitations were also a factor because students in the study were placed in the alternative program during the spring 1999 school term.

Data collection techniques included observations, interviews, and analysis of student records. This provided for an information- rich case study with an interest in process rather than outcomes and content rather than a specific variable (Merriam, 1998). These observations and interviews with students were firsthand encounters that allowed

the researcher an opportunity for in-depth perception and understanding but may also limit

objectivity. Qualitative case studies are limited by the integrity and sensitivity of the

researcher (Riley, 1963). Another limitation is the ethical problems that can arise in

protecting the identity of the research site and the participants (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

Definitions of Terms

Case Study

"An examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person,

a process, an institution, or a social group." (Merriam, 1988, p. 9).

Fieldwork

"The researcher physically goes to the people, setting, site, institution (the field) in

order to observe behavior in its natural setting." (Merriam, 1998, p. 7).

Observations

"A firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam, 1998, p.94).

Interviews

"A method of data collection from individuals who have special knowledge or

perceptions that would not otherwise be available to the researcher" (Gall, Borg, & Gall,

1996, p. 306).

Triangulation

"The use of multiple data-collection methods, data sources, analysts, or theories as

corroborative evidence for the validity of qualitative research findings" (Gall, Borg, &

Gall, 1996, p. 773).

Etic

"The researcher's viewpoint" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 548).

Emic

"The participant's viewpoint" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 548).

At-risk Students

"Those students who fall behind, whose school attendance is uneven, whose basic

skills are limited, who are bright but bored, who are in trouble with the juvenile

authorities, who are on drugs, who are pregnant, who have failed the district competency

exams, who are behavior problems, who speak English as a second language, or who

reflect a depressed socio-economic status" (Hardy, 1989, p. 38).

Alternative Program

"A separate educational program that offers instruction geared to the special

learning and behavioral patterns of disruptive students" (Hess, Martin, Beck, & Parker,

1979, p. 5).

Overview of the Study

In chapter 2, a review of the literature defines the characteristics of the at-risk

student and describes studies of both effective and ineffective ways of dealing with

disciplinary problems associated with such students. Information is also included on

alternative school programs.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the study including the participants in the study

and the methodology and procedures for collecting and analyzing the data. Qualitative

research techniques are described as applied to this specific research study.

Chapter 4 provides the results of the study. This includes a description of the

alternative school program, information on participants in the study, and information

gained through observations and interviews conducted in the study.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings of the study, conclusions drawn

from the findings, and recommendations for practice and for further study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

A literature search was conducted to examine the various characteristics and

conditions that contribute to defining at-risk students who may be served in an alternative

school placement. The characteristics of these students were explored in relation to

discipline problems and discipline procedures used by schools. Those procedures that

were shown by research to be unsuccessful as well as those recommended by the research

were also explored. The literature review is divided into five sections: (1) defining the at-

risk student; (2) examination of disciplinary policies and procedures; (3) family influence

on student discipline; (4) recommendations of effective means of serving at-risk students;

and (5) review of use of alternative school placements for at-risk students including a

description of alternative programs, characteristics of effective alternative programs,

studies related to alternative programs, and descriptions of several programs in operation.

The At-Risk Student

Most often at-risk is used to describe students who have a high probability of

dropping out of school (Manning, 1996; Manning & Baruth, 1995; Motsinger, 1993;

Rogus & Wildenhaus, 1991; Slavin & Madden, 1989). The Education Resource

Information Center's Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors (1990) defined at-risk for the first

time in 1980 as: "students with normal intelligence, whose academic background or prior

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performance may cause them to be perceived as candidates for further academic failure or early withdrawal" (p. 116).

Much of the research on at-risk students goes back to the National Commission on Excellence in Education report entitled *A Nation At Risk* (1983). This report directed the nation's attention toward improving schools and introduced the term risk in association with education (Frost, 1994; Lounsbury, 1996). Margonis (1992) described *A Nation at Risk* as embodying a standard of excellence and students who could not reach the standard as being at risk. Excellence became an ideal with at-risk denoting student deficiency.

In 1986, Congress passed legislation specifying research on at-risk students and teacher training for working with such students as priorities in educational funding. This trend increased in 1988. Congress defined at-risk as:

> Students who because of learning deficiencies, lack of school readiness,
>
> limited English proficiency, poverty, educational or economic disadvantage,
>
> or physical or emotional handicapping conditions face greater risk of low
>
> educational achievement and have greater potential of becoming school
>
> dropouts (Frost, 1994).

In a Phi Delta Kappa study, Frymier (1992) completed 65 case studies defining risk as being likely to fail at school and fail at life. He determined that the breakdown of society and deteriorating social values, the break up of the family, violence and sex depicted on television, decline of ethics, and substance abuse to be some of the reasons for placing students at risk.

He classified risk factors into five groups.

1. Personal pain which included suspensions, prior suicide attempts, pregnancy, drug use by student or family, alcohol abuse, and child abuse

2. Academic failure which included low grades, failing courses, retention, absenteeism, low self-esteem, and being served in special education classes

3. Family tragedy which included a recent sickness or death in the family, a parent losing a job, the student being sick or recently involved in an accident

4. The family socioeconomic situation including unskilled employment or unemployment of either parent, the mother not having graduated from high school, having a negative attitude toward education, and English not spoken in the home

5. Family instability including not living with either real parent, moving frequently, or the parents recently experiencing a divorce

Frymier (1992) found that older students tended to be more at risk than younger, blacks were more at risk than whites, Hispanics were more at risk than Asians, and boys were more at risk than girls. He also found when a student was at risk in one of these identified areas, there were overwhelming odds that the student was also at risk in many others.

One factor identified as placing students at risk is poor academic achievement (Bowers, 1990; Dryfoos, 1990; Hardy, 1989; Manning, 1993; Winbourne & Dardaine-Ragguet, 1993). Stevens and Pihl (1987) conducted a study of seventh grade students identified as at risk for school failure and found these students to differ significantly from normal classmates in age, intelligence, anxiety, self-concept, grades, and coping ability.

They were found to be relatively unskilled, anxious, and depressed. The National

Governor's Association defines at-risk students by the common characteristic of being

deficient in basic skills.

"A lack of adequate basic skills - the ability to read, write, compute, and

communicate - is the one characteristic that the school dropout, the teen parent,

the criminally involved, and the socially dependent youth typically have in

common"(Margonis, 1992, p. 343).

Slavin and Madden (1989) define at-risk as "those whose intelligence is within

normal limits but who are failing to achieve basic skills necessary for success in school and

life" (p. 5). The etiology of educational risk outcomes are based on the assumption that

students are at risk by virtue of innate inadequacies and/or inadequacies that are a

consequence of deprived homes. They propose those especially at risk are ethnic

minorities and specific subcultures whose life experiences differ from those of the larger

society. Dryfoos, (1990) sees low achievement as a process, both a predictor and a

consequence of other at-risk behaviors such as substance abuse, delinquency, and early

sexual behavior.

Other at-risk descriptors related to the school include retention (DeBlois, 1989;

DeRidder, 1991; Dryfoos, 1990; Haun, 1987; Ogden & Germinario, 1988; Slavin &

Madden, 1989) and poor attendance (Deblois, 1989; Dryfoos, 1990; Hardy, 1989; Ogden

& Germinario, 1988; Slavin & Madden, 1989). Dryfoos (1990) adds that being behind

modal level is a powerful measure of problem behaviors. Often the most obvious identifier

of at-risk students in the school is chronic discipline problems. Curwin and Mendler

(1988) describe these students as believing that they cannot and will not be successful in school and see themselves as losers. They prefer being recognized as troublemakers rather than being seen as stupid. Gold and Mann (1984) saw these students as those who in the past would have "adjusted" to the educational system by leaving it. "Now these less skilled, less motivated, and less self-controlled continue to go to school - more or less" (p. 1). DeBlois (1989) adds another common characteristic of at-risk as being uninvolved in school activities.

Several other at-risk characteristics found throughout the research include the following: (a) poverty (Bowers, 1990; DeRidder, 1991; Dryfoos, 1990; Hardy, 1989; Lindquist & Molnar, 1995; Manning, 1993; Pallas, 1989; Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989; Rogus & Wildenhaus, 1991; Thomas, Sabatino & Sarri, 1982); (b) ethnic minority, which is described by Pallas et al., (1989) as the best known at-risk factor because they are less likely to finish high school and therefore usually live in poverty (Blount & Wells, 1992; Bowers, 1990; Garard, 1995; Johnson, 1994; Pallas, 1989; Slavin & Madden, 1989; Wehlage, 1991); (c) pregnancy (Dryfoos, 1990; Hardy, 1989; Manning 1993; Wehlage, 1991); (d) substance abuse (Dougherty, 1990; Dryfoos, 1990; Hardy, 1989; Manning, 1993; Rogus & Wildenhaus, 1991; Thomas et al., 1982; Wehlage, 1991); (e) and depression (Dryfoos, 1990; Manning, 1996; Manning & Baruth, 1995; Wehlage, 1991).

Garard (1995) referred to those factors related to school and family as external or outside the control of the student. Factors such as self-esteem, low motivation, and poor locus of control, were considered internal factors. Garard's internal factors correlate with what Garmezy (1974) called "self-systems" including locus of control, self-esteem, self-

efficacy, and autonomy. When these "self-systems" are strong a child shows resiliency;

however, when they are low, they are factors associated with those at-risk. Low self-

esteem is not only considered as a risk factor (Bowers, 1990; Dryfoos, 1990; Rogus &

Wildenhaus, 1991; Winbourne & Dardaine-Ragguet, 1993) but is considered to be the

most common characteristic of at-risk students (Uroff & Greene, 1991). Payne and Payne

(1989) describe students with an internal locus of control as being more successful in

school because the student perceives that he causes his own outcomes and describe the at-

risk student as tending to have an external locus of control and attributing success or

failure to luck instead of effort. Various instruments are available through companies such

as Western Psychological Services and Hawthorne Educational Services to help determine

student characteristics such as behavior, feelings, and self-concept. Better understanding

of the student can aid in implementing strategies to help students improve in skills such as

decision-making and control of outcomes.

Two other overriding characteristics of the at-risk child are those of family

composition (Blount & Wells, 1992; DeRidder, 1991; Dryfoos, 1990; Lindquist &

Molnar, 1995; Pallas, 1989; Pallas et al., 1989; Rogus & Wildenhaus, 1991; Thomas et

al., 1982); and parent's level of education (DeRidder, 1991; Pallas, 1989; Pallas et al.,

1989). The definition of at-risk children and youth given by The National School Board

Association directly relates to family and environment. Their definition of at-risk is:

    "those who are subject to environmental, familial, or societal forces over

    which they have no control and which adversely affect their ability to learn in

    school and succeed in society. As a result, they have uncertain futures as students,

workers, and citizens and ultimately are unlikely to become productive members of our society" (Rovins, 1989, p. 6).

A related study of parental influence is a study by Motsinger (1993) of high achieving high school students, GED students, and young prison inmates that found 85% of the high achievers lived with both parents compared to 45% of GED students and prison inmates. Green and Scott (1995) conducted a longitudinal study of eighth grade students with at-risk factors identified as single parent homes, income less than $15,000 yearly, having an older sibling who had dropped out of school, having parents who didn't finish high school, limited English proficiency, and being at home without adult supervision more than three hours per day. Findings showed 15% higher incidence of dropping out of school for those with two or more risk factors. Students who had dropped out by 10th grade had changed schools frequently, came to class unprepared or acted out frequently, and had parents who were not actively involved or held low educational expectations. Of those identified with multiple risk factors, only 60% graduated from high school. These students were thought by teachers to be passive, disruptive, inattentive, or underachievers. Findings also included the at-risk students as more likely to be suspended, have a child, use drugs or alcohol, and be arrested. Myers, Milne, Baker, and Ginsburg (1987) assert that the mother's education attainment is positively associated with student academic performance and educational attainment expectation. Their study concluded that changes in the number of parents in the home as well as mother's employment affect both student behavior and achievement. Pallas (1986) sums up the affect of these risk factors by identifying the at-risk student as having the

inability to develop positive relationships with teachers, adults, or peers.

Disciplinary Policies and Procedures

There is a definite link between students labeled at-risk and chronic incidences of disruptive behavior. Gaustad (1992) indicates discipline problems affect the learning environment. The research of Curwin (1995), on discipline in the schools, indicates that children across all grade levels seem to be more disruptive with less internal control. The American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth (1993) indicates this link by their conclusion that antisocial, aggressive youth do poorly in school, have a history of poor school attendance, have numerous suspensions, and tend to be rejected by their peers. Johnson and Johnson (1995) found that anything that allows students to fail, remain apart from classmates, be socially inept, and have low self-esteem increases the probability that students will use destructive strategies.

The Phi Delta Kappa Gallop Poll of the Public's Attitude Toward Public Schools has shown discipline as being the most frequently mentioned problem since its inception in 1969. In 1977, parents listed discipline as the number one problem by the highest percentage ever, at 26%. They indicated problems of discipline, motivation, poor work and study habits, drug and alcohol addiction, and other problems rooted in dysfunctional families as relative to these problems. (Hartwig & Ruesch, 1994). Dubelle (1995) asserts discipline as a major concern of parents, educators, and the community.

Curwin and Mendler (1988) call their theory of discipline problems in the school the 80-15-5 principle. They project that 80% of the students rarely break rules, 15%

break rules on a somewhat regular basis, and 5% are chronic rule breakers and are generally out of control. Aggressive and disruptive behavior in the classroom often leads to poor school performance and destructive peer relationships which lead toward violence (Sautter, 1995). This relationship between at-risk youth and possible violence is shown by Wallach (1996) who argues that children who accumulate an overload of anger or hate or who feel worthless are more likely to be violent. These children feel unloved and do not care what others think of them. Johnson and Johnson (1995) add, if schools are to be orderly and peaceful places in which high quality education can take place, students must learn to manage conflicts constructively without physical or verbal violence . Sautter (1995) indicates that violence is occurring earlier and there is a direct connection between violence in the home or against children in the home and subsequent violent behavior by those children. Hartwig and Ruesch (1994) report that minor behavior problems in early grades are often ignored until they escalate into significant and major concerns during the secondary school years.

Research indicates several aspects of school organizations that help create or contribute to high incidence of discipline problems. In a discussion of self-esteem, Curwin and Mendler (1988) see 80% of children entering first grade possessing good self-esteem. By the time they reach fifth grade the percentage has dropped to 20 and by the end of high school only 5% of students have good self-esteem. Blount and Wells (1992) describe how students are placed at risk by schools through excessive control and regimentation, excessive expectations and demands for performance, excessive testing and grading, and lack of sustained interaction that reflects genuine caring. They call this "educationally

battering" children. Anti-social behavior results from lack of clarity of rules and policies, weak or inconsistent administrative support, discipline policies not being carried out, and few or no allowances for individual differences (Mayer, 1995). Myers et al. (1987) add that schools create a situation for failure of students through various types of labeling.

Manning and Baruth (1996) describe school as the culprit through obsession with testing and assessment, violence, tracking by ability, racial problems, and an emphasis on competition that separates learners into winners and losers. Kohn (1996) attributes behavior problems to curriculum problems. He describes the curriculum as part of the larger classroom context from which a student's behavior or misbehavior emerges. Many students find the work boring, too difficult, or not worth doing and misbehave to make the time go faster.

Gottfredson (1989) analyzed data from 600 secondary schools and found the following characteristics associated with discipline problems:

-rules were unclear and perceived as unfairly or inconsistently enforced

-students didn't believe in the rules

-teachers and administrators didn't know the rules or disagreed on how to respond to misconduct

-cooperation between teachers and administrators was poor

-misconduct was ignored

-schools were large and often lacked adequate resources for teaching

Findings of Forness, Guthrie, and Hall (1976) in a study of at-risk children indicated that teachers can perceive education risk, in some cases, more in terms of

classroom behavior than in terms of academic performance. Even though easily identified, Bowditch (1993) found in a study of routine disciplinary procedures that generally, disciplinarians rarely questioned students about details of their misbehavior or the reasons behind it. School personnel sought to punish "types of students" more than "types of behaviors".

Many disciplinary techniques take the form of punishment. Kohn (1996) views punishment, usually in the form of detention, suspension, expulsion, or some other form of time-out or isolation, as a quick and easy way to gain temporary compliance. Although intended to change future behavior, punishment models the use of power rather than the use of reason or cooperation and often escalates what it is intended to improve. Wehlage (1991) sees school policies such as use of suspension as a way in which schools put students at risk.

Suspension used in general for all students without regard to individual manifestation of behavior often ends up being counterproductive (Hartwig & Ruesch, 1994). A study by Nevetsky (1991) of an at-risk program serving ninth grade students, indicated that counseling, maintaining parent contact, and listening to students was effective while use of suspension was not effective. DeRidder (1991) indicates suspensions result from school climate associated with many teachers holding disproportionately negative or low expectations of at-risk students. Being suspended or expelled is one of the top three reasons students drop out of school. These students feel they are being "pushed out" because they continually receive signals from schools that they are not able or worthy to continue through graduation. They feel encouraged to leave. In the 1975

Supreme Court decision <u>Goss v. Lopez</u>, it was determined that suspension could damage the student's reputation as well as interfere with future educational and employment opportunities (Alexander & Alexander, 1992).

Family Influence on Disciplinary Problems

The make-up of the family has undergone many changes over the past several years. That, along with pressures from the outside world has had a major influence on children and their activities, which are often destructive and even dangerous. One influence of parenting on children's behavior is the lack of parenting skills and low involvement in school activities (Mayer, 1995). Hartwig and Ruesch (1994) found that less than 20% of parents are actively involved in their child's education while Garbarino (1997) adds there has been a 50% decrease in the past 30 years in the amount of time parents spend with their children in a constructive activity.

The rising number of single-parent homes is also a factor. Diprete (1981) found higher rates of discipline problems among students from single-parent families. In a study using a national sample of adolescents, Dornbusch et al. (1985) looked at the interrelationships among family structure, patterns of family decision making, and deviant behavior among adolescents. They found the mother trying to control the adolescent without the father is less likely to make decisions without input from the youth and is more likely to allow the youth to make his/her own decisions leading the youth to be more likely to exhibit deviant behavior. They also found an additional adult, especially for males, is associated with increased parental control and reduction in various forms of

adolescent deviance. The American Psychological Association found that "lack of

parental supervision is one of the strongest predictors of the development of conduct

problems and delinquency" (Sautter, 1995,

p. K8).

In a strong argument against schools receiving the blame for student disruptions,

Splittgerber and Allen (1996) argue that schools do not control the majority of the child's

time. They see problems as a result of large amounts of time youth spend away from

school combined with parents' being out of the house resulting in lots of unscheduled,

unstructured, and unsupervised time (Carnegie Counsel on Adolescent Development).

Another argument presented by Hwang (1995) is that schools are being given

responsibility that previously was accepted by parents. When students fail and don't do

their part, students and parents should be held accountable for student failures. The blame

is often placed on everyone but the student and parent, making self-victimization

convenient. He contends that student apathy results from parental apathy, and children

are content with minimal attainment while expecting inflated grades and accomplishments

so they can feel good about themselves. Students need to rely on their own resources.

Effective Strategies for At-Risk Students

In the past, techniques that worked with one child could be expected to have

similar effects with others. Today, children are more heterogenous and this is not the

case. The primary focus in dealing with children should be to try to attain an

understanding of their inner feelings rather than their observed behavior (Wolfgang &

Glickman, 1986). Research indicates some of the most effective ways schools can deal with behavior and discipline is through positive approaches. These might include consistent rules (Gottfredson, 1989; Ingersoll & Orr, 1988); teaching decision-making skills (Curwin & Mendler, 1997) and teaching self-discipline or self-control (Brendtro & Long, 1995; Fecser, 1993; Hartwig & Ruesch, 1994). Marshall (1998) describes an effective discipline program as one in which the student acknowledges inappropriate behavior, self-evaluates, takes ownership, and develops a plan for improvement. Student participation in decision making in the school and in the formulation of rules and consequences is another way of making students feel important and actively involved (Barruth & Berman, 1997; Mayer, 1995; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1995).

The school can promote positive relationships and a sense of connectedness (Gottfredson 1989; Maeroff, 1995) among students through cooperative learning activities (Rogus & Wildenhaus, 1991; Wang et al., 1995;); between students and adults through mentoring (Brendtro & Long, 1995; Kauffman & Burbank, 1997; Maeroff, 1998; Wang et al., 1995) and respect (Bosworth, 1995; Elias, 1998; Wallach, 1996); and within the school through active engagement (Elias, 1998) and encouragement of extra-curricular involvement (Kohn, 1996; Ogden & Germinario, 1988; Wang et al., 1995). Simple, human characteristics of listening (Bosworth, 1995) and social rewards such as smiling, praising, and complimenting are believed to promote better behavior among students (Gaustad, 1992). There is also a need for teachers to maintain high expectations for all students (Rogus & Wildenhaus, 1991; Wang et al, 1995).

The research overwhelmingly recommends the need for educators to provide a

caring, supportive, and nurturing classroom and school environment (Bosworth, 1995; Cuban, 1989; Elias, 1998; Hartwig & Ruesch, 1994; Rogus & Wildenhaus, 1991; Wehlage, 1991). Theodore Sizer, founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools, suggests personalization is the single most important factor that keeps young people in school (Shore, 1996) and Sautter (1995) agrees that the involvement of just one caring adult can make all the difference in the life of an at-risk child. A collaborative study of at-risk youth among 100 Phi Delta Kappan Chapters indicated the primary reason for dropping out of school for many students was reported as the belief that no one in the school system really cared about them (Parker, 1990). Research cites four characteristics of successful secondary schools: shared values, a sense of belonging, a sense of school membership, and academic engagement (Goodlad, 1984; Wehlage, Rutter, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989).

Yanossy (1986) implemented an intervention program to reduce the number of discipline referrals of high risk ninth grade students. He used parent conferences, home-school contracts, study halls with peer tutors, administrative counseling and praise, and assertive discipline over a period of 10 weeks with the goal of reducing destructive behaviors. The results included a drop by 35% in the number of disciplinary referrals, improved grades, and demonstrated the positive effect of peer influence.

The task of improving success for at-risk students must involve the implementation of new strategies in the schools for dealing with these students but parental involvement is vital (DeRidder, 1991; Dougherty, 1990; Harrington-Lueker, 1995; Manning, 1993; Motsinger, 1993; Nevetsky, 1991; Pallas et al., 1989; Price & Swanson, 1990; Slavin & Madden, 1989; Stevenson & Baker; 1987; Winbourne & Dardaine-Ragguet, 1993;

Yanossy, 1986). Stevenson & Baker (1987) advocate parent involvement in school activities leads to better performance of children in school. Taylor-Dunlop and Norton (1997) indicate parental involvement is more important to academic success than the family's income level. They advocate that research shows 90% of school achievement is determined by how often a child attends school, how much reading is done at home, and how much television a child watches. The support of parents in the importance of education and their involvement in that education is a great determinant of the child's success in school.

In reviewing the research about at-risk students, it is evident that many of today's youth fit many of these descriptors. It is also obvious that these students present a challenge for educators in many areas but especially in dealing with disruptive behaviors. Numerous articles and studies of effective techniques of discipline present ideas and possible solutions for dealing with this growing number of students. However, because many unsuccessful techniques are still being employed and many of the disciplinary issues today fall under the umbrella of "zero tolerance" there is often the need for an alternative placement for some students. This need indicates the importance of providing the right environment and services, maintaining the goal of reintegrating the student back into the regular program, and focusing on individual student needs.

Alternative School Placement for At-Risk Students

The idea of alternative schools began when colonial schools were founded as alternatives to English institutions. In 1902 John Dewey (1916) began to experiment with

innovative alternative situations. Since the mid 1960s the term has been used to refer to more flexible educational structures that focus greater attention on individualized and experimental education for students. By 1978, the National Alternative Schools Program identified 1,300 alternative school programs in the 50 states (Flaxman & Homstead, 1978).

According to Thomas et al. (1982) an alternative school placement can be as brief as an experience in a tutorial or remedial program for a few weeks or as long as a comprehensive learning program for several years. They identify common elements of alternative programs as being designed for individualized instruction with clearly stated goals and plans for achievement agreed upon by the student; the expectation of the development of positive, caring relationships between teachers and students; a clear system of rewards; low student-teacher ratios; and the establishment, by the school administration, of a climate of respect with fair disciplinary procedures.

Raywid (1994) describes alternative schools as standing apart based on two consistencies. They are designed to respond to a group that is not being optimally served in a regular program and they represent varying degrees of departure from standard school organization or programs. She identified three types of alternative schools. Type I are popular innovations such as schools of choice that make school challenging and fun. Fizzell and Raywid (1997) refer to these innovative schools as schools chosen by students and families due to their theme or focus. Dryfoos (1990) calls them arty types for the gifted.

Raywid (1994) calls Type II alternative schools "last chance programs" because

they usually serve as a last chance for students before expulsion. Type II schools are punitively oriented, highly structured organizations that employ firm and aggressive discipline policies (Fizzell & Raywid, 1997).

Type III alternative schools have a remedial focus. Students are presumed to need remediation or rehabilitation either in academics or social/emotional/behavioral challenges. The focus is on intensive counseling and support (Fizzell & Raywid, 1997; Raywid, 1994). Types II and III are viewed as having a mission to "fix" the student although studies show Type II programs often yield no benefits other than ridding conventional classrooms of disruptive students. Type III programs, however, through a supportive environment often yield an improvement in student behavior. Type III programs are based on the assumption that students can be helped to succeed in regular programs. (Raywid, 1994).

For the purposes of this literature review and this study, the alternative programs described will correlate somewhat with Raywid's Type II and III descriptors. The purposes of these programs are to remove disruptive or troubled students from the regular school settings and to attempt to remediate individual student needs. One theory proffered as to the need for these alternative programs is that traditional schools (especially at the secondary level) are no longer serving the needs of many students and family lifestyles of the 1990s (Smink, 1997). These alternative schools are sometimes referred to as "second chance" schools.

Hartwig and Ruesch (1994) report that many educators believe alternative schools are a significant development for dealing with at-risk students. The American Federation of Teachers adopted a resolution at one of their conventions supporting establishment and

maintenance of alternative educational settings for students removed from the regular classroom. A study of at-risk students by Nardini and Antes (1991) included a survey of principals which indicated between 25-49% use alternative school placements for disruptive students and 39% indicated they were effective. Hammond and Boivin (1991) recommend alternative schools as a replacement for suspension and expulsion.

Hartwig and Ruesch (1994) discussed the 1973 Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll as indicating the development and use of alternative school placements for dealing with drop outs, discipline issues, and juvenile delinquency was promoted as a solution by 62% of the public and 80% of educators surveyed. Alternative schools are seen to serve a dual function. They offer instruction geared to the special learning and behavioral patterns of disruptive students and they help improve the academic environment in the regular school setting through removal of disorderly students.

Characteristics of a successful alternative program include a small population (Black, 1997; Foley, 1983; Gaustad, 1992; Gottfredson, 1989; Hammond & Boivin, 1991; Smink 1997); individualized instruction (Black, 1997; DeRidder, 1991; Gottfredson, 1989; Kershaw & Blank, 1993); flexible approaches to teaching and scheduling (Black, 1997; Gaustad, 1992; Hammond & Boivin, 1991; Smink, 1997); caring relationships between teachers and students (Black, 1997; Haun, 1987; Smink, 1997); providing an orderly, positive environment (Gottfredson, 1989; Hardy, 1989); and providing a relevant and interesting curriculum (Black, 1997; Haun 1987). The need for additional services such as counseling (DeRidder, 1991; Hammond & Boivin, 1991;); and a vocational or work component (DeRidder, 1991; Frith, Lindsey, & Sasseer, 1980; Hammond & Boivin,

1991) are also advocated. The goal of improving behavior and social skills is often deemed more important than academics. Improving self-esteem is at the heart of many alternative placements (Kershaw & Blank, 1993; Manning, 1993).

Many researchers see a need for alternative schools to have a clear philosophy or mission (Smink, 1997; Whalen, 1985). It is generally believed that a separate facility apart from the traditional school is more effective than one maintained as a part of the regular school setting (DeBlois, 1989; DeRidder, 1991; Whalen, 1985). As with all educational programs, the need for parent involvement is encouraged and viewed as essential (Frith, Lindsey, & Sasseer, 1980; Manning, 1993; Thomas et al., 1982; Whalen, 1985).

Several studies of alternative school programs demonstrate the accuracy of the characteristics recommended by the researchers listed above. One of the most significant areas of success in these programs, according to the students' reports, is the difference in the teachers' attitudes and actions toward them. Teachers in the alternative program were described as more concerned, less authoritarian, more fair (Griffin, 1993), more understanding, and more interested in them as students (Foley, 1983; Kershaw & Blank, 1993; Winbourne & Dardaine-Ragguet, 1993). Duke and Muzzio (1978) used self reporting surveys to analyze affective objectives such as student attitude toward self and toward school. Their findings included improvements in self-concept and a lesser although significant level of positive change in attitude toward school. They found the students considered the teachers more positive and more willing to help and there was a decrease in absenteeism.

Taylor-Dunlop and Norton (1997) conducted an in-depth ethnographic study of 11

at-risk young women aged 15-17 in a high school in New York state. Two were in an alternative program and the rest in a regular program. Results indicated a desire to have adults communicate with them in a non-hurtful way, to have learning be meaningful, and to be "talked with" instead of "talked at". Those in the alternative setting saw their teachers as more caring and more flexible in allowing them to make decisions.

Another characteristic of effective alternative programs that has been cited in the findings of several studies is the provision of a supportive environment. A study by Taylor (1986-1987) describes an alternative program for re-socializing high school students. Using participant observation, unstructured interviews, and review of student records over a period of 11 weeks, he found that in the traditional settings, teachers' lack of receptiveness to students practically forced them to withdraw from school. The students described the alternative program environment as being positive with a sense of personalization as opposed to making them feel alienated.

Gold and Mann (1982) compared alternative school programs with other public school programs and found alternative schools were effective in reducing disruptive behavior and improving academic success of students. In a later more comprehensive study of alternative schools, Gold and Mann (1984) found that school failure and subsequent disruptive behavior may be ameliorated by school success provided in a warm, caring school environment. They hypothesized two essential ingredients of alternative programs that would determine success by reducing disruptive and delinquent behaviors. These included a significant increase in the proportion of a youth's successful versus unsuccessful experiences and a warm, accepting relationship with one or more adults. A

major premise of the study was that school failure constitutes a threat to a student's self-esteem which provokes efforts on the part of the student to enhance self-esteem by disruptive and delinquent behaviors.

Using instruments to measure anxiety and depression as part of their interview with students, Gold and Mann identified students who were most anxious and depressed and labeled them "beset students". These students had lower self-esteem and were more involved in disruptive behaviors in school. These students did not experience as much success in the alternative programs as those they called "buoyant students" who scored significantly lower on anxiety and depression measures. Overall they found that alternative schools did reduce disruptive and delinquent behaviors and positively affected students' attitudes toward themselves and school but was not as effective for students showing characteristics of anxiety and depression.

Many of the alternative programs presented in the literature serve students beginning at the middle school level though secondary school. One example is CLASS Academy which stands for Creative Learning Alternative for Student Success. The concept of a county-wide centralized school combined with the community college's Prevention Project that provided alcohol- and drug-abuse programs as well as other community services resulted in the formation of the academy. The goal is to help students stay in school and master basic skills. It also seeks to help foster cooperative attitudes in students and help them establish healthy attitudes. The CLASS Academy allows students to help devise the rules, and discipline focuses on realistic consequences rather than punishment (DePaul & Downing, 1998). Another program in Jonesboro, Arkansas, called

Operation Rescue Project serves 9 to 15 year old students referred for serious academic underachievement, serious behavioral problems, or both. Providing services in academic, social, behavioral, and vocational areas and believing family dysfunction is the primary causative factor in student behavior, the program tries to duplicate a functional, caring family (McKee & Crawford, 1991)

Most of these alternative programs are seen as options to out of school suspension and expulsion. Other examples include the RE-FOCUS Program in Kansas City which provides student services from one hour to ten days, maximum (Elliott, 1991); the Gateway Program in Maryland that is organized so no student "falls through the cracks" (Hiraoka, 1996); and the Alternative Learning Center Education Center (ALEC) that succeeded in a drop in suspensions from 62 to 17 after six months of program implementation (Thorbahn, 1995). Williams (1989) describes a delinquency prevention project that targets middle school students with chronic discipline and/or truancy problems. Grimes Alternative School has been able to improve attendance, academic performance, and behavior.

Abbot (1994) describes ALPHA Alternative School in Michigan which is one of three alternative programs studied by Mann and Gold in 1984 and is the only one from the study still in existence. It began in 1972 to work with students with poor attendance. ALPHA's most essential component is a seminar teaching effective living skills such as time management, stress management, assertiveness, goal setting, effective communication, problem solving, and interpersonal skills. Parent involvement is also a major component (Abbott, 1994).

Some alternative programs are offering more than the basic programs in academics and social skills. One example is an alternative school in Atlantic City, New Jersey which is located on a college campus. Their goal is deep and continuous integration of chronically disruptive and disaffected students into the college core culture. Thinking these students are most affected by rules, they thought the sociology of the college site would have an impact on affective development. The program includes student participation in clubs, college courses, and recreation facilities. This award-winning college-based model has expanded to eight more Atlantic County schools (Kellmayer, 1995).

Other alternative programs feature additional components such as student planning teams (Price & Swanson, 1990); mentoring and special cultural and social programs such as Talent Trap, College Help, Teen Parenting, and Teen Pregnancy (DeMaria, 1993); and the creation of a support base (Morton, 1989). Kershaw and Blank (1993) described an alternative school consistent with Glasser's control theory that attempts to provide students with the tools they need to deal with their own anger, behavior, and academic demands. Gagne (1996) described an alternative school operated by the Toronto School Board in Canada; Contact School caters to students who are dropouts, street youth, and at-risk. With 12 teachers, three street workers, and two office staff, Contact School serves approximately 140 students, with a waiting list. Students exhibit the usual at-risk behavioral factors and come from dysfunctional social and family backgrounds. Contact School has proven to be successful through the implementation of three priorities: meeting the survival needs of students, meeting the academic needs of students, and introducing

students to the existence of the world beyond the walls of the school.

Many of these and other alternative programs share mutual goals and missions. One is the need for improving the student's self-esteem (Brubaker, 1991; Gagne, 1996; Kramer, 1989; Price & Swanson, 1990; Uroff & Greene, 1991). Other overriding components include counseling (Davis, 1994; Frith, Lindsey, & Sasseer, 1980; Kershaw & Blank, 1993; Kramer, 1989; Nevetsky, 1991; Thorbahn, 1995; Williams, 1989;); and the need for parent involvement (Frith, Lindsey, & Sasseer, 1980; Mesinger, 1986; Nevetsky, 1991; Price & Swanson, 1990).

While the research shows there are many alternative programs incorporating the necessary components to yield successful results and impact those students enrolled in such programs there are still several concerns about the use of alternative placements. One concern is cost (Glass, 1995; Hardy, 1989;) and the question of effectiveness versus cost efficiency (Nichols & Utesch, 1998). Another concern is the negative stigma that can be attached to the program and the students who attend (Gold & Mann, 1981; Taylor, 1986-1987). These programs are sometimes termed "dumping grounds" (Hardy, 1989; Whalen, 1985) and "schools for losers" (Raywid, 1994). Black (1997) predicts these programs will crumble if used as dumping grounds without incorporating the necessary ingredients for change.

Kershaw and Blank (1993) describe regular schools as focusing on the academic or cognitive while alternative schools focus on the affective domains. Kellmayer (1995) describes these programs as often being "watered down" versions of traditional programs and describes students as warehoused rather than educated. Some teachers are concerned

over both the quantity and quality of academic work that is completed (Davis, 1994). In their study of alternative schools, Gold & Mann (1984) found regular teachers felt alternative school students earned credits with less effort, received passing grades for less passable work, and were even allowed to break rules. Harrington-Lueker (1995) points out that alternative schools are often staffed with teachers with the least amount of experience.

Another concern about alternative programs is that of transitioning the students back into the regular program. In a case study conducted to determine perceptions of students, teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators, Kershaw and Blank (1993) found most of those interviewed indicated there was no consistent action plan for integrating alternative school students back into the regular school environment. Clough (1991) also found most at-risk programs show little or no evidence of being designed for effective student integration back into the total educational program. There is a need to pay more attention to what occurs after the student is released. There seems to be an expectation that long lasting change from relatively brief interventions will occur. However, most experts believe the changed behavior must be reinforced after the treatment ends (Mesinger, 1986) A study by Kershaw and Blank (1993) suggests that student improvement is a result of being away from the negative influence of peers and once the students are reintegrated into the regular program they fall back into their previous pattern if there is not an appropriate support system for reintegration.

Basis for Study Based on Literature Review

The literature provides a basis for examining the at-risk characteristics of students and examining their disruptive behavior patterns throughout their school career. These students, presently being served in an alternative school program, are often the victims, not only of their physical and environmental circumstances, but of the schools and school programs as well. There is evidence that effective alternative school programs exist that appropriately provide for the academic, social, and behavioral needs of at-risk students. There is also evidence that these students can often succeed in the regular program when a climate is provided in which the students are made to feel respected and wanted in the regular program.

Little evidence was found as to why some students are repeatedly moved in and out of alternative placements without evidence of positive change. These students are constantly placed in in-school suspension, suspended from school, or placed in an alternative school repeatedly throughout their school career. Dougherty (1990) indicates these students are the "fluctuating layer that lies between those students who are labeled "average" and those who receive special resources not available to the average student" (p. 10). With the number of at-risk students growing, there is a need to determine how alternative programs are serving these students and why they are unsuccessful upon returning to the regular school program.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Overview

Research literature exists linking at-risk student factors to lack of success in school and chronic discipline problems. There are various methods used to try to meet the needs of these students in educational systems. One method of dealing with students who consistently display behavior problems in the schools has been the use of programs to isolate theses students from the regular program through the use of alternative schools.

Studies indicate the success of these programs as well as concerns. This research study was the result of a concern that some students are repeatedly pulled from the regular classroom and placed in the alternative school throughout their school years. Students are often sent to an alternative school and then placed back in the regular program without any evidence of change or progress. This type of situation results in the same students being moved back and forth between the two placements without any real change in behavior. The study sought to ascertain whether these placements provide meaningful interventions for students. If the same intervention is used with these students repeatedly throughout the student's school years, then the success of that intervention is questionable.

Chapter 3 presents the methods and procedures for examining a case study of students repeatedly referred to out of school placements, specifically an alternative school setting. This chapter describes the research design, the rationale for the study, the

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sampling techniques, data collection, and procedures of data analysis.

Research Design

I chose the case study as the qualitative research method for identifying the risk

factors of subjects, the disciplinary history of subjects, characteristics of the regular school

environment and the alternative school environment in terms of meeting student needs,

and the characteristics that were missing in either setting needed for student success. The

case study is considered a form of nonexperimental or descriptive research and does not

allow for manipulation of treatments or subjects; therefore, the researcher takes things as

they are (Merriam, 1988). "Descriptive research is undertaken when description and

explanation (rather than prediction based on cause and effect) are sought." (Merriam,

1988, p. 7). Those interviewed in the study were able to give their perceptions, attitudes,

and opinions about the school settings.

I sought to determine effective ways of providing for at-risk students who are

repeatedly referred from the regular school placement to the alternative school placement.

This was done through interviews, participant observations, use of school records, and

the investigator's own interpretation as described through a rich, descriptive narrative.

Merriam (1998) describes the case study as including as many variables as possible

and portraying their interaction, often over a period of time. The descriptive nature of the

research illustrates the complexities of a situation where not one but many factors

contribute to it. There is an attempt to discover how preceding events led to the present

situation. Finally, the research is particularistic - focusing on a particular situation, event,

program, or phenomenon (Merriam, 1998).

Fieldwork is an important part of qualitative research. Gall et al (1996) characterized fieldwork as a process in which the observer focuses on the events that are most relevant to the research problem. One of the strengths is the attempt to examine events and meanings as they unfold. The qualitative investigator tries to understand the influences that determine the way events unfold. It is believed that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds (Merriam, 1998). Jorgenson (1989) cautioned of the importance to remain open to all possible findings when going into the field. The researcher must provide bountiful descriptions of episodes of these experiences to provide adequate descriptive data for analysis.

A technique used in qualitative research is participant observation. Merriam (1998) describes observations as "taking place in the natural field setting and representing a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest (p. 94). The researcher must be aware of the need for objectivity in using this technique (Merchant, 1997), because the researcher, as described by Merriam (1998), is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.

Sherman and Webb (1988) described qualitative research as "implying a direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone'" (p. 7). This is the value of both fieldwork and interviewing as a means of data collection. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), qualitative interviewing allows us to share the world of others to find out what is going on, why people do what they do, and how they understand the world (p. 5). Interviewing requires skills such as active listening, empathy, and the ability to establish

rapport and enter the interviewees world (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Qualitative methodology used for this study included participant observations in an alternative school setting with eighth and ninth grade students. Interviews with students were both structured, using a predetermined set of questions and semi-structured in which I introduced a subject and guided the discussion. Interview questions were used to encourage students to talk about themselves, their feelings, their perceptions of school in general, and their experience in the alternative school. These questions were drawn from my experience as a guidance counselor and from classroom and small group activities conducted with students as well as questions related to educational settings (Abrams & Schmidt, 1978; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998;). Other studies involving at-risk students and their survey instruments were also considered (Hadden, 1997; Kershaw & Blank, 1993; At Risk Students Missouri LINC Module, 1989). I sought advice from a school psychologist who is familiar with interviewing students and administering various instruments to better understand students and their needs. Consideration was also given to the review of literature and the characteristics of at-risk students, aspects of educational settings, and the use of alternative school placements as a disciplinary intervention. Interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators in the alternative school as well as the regular school settings. These questions were determined based on needed information specific to this study and aspects of educational settings as described in the literature. Archival data used consisted of student cumulative records as well as disciplinary records kept by the administrators.

Because these students were being served in an alternative school due to chronic

discipline problems, a functional behavior assessment interview was also conducted. This consisted of a structured interview with each student, his/her parent, and teacher. This assessment was designed by the school psychologist based on guidelines from the Tennessee State Department of Education, Division of Special Education and a policy guide created by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (Tilly et al., 1998). This interview is part of a process of determining the relationship between events in the student's environment and the occurrence of problem behaviors. Although used by the school system as a part of individualized behavioral planning for special education students, I chose to use the assessment as a way to discover the parents' and teachers' perceptions of the problem behaviors of each student as well as the students' perceptions of factors related to school behavior.

Rationale

At-risk students are defined based upon a series of factors external to the student such as socioeconomic status and single-parent families as well as internal student behaviors including factors such as low self-esteem and low motivation. These students are at risk even before they enter school and we continue to label them as such throughout their school career. These students appear unable to change that label (Garard, 1995).

Many of these students exhibit chronic behavior problems that result in various punishments involving exclusion from the regular school setting. These students are often shut out of the regular school setting and even completely alienated within the school community. Students at risk of school failure seem to be caught in a situation that denies

them success because of the problems they confront on a daily basis at home and school

(Nunn & Parish, 1992). The alternative school setting provides these students a more

intimate school environment with smaller classes and more individual help.

Sampling

Merriam (1988) defines purposeful sampling as the selection of information-rich

cases for in-depth study. Sampling in field research involves the selection of a research

site, subjects, and phenomenon of interest. "The researcher needs to consider where to

observe, when to observe, whom to observe and what to observe" (Merriam, 1988, p. 47).

In qualitative research the unit should be the smallest piece of information about

something that can stand by itself (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the purpose of this study,

I chose to study students in either eighth or ninth grade who were placed in an alternative

school setting during the 1999 spring term. These students had all been placed in the

alternative school setting prior to the term in which the study took place. Interviews with

administrators and teachers in both the alternative school setting and the regular school

setting were also conducted. Rubin and Rubin (1995) state, "You choose people who are

knowledgeable about the subject and talk with them until what you have provides an

overall sense of the meaning of a concept, theme, or process" (p. 73).

Sample Size

A small, nonrandom sample is selected because in qualitative research one wishes

to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of many.

Because it is impossible to interview everyone, observe everything, and gather all the relevant material in a case, a sample needs to be selected either before data collection begins or while the data are being gathered. One difference between quantitative and qualitative research is the number and kinds of respondents that should be critical for research purposes (Merriam, 1998). The researcher must develop a sample big enough to be generalized to the population in quantitative research but this is not the case in qualitative sampling (McCracken, 1988).

This study included five students who had repeatedly been served in the alternative school setting. The group consisted of three female and two male students with three at the ninth grade level and two at the eighth grade level. One student was certified to receive special education services. Interviews were also done with the alternative school administrator and two alternative school teachers as well as four regular school principals and seven regular school teachers. Permission was obtained from the superintendent of schools, the director of the alternative program, and parents and students for participation in the study (Appendix A). Confidentiality of all information was assured

Data Collection

I chose to use multiple methods of collecting data. "Methodological triangulation combines dissimilar methods such as interviews, observations, and physical evidence to study the same unit" (Merriam, 1988, p. 69). I used both structured and semi-structured interviews with some explanation and flexibility with all participants (Appendix B). Probes, as defined by Merriam (1988) as an adjustment throughout the interview, were

used as discussion of a question often led to further information and insight. Student records were examined to gain insight into past academic performances and disciplinary reports were used to determine patterns of behavior and consequences or interventions used by the school. The functional behavior assessment interviews for students, parents, and teachers were also used to determine factors preceding behaviors. These questions are part of the assessment interview used by teachers for writing behavioral plans for individual students (Appendix C).

Data were also collected through participant observations in the alternative school setting. The placement of students back in the regular school program during the course of the study allowed me to observe and compare both settings. Observations were done with minimal disruption to the learning environment. Observations included academic activities, peer interactions, behavior problems, and resources used by the students such as counseling or contact with any outside support resources. Information was also gathered regarding transition plans for students when moved between the two placements.

I secured an auditor to examine and report on the indexing process to assure validation. The auditor's role can be described as keeping the investigator accountable for valid interpretations of the data. I requested the services of Dr. Rick Osborn, Assistant Dean for Cross Disciplinary Studies at East Tennessee State University to serve in this role. An audit agreement is listed in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, and recombining data (Yin, 1994). Merriam (1998) describes data collection and data analysis as a simultaneous act. The participants' responses were analyzed using qualitative analysis procedures. "Data analysis is the process of making sense out of data including consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read" (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). Analyzing qualitative data means the researcher takes general statements and searches for relationships among the different categories. Concepts are indicated by data (Merriam, 1998).

Analysis in this study began with the collection of records of field contacts and summarizing the data collected from each observation and interview. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) categorize case study data analysis into three types: interpretational analysis, structural analysis, and reflective analysis. All three were used in this study.

Interpretational analysis was used to examine the data in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns among the students in the study. Coding was used to fit the information into categories. The discovery of related themes further categorized the data. Structural analysis was used to identify patterns especially in conversation analysis. This was an important aspect of the study in observing interactions between students and adults in the school setting. The use of reflective analysis allowed me to rely on intuition and judgment in order to evaluate the at-risk student in the alternative school setting. This is an important aspect of descriptive analysis in qualitative research (Gall et al., 1996). Both etic, the researcher's viewpoint, and emic, the participant's viewpoint, were used in data

analysis.

Triangulation was achieved through the multiple methods of observations, interviews, and record analysis. Merriam (1998) emphasized the use of triangulation as a way of indicating internal validity and reliability of the study. It is seen as a strength of the case study/qualitative approach (Merriam, 1988). Other strategies to ensure internal validity included long term observation and use of peer examination. Dependability and trustworthiness are tied to validity and may be reached through a variety of qualitative measures (Jorgensen, 1989). Reliability, or the consistency of results, was ensured by use of the external auditor and my previous experiences which impacted the choice of research methodology. As an educator who has had experience working with at-risk students both in a special education classroom and as a guidance counselor in a regular school and an alternative school, I was experienced at interacting with at-risk students and the alternative setting. Merriam (1988) describes the characteristics of a good qualitative researcher as one who is sensitive, who shows empathy which is the foundation of rapport, and who is able to listen. These characteristics of a good qualitative researcher are synonymous with the characteristics of a good counselor.

Ample description must be provided by the researcher for analysis of the learning environment and the student interactions within the environment. These data culminated in a case study of aspects of serving at-risk students in both the regular and alternative school settings based on perceptions of students and staff members. Yin (1994) defined the case study design as being particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context. This case study provided insight

into the factors that put these students at risk including their school history, academic achievement, and disciplinary problems as well as their perceptions of contributing factors to their dislike of school or lack of success in school. Interview data comprising the case study were transcribed using a transcriptionist. Information was then coded and divided into categories. Similarities and differences among the categories were examined to discover major themes and patterns. Generalizability is limited to the students and the alternative setting involved in the study. However, conclusions could be drawn for further study of similar alternative school settings as methods of intervention for at-risk students.

Summary

This study was conducted in an alternative school setting serving students in grades six through 12. Five students being served in the alternative school were chosen as participants as well as teachers and administrators in both the regular and alternative school settings. A qualitative case study design was the chosen research design. Information was provided about the methods of collecting and analyzing the data.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

I investigated effective ways of providing for at-risk students who are continuously referred from the regular school program to the alternative school program. To obtain information, interviews were conducted with students to determine student issues, disciplinary problems in school, and perceptions of both the regular school and the alternative school programs. A functional behavior assessment interview was done to compare student, parent, and teacher perceptions of disciplinary problems encountered in school by the student. Interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators in both school settings. To ensure confidentiality, information was provided without using student names. Information was clustered with individual stories and quotes.

Within this chapter, results of data collection and discussion of the analysis is presented. I have attempted to portray pictures of the students' thoughts and feelings related to school and their placement in the alternative school setting. Through interviews with school personnel, I hoped to discover what the school system might implement to prevent the students from continuing to repeatedly be placed outside the regular school program.

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The Alternative School Setting

The Tennessee Legislature, in passing Section 41 of the Education Improvement Act of 1991, required that alternative programs be available in grades seven through 12 for students who were suspended or expelled because of disruptive behavior. Section three of Public Chapter 871 gives the following responsibilities to the State Board of Education: "The State Board of Education should provide a curriculum for alternative schools to ensure students receive specialized attention needed to reform students to prevent them from being repeat offenders" (Tennessee State Department of Education).

I sought to determine the reason some students repeatedly are placed in the alternative school setting using an alternative school located in Tennessee. The alternative school serves four high schools and 11 elementary schools (K - 8) and is housed on a separate campus from the regular school settings. Students served at the alternative school are provided transportation by the regular school. The alternative school opened in fall 1995 to serve as an option to students facing suspension or expulsion. It serves students in grades six through 12 with an average daily population of 36.

The alternative school is based on the premise of helping elementary and secondary students who are exhibiting serious discipline problems to improve their behavior and become academically successful. There are four objectives of the program: 1) To improve discipline in the schools by providing an alternative for those students who are having adjustment problems in traditional settings, 2) To provide an educational opportunity for disruptive students to continue their studies and earn credits, 3) To modify behavior patterns to the extent that disruptive students can return to traditional school settings, 4)

To guide each student in the development of a greater respect for themselves, their peers, authority figures, and the importance of learning. Stringent rules are in place with no misbehavior allowed. Students placed in the alternative school are not allowed to participate in extra curricular activities at their home school. The duration of assignment to the alternative school may range from a minimum of one day to a maximum of one school year based on offense and circumstances that are considered zero tolerance. Short-term students are referred to as transients and long-term students are referred to as permanents.

The program is funded through the Better Education Program (BEP) with an estimated yearly expenditure of $170,000.00 with a per student expenditure of $642.00. This sum includes school utilities and salary and benefits for one administrator, two full-time teachers, one clerical worker, and one teacher's assistant. The curriculum is a continuation of the regular school including standardized testing requirements of the home school.

Table 1 indicates the number of students served since the alternative school's inception in 1995. It was assumed by the director that the number of students placed in the alternative school dropped from the 1996-97 school year to the 1997-98 school year due to regular schools hiring teaching assistants to provide in-school suspension programs.

TABLE 1

YEARLY NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED IN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

School Year	Number of Students Served
1995-96	503
1996-97	485
1997-98	280
1998-99	248

Reports indicate the majority of long-term placements for students is due to fighting, truancy, continuous disruptive behavior, and zero tolerance offenses. Short term placements are usually due to violation of the tobacco policy, class disturbance, tardiness, profanity, and disrespect. The end of year report for the 1997-98 school year for the alternative school in the study indicated that approximately 90% of the students in attendance had attended previously.

Students who are to be placed at the alternative school for a short amount of time are referred by the home school principal with parent notification. To review and evaluate a student to be considered for permanent placement, a staffing is held that usually includes the student, parent(s), home school principal, alternative school principal, and a special education teacher when appropriate. Students who have been expelled for zero tolerance offenses are referred through the superintendent of schools.

Student Participants

The five student participants in this study were placed in the alternative school during the spring 1999 school term. At the beginning of the study, three students were expected to remain in the program until the end of the term and two were placed in the alternative school with plans to return to the regular school program at the end of six weeks. The two students who went back to the regular program were again placed in the alternative school program before the term ended.

All five students had been placed in the alternative program prior to this term. Table 2 indicates their history with the program since it began in the 1995-96 school year. The amount of time these students were placed in the program varied from 3 days to a full school term or longer.

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF TIMES PLACED IN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

Students	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
#1			2	1
#2	1			1
#3			2	2
#4	3	1	1	2
#5	1	2	1	3

Classroom Observations

I spent extensive time with these five students engaging in both interviews and classroom observations. Two of the students returned to the regular program during the study allowing me to observe both the alternative school setting and the regular school setting.

Alternative School Setting

I spent time observing in both the elementary and high school classrooms at the alternative school program. The elementary classroom which serves students in grades six through eight changed structurally over the course of my observations. At the beginning of the spring term, the room was very large with a wide open space in the middle except for a very small table with two chairs. The teacher's work station was on one side. Students were placed around the outer walls of the room in cubicles partitioned with three sides covered and the open side facing the center of the room. This gave the teacher visibility of each student, but with the students facing the wall, they were observed from the back. The average number of students in this classroom is approximately 15 but the numbers ranged from nine to a maximum of 20.

During one observation, three of the nine students present that day were completely enclosed in a cubicle with a wooden partition covering the fourth side. When I inquired what determined being completely enclosed in a cubicle, I was told those students completely enclosed were repeaters and those not completely enclosed were first time students. Of the two elementary students in my study, one was completely enclosed in the

cubicle and the other was in the regular three-sided cubicle.

Approximately 12 weeks into the term, a new assistant was hired for the elementary classroom and the permanent students were separated from the temporary or transient students. A wooden barrier was erected in the middle of the classroom with permanent students being placed in the partitioned area facing the teacher's desk with their desks placed in a row more like a regular classroom. This enabled the teacher to conduct class similar to the regular school while the assistant worked with the transient students who were still placed in cubicles facing the wall. A diagram of the classroom is shown in Appendix E.

Throughout the observations, students were either working at their desks on work sent from the home school or work assigned by the alternative school teacher. Sometimes students were reading a book and occasionally I would see a student with his/her head down on the desk. A reading center was available with materials for students to use after completing assignments. Students would raise their hands for assistance and come up to the center table for help from the teacher or the teacher's assistant.

Classroom rules were posted on the wall inside each cubicle so students saw them when looking straight ahead toward the wall. The classroom was devoid of decoration other than around the teacher's desk where there were a few posters. Between the teacher's desk and a cabinet with a sink was a computer center. Permanently placed students do not use the computer but transient students who have assignments requiring the computer are allowed to do those assignments on the computer. There are no clocks on the wall as pointed out by the teacher, "so students will not sit and watch the clock".

Activities observed included the teacher handing back papers and students working independently. When students questioned a decision made by the teacher the response was "you are here for punishment not for rewards". During one observation, a student was denied access to the computer and reminded the teacher that another student had been allowed to use it. He accused the teacher of favoritism by saying, "you just don't like me." The teacher ignored the comment.

The two eighth grade students who participated in the study were observed several times. One student was in a completely enclosed cubicle and worked independently with help from the teacher as needed. During the interviews when asked about working in the cubicle she complained stating, "I hate it down here. It's boring. All you do is sit in a hole and do work all day." She later said she didn't mind being in the cubicle where the teacher could not see her because she could put her head down and sleep. After six weeks, this student returned to a regular school program; however, she chose to attend a different school from the one she attended prior to being placed in the alternative program. Nonetheless, she was placed back in the alternative program after a few short weeks. During all the observations her seating arrangement remained the same. The other eighth grade student in the study remained the entire term and moved from working in a cubicle to the new section set up more like the regular classroom. This student always appeared focused and seemed to work well independently. When finished with her assignments, she would read. She stated during the interviews that reading was something she really enjoyed doing during her free time. This student indicated how well she felt she was doing in terms of her grades since being placed at the alternative school because she was

able to focus on her work and complete assignments without the distraction of talking and socializing with her friends.

My visits yielded time for discussion with the teacher in the program and I learned that he has several areas of certification including elementary, special education, supervision, and a couple of high school areas of endorsement. He was very grateful for the addition of the assistant in his classroom because he and the high school teacher had to share an assistant prior to implementation of this new position. The director of the program indicated that a request had been made to retain the assistant's position for next school year; however, the school board has not yet voted on this decision.

The other component of the alternative school is the high school program for students in grades nine through 12. The average daily number of students in attendance is 11 but numbers ranged from six to 16. This classroom is divided into two halves with a partition dividing the room except for a teacher's desk with walk space behind it. This allows the teacher to be at her desk and observe both halves of the classroom. One side of the room is for temporary or short term students and the other side is for students placed there for an extended period of time. A diagram of the classroom is shown in Appendix E.

The atmosphere of the room was very inviting. Although the room was divided into individual cubicles, there was a table and chair in each cubicle with lots of room for high school sized students and all their materials. The dividers were painted bright purple and the tables were a combination of colors that matched beautifully. Some of the cubicles had computers on the table.

Each cubicle had rules of the classroom posted as well as poems and inspirational

quotes. One quote said, "It is wise to direct your anger toward problems - not people; to focus your energies on answers not excuses" by William Arthur Ward. I found this very appropriate because conflict and fighting are often reasons students are sent to the alternative school. There were large maps on the wall and several posters decorated the side of the room with the transient students. The wall dividing the two rooms was decorated with "got milk" pictures on the side with permanent students. There were also photographs of students from last term displaying projects made for home economics class and a large clock on the wall. There were several bookshelves with books.

A teacher's assistant works on the side of the classroom with temporary or transient students and the teacher works with the permanent students. Temporary students work independently in cubicles but permanent students are sometimes pulled to the table to do group work. If several students are working in the same class, they will sometimes watch a film or do a project related to the class. The high school teacher has certification in the areas of special education and secondary science, biology, and government.

One of the high school students in my study was scheduled to return to the home high school at the end of the first six weeks and the other two were placed in the alternative program for the entire term. These students seemed to work well independently while I observed. One student was sometimes disinterested and lethargic. This student was described by the teacher as very apathetic and was described by the home school administrator as being unmotivated in school. I did observe him with his head down or looking out the window and not doing his work. The teacher tried to involve

him in group work with other students at the table when possible.

Regular Classroom Setting

During the term, one of the eighth grade students and one of the ninth grade students returned to the regular school program. This allowed me to observe and make comparisons between the settings. I first observed a high school English class. The class was actually held in a mathematics classroom due to lack of space so the room was decorated with a math theme as well as some seasonal decorations. There were 18 students in a typical classroom setting with rows of desks. Students discussed and then watched Act II of the play *Julius Caesar*. Although some students were more involved and attentive than others and one student put his head down for a short time, overall the students behaved very well and seemed interested in the subject matter. I also observed a driver's education class which was held in the cafeteria due to heating problems on the gymnasium stage where it usually meets. Class was in session because it was a scheduled test day rather than a driving day. The teacher reviewed and then passed out the test. Following the test, there was a discussion about insurance. The student I observed sat with other students and talked and socialized when appropriate but worked quietly and followed directions as needed.

At the elementary level, I observed an eighth grade English class although the student in my study was not in the class that day. I did, however, observe the class which consisted of 20 students engaged in a language arts lesson on word origins. Again, this was a typical classroom with lots of decorations such as maps, posters, classroom rules,

and a calendar. The student in my study had been placed on the front seat of the second row which was in close proximity to the teacher's desk. The teacher reported having no difficulty from the student during class time.

The next time I planned to observe, the student had been placed in the in-school suspension class for threatening another student. This was held in the dressing room next to the gymnasium. In-school suspension was held three days a week by a teacher's assistant. The room was tiled, with benches and storage for athletic equipment against one wall with the teacher's table against the equipment serving as a divider from the students. The storage section was really a mess with things such as coat hangers, ladders, a coat rack, and other things all piled together with the athletic equipment. The wall opposite the teacher's table had eight cubicles with students who had barriers on three sides with their backs toward the teacher. There were nine students the day I observed with all but two placed in cubicles. One student was seated at a desk near the teacher's table and the other was seated at the teacher's table.

The wall opposite the doorway has two bathroom stalls, a sink, and a shower stall that is filled with football equipment. The bathrooms are not used by students during the day but are used by team members during ball season.

The student I observed had an assignment sheet on which the teacher assistant checked off each assignment as it was completed. I was told that if a student finishes all the assignments before the end of the day they send for more work. The student I observed was placed in the in-school suspension class for three days. She sat in a cubicle and worked on a science assignment on tornadoes. She got out of her seat to ask for help

from the teacher's assistant. Following the completion of the science assignment, she had

only one more assignment listed and it was just approximately 10:30 in the morning. She

asked the assistant if she could read a library book when she completed all her

assignments.

The arrangement of the classroom was similar to the alternative program although

the room was very small and the atmosphere wasn't as pleasant. The assistant seemed

very conscientious in terms of work completion and staying on task.

Student Interviews

It is important in the interview to establish trust, respect, good rapport, and a good

relationship (Benjamin, 1981). During the approximately 15 weeks I spent with these

students, I believe respect, rapport, and a good working relationship were established.

The students appeared to feel comfortable sharing information with me and some even

asked me questions and wanted to chat when our interviews had ended. There was one

student who was less responsive than the others during the interviews. I gained a great

deal of insight into these students' lives and their perceptions of school and the difficulties

they have encountered in school.

Student Issues

Home environments are typically a contributing factor in a student's approach to

learning. Morrow (1987) describes basic nurture and protection by adults as necessary for

healthy development in children. All five students in the study were from single-parent

families with some living with their mom, some living with their dad, and one with another

relative rather than either parent. Two of the students had no contact with the other

parent and the others had minimal contact. Relationships with siblings were mixed with

some being in the same house as the student and others living with the other parent or

even other relatives.

Some of the students were quite graphic in their description of their parents. One

student said,

> "Well, my mom and dad got a divorce when I was three. He beat her and he came
>
> back to her three months later and he beat her all the time. All he does is get
>
> drunk all the time."

Patterson (1982) concluded that adolescents who regularly engage in at-risk

behaviors are more likely to come from families with inept parenting styles. One student

indicated that he had changed schools several times which I concluded to mean his family

had moved several times until he described the number of times he had moved back and

forth between his two parents which included several ex-step parents in the description.

When asked why he moved from his mom's house the last time, he replied, "She kicked

me out of the house because I smoked pot all the time and done whatever I wanted." In

describing her school career, another student said,

> "I went to one school for kindergarten, first, and second grade, then because we
>
> moved, I went to a different school for third, fourth, fifth, and part of sixth grade,
>
> then we moved again and I went to another school."

She indicated it was hard changing schools, leaving her friends, and starting over in a new

school so often.

In discussing life stressors, only one student did not talk about the divorce of his/her parents but mentioned the death of a grandparent instead. Actually, one of the students described her parents as never having been married and explained that her father had moved between her mom and her step-mom several times resulting in the birth of her and her two brothers. He finally married the step-mom when her mom refused to take him back.

Despite the difficult circumstances, most of the students indicated they had family members they felt close to and who listened to them and helped them with their problems. Most, however, did not describe their caretakers as showing an interest in their friends and in the activities that are important to them. One student said, "My dad doesn't ask where I was at or about the kids I was with." Another student said her mom wasn't interested "because my friends are older and always get in trouble."

In addition to home factors, all the students were or had been involved with the legal system. Offenses ranged from possession of alcohol or drugs at school to theft. By the end of the school term, the one student who was not on probation during my contact with the students had encountered legal problems again. The students described probation as including such things as house arrest, weekly meetings with a probation officer, drug testing, and alcohol and drug classes or rehabilitation classes.

It is often assumed that students' behavior is strongly influenced by peer pressure. Ingersoll and Orr (1988) indicate that when at-risk behavior is sanctioned and expected by the peer culture, it is more likely the individual adolescent will engage in that behavior.

Two of the students indicated peer pressure as a factor in the decision to use tobacco, alcohol, and drugs or leave school without permission; but the others indicated they didn't need to be pressured because they would do it on their own if they wanted to and one indicated she felt no pressure from her friends. In discussing their friends' attitudes toward school, all five students said some of their friends made good grades but they didn't like school.

Discipline

The students in the study were selected because they had repeatedly been placed outside the regular school program. Most had experienced detention, in-school suspension, and even out of school suspension as disciplinary measures in the past. As indicated by Table 2, presented earlier in the chapter, all the students had been placed in the alternative school prior to the study. Reasons for placement in the program during the school term in which the study took place included possession of marijuana, possession and consumption of alcohol on school grounds, fighting and being unable to get along with others, and leaving school without permission. Disciplinary records for the school year indicated some of these students had few or even isolated incidents and other students had a very long report of inappropriate behaviors including class disturbance, profanity, refusal to cooperate, and disrespect to teachers and administrators. Skiba and Peterson (1999) report fighting among students to be the single most frequent reason for suspension with disrespect, disobedience, tardiness, and truancy also being common reasons for suspension. All the students agreed their behavior was disruptive to others in

the classroom.

Students in the study indicated they had a hard time keeping their minds on their school work for various reasons such as their own or others talking, their mind being on something else, or feeling that the work was too hard. They all indicated they often did not follow the teacher's directions but did whatever they wanted instead. One student described his behavior,

"In fifth grade, I got in trouble all the time and got sent up to the office all of the time and that never did no good. They gave me in-school. In seventh grade, I got in trouble for making teachers mad and I got after-school everyday and after two or three weeks I got suspended for telling the teachers it sucked. In eighth grade, I got after-school all the time for not doing my work, but I never went to them."

In discussing their behavior in school and reasons for being placed in the alternative school, all the students indicated they didn't consider the alternative school as a bad or negative consequence. They really didn't mind being placed in the program and in fact, although they missed their friends and were excluded from school activities, they preferred being in the alternative program because their grades improved and they stayed out of trouble. From their perspective, the alternative school provides a different school climate that seems comfortable to the student who prefers a smaller class size, a closer relationship with the adults in school, and more individualized help with academics. When asked what might prevent the students from returning to the alternative school, responses included, "they would have to separate every one of the kids and keep them apart" and "if we done something fun once in a while I don't think I would be down here, it is just

boring in class". The other students said nothing could be done to prevent their return to the program. One said, "If I am going to do it, I am going to do it no matter what they try to do." When asked about progress made while attending the program, one girl stated, "I haven't made any progress, I keep coming back."

Perceptions of School

Teeters (1990) asserts that alternative school students are especially perceptive. If they sense a teacher does not care about them, they will not care. These students displayed a general dislike of school and a wish to discontinue attending school. They all felt teachers and administrators are sometimes unfair because certain students who were "their picks" or the good students didn't tend to get in trouble even when they did something wrong. One student expressed the opinion that if a student had money or the school personnel knew the student's parents, there was a difference in treatment of that student. One student stated, "People who make better grades can talk whenever they want, some of us don't make good grades so teachers think they can do more than we can." Another student said,

> "Some of the teachers don't like me. Like this one, I was doing a test and she graded it and gave me a 60 and I told her it was wrong because she went over the answers with us and I had two more right and it was a 70. She said I could have a zero. I didn't like that a bit."

Students also indicated there was inconsistency in that a student could get away with something in one teacher's class but couldn't in another teacher's class. One student

described an incident in which a teacher saw a student smoking and he got in trouble and the next day the same teacher saw another student smoking and nothing was said to that student. One student expressed, "If teachers weren't so mean and so hard on kids some kids would want to go to class, if the teachers were nicer the kids would be nicer and do what they ask sometimes." The students did indicate, however, that they got along with certain teachers in the regular school and all but one got along well with the alternative school teacher.

The students' opinion of a good teacher included one who was nice, helped them with their work especially when they didn't understand something, and who listened and talked to kids about their problems. One student stated that the alternative school teacher will, "keep going over and over it until I finally get it." Another student stated, "The teacher here explains things and helps me with my work." One boy said his best teacher relationship was with a teacher who told him he trusted him. He said this in a way that led me to believe that very few if any people in his life had ever made him feel that way before.

In comparing the regular school setting and the alternative school setting, students liked having free time and spending time with their friends at the regular school but generally disliked the teachers and the amount of work and homework required. One student who felt positive about her alternative school experience said, "The teachers at the regular school don't teach you right. They'll give you an assignment and they won't go over it or they won't teach you good enough." At the alternative school, all but one student reported liking their teacher. They indicated liking having extra help with their

work but disliking the lack of freedom to talk and the boredom. They thought the amount of work required as well as the academic level was different. There was more work given but it was easier and there was no homework required. One of the alternative school teachers said the students weren't given homework because they have six hours of straight work time and he felt that was plenty. One of the students stated, "I used to worry about my grades, but down here I don't really have to because if we don't make above an eighty, we get to redo it."

While discussing "belonging" in school, the students gave mixed responses concerning the regular school. Three students indicated they didn't fit in at the regular school but two students said they felt they did fit in. When discussing her peers' relationship to her, one girl said, "The ones that never get in trouble, I guess don't like me but the ones that do get in trouble probably like me better than some." One girl said she and another girl were the most popular girls in their class. Four students felt a sense of belonging at the alternative school. They all indicated they got along well with most of the students in the regular school and the alternative school but indicated the students at the alternative school weren't as "snooty" or "goody-goody", meaning these students never get into trouble.

Most of the students thought the courses offered in school should not be changed but there should be more of a differentiation for students who are going to college and those who want to learn skills or attend vocational classes. If attendance in school was not mandated, only one student said she would continue to attend and graduate. Her response to not finishing school was, "I would not be happy. I have to have my high

school graduation." The others hope to get a GED and get a job. Two students expressed an interest in college. Their goals included money, a good job, getting a GED and having children. Most associated success with graduating and having a good paying job.

The lack of interest in school was evident in the attendance record of some of the students. Others who had a better attendance record say it was because their parents made them go to school. One student said her attendance was good in lower grades when her mom took her to school but as she got older and started riding the bus, she stayed home more after her mom had left for work and didn't know she had not gone to school. Table 3 shows the attendance records for these students.

TABLE 3

NUMBER OF DAYS REPORTED ABSENT

Student	1998-99	1997-98	1996-97	1995-96	1994-95	1993-94
#1	13	11	4	1	6	9
#2	4	1	4	1	*	*
#3	10	15	19	7	11	10
#4	15	12	25	19	16	20
#5	46	4	24	7	10	22

* (Student did not attend school system)

The rate of attendance was widespread with some students from year to year and also varied among students. Three of the five students had repeated a grade in school.

Functional Behavior Assessment Interview

A functional behavior assessment interview was conducted with each student. This included an interview with the student, a parent, and a teacher. The purpose of the functional assessment is to determine the relationship between events in the student's environment and the occurrence of problem behaviors. This information can be used to build effective behavior support plans (Memorandum: Tennessee State Department of Education Division of Special Education, 1999) and should be done when a student's academic progress is impeded by his/her behavior.

Skiba, Waldron, Bahammde, and Michalek (1998) indicate that inherent in individualized intervention plans are two central assumptions of functional assessment. First, behavior serves as a communicative function with the goal of understanding the context of behavior. Second, the understanding of the causes and conditions maintaining disruptive or inappropriate behavior can be used to understand and teach replacement behaviors. Data are collected about the behavior and an attempt made to better understand the gap between what the student is currently doing and what we expect him/her to do. The goal of the behavior plan is to ensure new learning that will allow the student to succeed in the academic environment.

A functional behavior assessment interview was done on each of the five students in the study to compare behavior concerns of the student, the parent, and the teacher.

Frymier (1992) says comprehending who is at risk and what he/she is like can be ascertained only by studying teachers' perceptions of children and the information teachers have about each child. Both the teacher and parent interviews provided information about their biggest concern in terms of student behavior, its frequency and duration, as well as the type of response the person uses with the student. Their concerns included disruptive talking and disrespect, poor attitude, lack of motivation, leaving school without permission, and fighting or not getting along with others. Student information included the behavior the student considered to be their biggest problem in school, what caused the problem, what types of rewards the student would consider working for if appropriate behavior was exhibited and what aspects of the school the student liked and disliked. The only disagreement in comparing the responses was a female student whose teacher agreed with her that her biggest problem was talking in the classroom but her mother indicated it was her grades. Responses from parents to these problems included encouragement, grounding the student from privileges, and expressing authority verbally. Teacher responses included use of authority, pairing students for peer and group work as a motivator, and following disciplinary procedures through the use of office referral.

Each student responded differently in terms of likes and dislikes related to school. Two of the five students disliked almost all school subjects, one described the same number of courses she liked and disliked, and one indicated liking most subjects with the exception of math. All the students indicated a desire to work for rewards such as free time, parties, and school trips. One student described the problem this way, "We usually have this thing, if we make the A or B Honor Roll, we get to go swimming at the YMCA

or something. I have never really made all those good grades to get to go." These are not the students who usually earn these types of rewards.

When used by the school system, the functional assessment leads to the formation of a behavior plan that uses the information gained from students, parents, and teachers to help prevent behaviors from repeatedly occurring with students. Because it was not the purpose of my research, I did not actually write a behavior plan for the students.

School Staff Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the director and two teachers of the alternative school. In the regular school program, principals and teachers were interviewed at both the secondary and elementary levels.

Alternative School

The alternative school teachers and director described their students as behavior problems ranging from classroom disturbance and fighting to violation of the tobacco, alcohol, and drug policy. They have had students in the program who were there for assault, bringing knives to school, and making bomb threats. They indicated the same students are often sent to their facility repeatedly because they are behind academically, bored, and continuously misbehave to the point that administrators in the regular schools don't know what else to do with them. One teacher described them as, "troublemakers, continual behavior problems, and the root of the behavior problems lie in the fact that they cannot get along with authority". The director of the program stated the opinion that

some students enjoy being there because it is a secure environment in which they don't have to compete with other students. They like having their own area and their own space. "They feel a part of the school because they are among their own."

The staff sees the purpose of the program as punishment although they do feel there is some remediation involved academically. Many of the students are certified to receive special education services and many others are behind academically and the chance to have a smaller teacher/student ratio is beneficial. The one-on-one attention helps the students academically. It is also the reason some students like being in the alternative school program. Almost all of the students in the study like the alternative placement and the teacher better than the regular school.

All three staff members view the alternative program as being effective with students. They feel the structure and student awareness of expectations play a big role in its effectiveness. Their discipline problems are minimal because the students have little to no opportunity for discipline problems. Although the teachers describe it as very boring and a punishment because the students miss their friends and school activities, they consider it a good alternative to expulsion and one teacher described it as a chance for the students to mature. They also realize that it is seen as a way to keep these students from disrupting the regular program and keep them "out of someone else's hair".

Concerns of the staff include the alternative program's becoming a dumping ground for students, their lack of resources, and the lack of a good transition plan when the students go back into the regular program. They think the students suffer academically because rather than being in the classroom with a teacher who specializes in

a subject area, they are in a classroom where everyone may be working on a different subject. They also think there is a need for a counselor or social worker who will work with the remediation of behavior for these students and will aid in effective transition back into the classroom rather than the student being at the alternative school one day and in the regular classroom the next day. They describe the transition as sending the students' grades back to the regular school and communicating through paperwork. Everett (1991) says even though temporary relief for the teacher to work with students who show more desire to learn is welcomed, when the troubled student returns and has not been rehabilitated and is further behind academically, this only makes an already critical situation even worse. One teacher expressed a wish for family counseling. She said,

"The students don't have goals partly because they don't have parents who have goals and their parents don't have goals for them. A lot of that is because they don't see a better life. They are perfectly content with what they have."

The alternative school has had two part-time counselors in the past as well as a contract with a mental health counselor for students with special education certification. They also signed a Partners in Education agreement with the county sheriff's department that allowed a police officer to visit weekly and offer programs and counsel with the students. All of these programs seemed to be effective but they have all been short term and are no longer in place. One of the area high schools sends their School Resource Officer to the alternative school periodically.

<u>Regular School</u>

Teachers and administrators in the regular school program define the at-risk student in terms of attendance, academics, getting along with others, retention, and the home environment. These students can't really see the need or how education is going to benefit them. One administrator defined this type of student as, "a student who begins missing school, is not motivated, is misplaced, is lost in class, is frustrated, and who is from a single parent family or is a latch-key kid". A teacher added, "this type of student needs a lot of attention but most of the time what they receive is negative". These students were considered to be a very small percentage of the total school population.

Those staff members interviewed indicated that the most prevalent discipline problems are fairly minor offenses. The 1999 Kappan Report reported the greatest percent of teachers (69%) say alcohol is a fairly serious problem, while teachers in small towns view smoking as a more serious problem (Langdon, 1999). Although use of tobacco products was cited as prevalent among students, the use of drugs and alcohol was minimal. The biggest concerns the teachers cited were not completing assignments, tardiness, apathy, lack of motivation, vulgar language, talking in class, and lack of respect. Teachers reported setting and enforcing classroom rules to deter behavior problems in the classroom. One teacher said,

> "Teachers in the classroom should make sure the rules are clearly stated and understood by students the very first day; a teacher can't change the rules as the semester goes on because that is not fair to the students. Make sure the students know exactly what is going on and what is expected of them and exactly what the

consequences are if they violate those rules."

The administrators adhere to school board policy and the guidelines for zero tolerance in dealing with discipline problems.

Some schools are implementing a wide variety of measures to help students and to prevent chronic discipline problems. These include use of strike systems in which a strike or warning is given for misbehavior and a certain number of strikes results in loss of privileges or other consequences, parent conferences, detention, and in-school suspension. One school is using a Title I position to implement behavior management as well as other programs for students with problem behaviors. Most administrators in the study prefer the use of the alternative school program as a last resort for students or when expulsion leads to that recommendation for zero tolerance offenses.

Parent involvement is strongly encouraged in the schools. In some schools, parents are welcome to work as assistants and help with classroom activities as well as being informed of school events through newsletters. Parents are informed of student progress through Individualized Education Program meetings, progress reports, and work sent home to be signed by parents. Most school staff, however, stated that parent involvement usually consists of the same parents in most activities and is more evident with open house, sporting events, and when their child is involved in a school program or activity.

Feeling connected to the school is considered important by school staff and is encouraged through extracurricular activities, sports, team building activities, clubs, student council, and school improvement committees. One administrator stated, "I think

if they get to make some choices that they feel like they are a part of the school."
However, the amount of decision making varied. Staff members' opinions concerning
student decision making was mixed with one teacher indicating there were some decisions
students had no business making. Others included students in school improvement
committees and student council which allows for student input.

Perceptions of Use of the Alternative School

The administrators and teachers interviewed had mixed reactions about the
effectiveness of the alternative program for students. Their perceptions of the
effectiveness of the program were aimed more for other students left in the regular
program than for the students who attend the alternative program. One administrator
said, "It removes a disruptive student from that environment but it does not benefit the
student who actually goes. I don't think they are taught a lesson while they are there."
However another stated, "Sometimes it is that one student who dictates what it takes to
cause such an uproar in that whole room that no kid can function very well." Another
teacher added that it benefits the ones not going because it shows there is a consequence
for their actions.

Other concerns were the loss of teacher instruction and students getting behind
academically. One teacher concern was the fact that the students do their work
independently and a lot is learned in class that is not written. Also, she questioned
whether placing the same type of kids together, students with similar inappropriate
behaviors, were helped or harmed by the process. Several staff members were concerned

that students will often return from the alternative program and indicate a wish to return.

One teacher theorized this may be a result of these students having so much excess

baggage that it is the one place they feel they have control. Concern was expressed for

students returning from the alternative program and not having completed the

assignments. Administrators were concerned about transportation to and from the

alternative program and the fact that elementary students are placed on a bus with high

school students as well as having a waiting period at the high school before catching the

bus.

The transition or lack of a transition plan for these students was a repeated

concern. Most of the teachers were unaware of any plans being in place. One

administrator suggested the need for a representative from the home school and one from

the alternative school to work together in developing a transition plan for a student and

then continuing to work together for the length of time needed for each student.

Resources reported as needed in addition to transitional personnel and plans

included a behavior specialist, more counselors, the implementation of service learning to

help the students be more self sufficient, and more academic resources for the alternative

program. One administrator added the need for in-depth counseling, a self-profile for each

student, and testing as part of the intervention to transition students back into the regular

program. The suggestion was made for a tougher judicial system and an intervention

beyond the alternative program for those students who don't seem successful being served

in the alternative program. One statement concerning the effectiveness of the program

was,

"No, it isn't effective because it isn't therapeutic. There needs to be counseling because a lot of the students are repeat offenders and they go out of the school environment but there is nothing there except to sit and do assignments."

Teachers and administrators discussed benefits of the program as well as concerns. These benefits included having an alternative to expulsion which allows the students to continue their education and being taught that attendance is important. A teacher described it as a time out for the student from the usual environment. Another teacher considered it effective because, "some students are just really and truly not capable of handling large schools or working with others in a big situation; and being with their peers is rewarding."

The goal of the alternative program as stated in the description is to provide an educational opportunity for disruptive students to continue their studies and to modify behavior patterns to the extent that disruptive students can return to the traditional setting. Administrators expressed mixed feelings about the accomplishment of this goal. In discussing whether the alternative program served to punish or remediate students, the following comment was made:

"I don't think it serves as remediation at all and I don't know that it really punishes. I think what it does is remove those students from an environment and it keeps peace at home. I don't see how it changes the behavior because there is really no one there that is dealing with that child and trying to get that child to understand what the behaviors were and why certain behaviors were

not appropriate and what should have been done instead of those behaviors."

Others considered it punishment because it removed the students from the regular

program but didn't really cause a behavior change. Some considered it remediation

because students received more individual help with the academic work.

Summary

Chapter 4 has presented a summary of the results of the analyzed data of this case

study. Themes were presented that emerged from interviews, observations, and analysis

of school cumulative records. The study took place during a five-month school term.

Primary data were gathered from interviews with five students placed in an alternative

school setting and interviews with teachers and administrators in both the regular school

and the alternative school. Supporting data were provided by cumulative school records

and the functional behavioral assessment interviews.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to present a summary of the findings of the study, to provide conclusions drawn from the findings, and to provide recommendations for practice and for further research. With the increasing number of at-risk students and the increasing numbers of chronic, more severe discipline problems in our public schools, there is a corresponding increase in frustration for both students and educators. Many of these students are repeatedly placed in "out of class" programs including alternative school placements. These students do not seem to find success in the regular educational program or the alternative school program.

The use of alternative school programs for students has grown steadily since the 1970s. The problem, as researched in this study, is the same students being moved back and forth between the regular school program and the alternative school program throughout the student's school career. This leads to these students' becoming more and more alienated from the regular school program and losing their connection with the regular learning environment. Something needs to be provided for these students to help them find success in the educational system.

A review of the literature describes the characteristics that put students at risk of being unsuccessful in school, having chronic discipline problems in school, and eventually dropping out of school completely. The students in this study demonstrated many of these

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factors including suspension, alcohol and drug use, low grades, absenteeism, dysfunctional families, and frequent changing of schools. Frymier (1992) categorized these factors as personal pain, academic failure, family tragedy, family instability, and family socioeconomic status. All of the students had chronic discipline problems and had been placed in other "out of class" programs such as in-school detention or out of school suspension. All five students had been placed in the alternative school program prior to the semester in which the study was conducted.

The literature provides an overview of the various types of alternative programs, their various components, and their degree of success with students. Raywid (1994) identified three types of alternative schools with Type I as schools of choice, Type II as "last chance programs", and Type III as a school with a remedial focus. The alternative school in this study fits the description of the Type II school because it was punitively oriented.

Although the literature provided a basis for components of an effective regular school program and an effective alternative school program, little evidence was found as to why some students are continuously moved in and out of alternative placements without evidence of positive change. The continuous movement back and forth signifies a need for change in one or both of these educational settings.

The purpose of this study was to determine effective ways of providing for at-risk students who are continuously referred from the regular school program to the alternative school program. This was done through a qualitative case study research method. Data were collected through structured and semi-structured interviews with five students being

served in an alternative school setting. Cumulative school records were also used. Interviews were conducted with administrators and teachers in both the alternative and regular school settings. Interviews were typed and transcribed and then information was coded and divided into categories. These categories yielded themes and patterns of information. Observations of students were also done in both educational settings.

Findings from information gained from students through observations, interviews, and analysis of school records indicated these students have many of the factors that put students at risk of school failure and they have a history of school problems. Most of the students liked the alternative school setting as opposed to the regular school but missed certain aspects of the regular school such as free time, school related activities, and social interaction with their peers. They saw value in the time spent at the alternative school because they stay out of trouble, their grades improve, and they get more individual attention. They did not indicate feeling a stigma about being placed at the alternative school.

Findings also indicated a discrepancy in one of the objectives of the alternative school program for many students. This objective was to modify behavior patterns to the extent that disruptive students can return to the traditional school setting. Some students return to the traditional school setting but for only a short period of time before being referred back to the alternative program. The interviews with administrators and teachers showed a discrepancy in their views of the goals of the alternative program and its effectiveness in meeting these goals. Several teachers believed those who benefitted most were the students left in the regular classroom because the disruptive student has been

removed and the other students see the example of consequences of disruptive behavior.

Many components that are recommended for successfully serving students in an out of

school placement were missing such as counseling, a transition plan to reintegrate students

back into the regular school, and providing students with information to help control and

change behavior such as conflict resolution skills and life skills.

Conclusions

In conducting this study, answers were sought to the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics that identify students at risk?

2. What is the disciplinary history of the students in terms of referral to alternative

placements?

3. What are the characteristics of the regular school environment and the

alternative school environment in terms of meeting these students' needs?

4. What ingredient seems to be missing from either or both settings to help the

students succeed?

At Risk Characteristics

Findings suggest that students do not always fit a stereotypical description of at-

risk students. Although all the students in the study had some of the factors used to

describe at-risk students, the students themselves were individual and unique. In looking

back at Frymier's (1992) categories of personal pain, academic failure and family issues,

all of the students had factors in their lives that fit into one or more of the categories yet it

was impossible not to look at each student individually and not just as at-risk factors or categories.. For example, all five students came from broken homes and were affected by the divorce of their parents and each described different living arrangements and different interactions with their parents. Their parents' jobs were described as blue collar and many of the parents had not completed high school. Most of the students did not like school and with the exception of one student would drop out if possible. All of the students described feeling a sense of unfairness when it came to teachers and administrators and the way things were done in the educational system. Yet, each student described their likes and dislikes about school, themselves, and life in general quite differently. Their academic ability varied from a student who had passed the high school competency test and was hopefully headed toward obtaining a high school diploma to a student with special needs. The things that interest them both in school and out were unique yet they all described a need for acceptance, interaction with their peers, and their desire for school to be fair and not "boring." It was interesting to look at the descriptors in the literature of at-risk students and see which characteristics applied to each individual student in the study.

Disciplinary History

The disciplinary histories varied with each student as well. As shown in Table 2 in Chapter 4, each student had been placed in the alternative school program since its inception in 1995. However the number of times varied with each student. Individual disciplinary records indicated a wide range of reasons for these referrals. Some of the students had long, detailed disciplinary reports that indicated continuous problems in the

classroom and in the school with such things as disrespect for authority and use of bad language or disruption of the learning environment. Others had more isolated incidents such as leaving school grounds, possession of drugs or alcohol on school property, or fighting. Although more serious offenses that fall under zero tolerance, these acts seemed more like a one-time mistake compared to looking at a student's disciplinary record that covered several pages and appeared to show a blatant disregard for authority or the importance of education. Although a pattern was established in being referred to the alternative program, the number of referrals, reasons for referral, and length of time placed in the program were different for each student.

Characteristics of the Regular School Setting

Teachers and administrators in the regular school setting indicate their biggest concerns in terms of student discipline as being non-serious offenses. Student apathy, not completing assignments, vulgar language, and lack of respect are some of their concerns. They think fair and consistent rules are in place in the schools and that students know their expectations and the consequences of violating the rules. One administrator indicated the percentage of students who are chronic discipline problems is very low. The administrators prefer the use of their in-school suspension program as punishment for most students but use the alternative program for students with repeat offenses and consider it useful for students placed there by the superintendent of schools for zero tolerance offenses.

Educators in the regular schools consider student connectedness and student

involvement in the schools important and have clubs, sports, and student recognition programs in place. The regular school programs are also implementing measures such as strike systems, parent conferences, and use of detention as disciplinary measures with students. One or two schools have implemented specific programs for students based on certain criteria. Results of this study indicate these students are not the type who are deterred by strikes leading to consequences for misbehavior or out of class placements and rarely if ever gain rewards such as incentive trips or special recognition. They do not all meet the criteria for special programs that would provide individualized academic instruction and are not involved in the positive aspects of school such as clubs and extra-curricular activities. The regular schools do not have programs in place to meet the needs of this small percentage of students who are apathetic, unmotivated, do not choose to actively participate in school, or who cannot meet high academic standards. Neither do they have a specific plan for successful integration of these students into the regular program after they leave the alternative school. As one teacher said,

"These students can't really see the need or how education is going to benefit them and that no matter how hard they try they seem to fail or come close to failing. They need a lot of attention and do a lot of things to get attention but most of the time, what they receive is negative."

Characteristics of the Alternative School Setting

The alternative school program provides an alternative for students to continue their academics in a separate facility from the regular classroom. The importance of

continued school attendance is enforced and students do not lose academic gains or credits while being placed outside the regular school for disciplinary reasons. A secure classroom environment is provided with small numbers of students thus allowing the teacher to provide individual attention and academic help. The staff at the alternative program are caring and concerned about these students and their progress while at the alternative program. They are realistic in their expectation that many of these students will return to the program again and again.

The alternative program is challenged with the responsibility of continuing the education of these students and providing interventions to change and correct behavior. It is very difficult to meet these challenges with no additional resources beyond the classroom teachers and teacher assistants. It is also difficult to do with limited resources in terms of academic materials and additional courses that are needed in the areas of decision making, conflict resolution, life skills, self-esteem, and career awareness. If the students are repeatedly returning to the alternative program, effective change is not taking place.

One difficulty for the staff at the alternative program is dealing with short-term and long-term students simultaneously. The short-term students are dealt with very strictly in terms of following the rules and often the teacher doesn't get to know the students very well because they are in and out so quickly. The long-term students are treated more like students in a regular school program because the teachers plan activities and try to allow for some student interaction in learning. It is also more difficult to always be strict and unwavering with these students because an attachment is formed and this caring

relationship with an adult is what is most needed by many of these students. It is very difficult to wear two hats in one classroom and provide for both groups of students at the same time.

The two instructors in the program are faced with the difficulty of providing for the educational needs of students with very divergent learning abilities and learning needs. Both teachers hold several teaching endorsements but still do not feel competent in all academic areas and have limited materials for a student who might be enrolled in an eighth or ninth grade science class but who reads on a much lower level. Because of the structure of the program, these students have to work independently and miss the experience of a classroom teacher. As one regular classroom teacher said, "I think the student needs to be in the classroom...listening and participating in activities that they just don't get if they are away from that classroom."

In looking at both the regular and alternative school settings, findings suggest there is not enough linkage between the two settings. Many of the regular classroom teachers who participated in the study have never visited the alternative program and have no idea what the program is like. Many think it is a good alternative to out of school suspension but is not really beneficial to the students. They do not think the students return to the regular program having learned a lesson and complained that the students return without having completed the assignments. Many said it was more beneficial to the other students in their classroom than those who were sent to the alternative program.

There is no real plan for the students to effectively reenter the regular school program. There is a need for support to avoid relapse and future referral back to the

alternative school program. When asked about transition plans, the teachers said they weren't aware of any being in place and administrators admitted the only transition is the guidance counselor helping the student make schedule adjustments if needed. The students' reply to reentering the regular program was that they would walk back in the next day and start going to their classes. The teachers and administrators in both school settings think there is a need for transition plans and even transition personnel to aid these students in successful reentry into the regular classroom program.

There are also no support services being provided for students while being served in the alternative program. They are continuing their academics but are not being provided with counseling, or information and training in things such as conflict resolution, life skills, career awareness, or other related areas that might help to remediate their behavior and retrain them for successful reentry into the regular school program. The alternative school program seems to be used for punishment for students to remove them from the regular school so their academics can be continued without the provision of any additional remediation or support.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings of this study, the following recommendations for practice are made to improve the effectiveness in providing for at-risk students in both the regular and the alternative school settings.

Regular School Program

* Early intervention strategies for students identified with risk factors and evidence of chronic discipline problems such as tutoring programs, individual and family counseling, and community out-reach programs.

* Implementation of a teacher mentoring program for at-risk students to provide a caring adult in the school for each student.

* Implementation of a peer counseling or peer mediation program for students who might feel more comfortable talking to a peer about problems or conflicts than talking with an adult.

* Exploration of the possible implementation of a strategy such as Glasser's Choice Theory which helps reveal to students both why and how all of us behave and helps students see quality in other aspects of education than just athletics or specific courses such as advanced placement or vocational training (Glasser, 1990).

* Consistency in rules between teachers and administrators within the school.

* Implementation of activities to foster an interest in participation in school and to help students feel they belong or are connected to the school.

* Provide more extensive follow-up for students returning from the alternative school by the guidance counselor or other personnel.

* Provide staff in the regular schools with opportunities to become acquainted with the alternative school program through staff development or on-site visits.

<u>Alternative School Program</u>.

* Provide a separate program for short-term and long-term students with different methods of dealing with student remediation based on individual student needs such as reason for referral, length of time placed in the program, and number of times previously served in the program.

* Explore the possibility of providing a long-term alternative school for those students who cannot experience success in the regular program with the implementation of a variety of academic offerings with the addition of work experience and counseling services to help in remediation of problems for long term students.

* Implementation of guidance activities in addition to the academics such as life skills, social skills, work readiness, and conflict resolution through individual and small group counseling.

* Implementation of a student assessment to determine aptitude and interest when placed in the alternative program for an extended period of time in order to gear academics toward both student abilities and interests.

* Provide student resources such as a mental health component or a school counselor at the alternative school.

<u>Both Regular Program and Alternative Program</u>

* Explore strategies not just for parent involvement but for adult involvement for those students who have close relationships with interested adults other than their parents.

* Provide for better networking and communication between the two programs

for clarification of student and program information to better meet student needs.

* Implement a transition plan for students to return to the regular program and avoid relapse through school personnel including communication between the two programs and contact with the student and parent as needed.

* Determine individual student learning styles for implementation of appropriate learning strategies and to provide individualization through self-paced work.

* Provide for networking between the school system and community agencies such as family resource centers, mental health programs, and the juvenile court system.

* Implement strategies of decision making and character education such as responsibility, team work, problem solving, and citizenship through activities such as service learning.

* Emphasize real life learning through linkage of school and work through career awareness and exploration.

* Use behavioral assessments and develop individual behavioral plans for consistent consequences for behavior.

* Look at the students as individuals including physical, emotional, and social needs.

Some of these strategies are currently being studied by a team of educators in the state of Tennessee who are focusing on alternative school curriculum and integration of service learning.

There are many recommendations related to students and the provision of plans and strategies to help students adapt to the educational environment, but there is also a

need for change in the educational system and the educators in the system. At-risk students bring life factors to the learning environment such as home circumstances that cannot be changed by any educational program. Therefore, a change is needed in the expectations of educators that all students can conform to the standards set by educational systems. Educators must learn to be more flexible, understanding, and caring of individual students and their needs. Educators, who are from predominantly middle class backgrounds, sometimes have a hard time understanding the living conditions and emotional conditions of these students' lives. It is important that educators are fair, consistent, and accepting with all students. Just as we strive for change and progress with these students, we have to strive for change and progress within our own attitudes and ways of thinking.

Recommendations for Further Research

This case study investigated effective ways of providing educational services for at-risk students who are repeatedly placed out of the regular classroom into an alternative school program. I found there are many effective programs and strategies in place to serve students in both the regular schools and the alternative school; however, a small percentage of students still have chronic discipline problems. These students do not always find success at the alternative school and many do not successfully return to the regular school setting after being served in the alternative school.

Further research in this area might include a similar study in another school system to compare their percentage of students who are repeatedly placed in the alternative

school program. If other alternative schools that are similar to the one in this study indicate a smaller percentage of student returns, then research might yield what programs are in place and which programs or services seem to be effective with students. Additional research might include exploring the current practices used in education that are not effective with students and implementing new strategies to help students overcome risk factors that cause them to be unhappy and unsuccessful in school. Another area for investigation might be programs that provide both student and family counseling to get to the root of the problem rather than just isolating students for problems through alternative school placements. A final area for research might be the identification of factors that promote resilience in students to help them function in school and in society.

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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

111

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Researcher: <u>Tammie N. Feathers</u>

Title of Project: <u>Repetitive Use of Alternative School Placements for At-Risk</u>

                       <u>Students</u>

A study will be conducted of students at risk of not completing high school due to discipline problems which result in an alternative school placement. The purpose of this study is to compare the regular school program and the alternative school program in terms of meeting the needs of students. This study will be conducted throughout the Spring 1999 school term.

The procedures of the study will include observations of the students in the classroom (both regular and alternative classrooms), interviews with students in the study related to school experiences, disciplinary problems throughout their school years, and perceptions of the alternative school program. I will also analyze cumulative school records.

There should be no risks involved for students in this study. All information, including student identity, will be kept confidential. The final report will not identify any student or the alternative program being studied.

Student Signature:_____   Date:_____

Parent Signature:_____   Date:_____

Researcher Signature:_____   Date:_____

January 11, 1999

Mrs. Tammie Feathers
299 Norton Road
Greeneville, TN 37745

Dear Mrs. Feathers,

I am writing in response to your request to conduct a study utilizing the alternative school program as part of your requirement in completion of the Dissertation for the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Department at East Tennessee State University. Permission is granted to conduct this study which will include observations of students in the alternative school and regular school settings as well as interviews of students, teachers, and administrators. I also understand you will be analyzing school cumulative records.

Good luck with your study.

Sincerely,

Richard Morrison
Superintendent of Schools

January 11, 1999

Mrs. Tammie Feathers
299 Norton Road
Greeneville, TN 37745

Dear Mrs. Feathers,

Your request to utilize the alternative school program for a study toward completion of your dissertation through East Tennessee State University is granted. It is my understanding that you will be doing classroom observations and interviews with students while they are placed in this program, as well as interviews with myself and our instructors.

As long as permission is obtained from the superintendent of schools as well as the parents of the students used in your study, I have no problem with the use of this program for your study. I understand that confidentiality will be maintained and no student names will be used in your final written report.

Sincerely,

Gary Brown, Director
Alternative School

APPENDIX B

Sample Interview Questions

Sample Interview Questions
Student

1. Tell me who you live with.

2. Do you have brothers or sisters?

3. If yes, what are their educational levels?

4. Tell me about your friends.

5. What do you do for fun and entertainment?

6. Tell me about your family members' occupations.

7. Tell me about your past school experiences, good and bad or a combination of both.

8. Tell me about the types of procedures used in school to deal with your behavior or misbehavior such as in-school suspension, corporal punishment, etc.

9. Tell me how you were referred to the alternative school.

10. Tell me about your experiences here compared to the regular program.

11. What do you like about the regular school program? What do you dislike?

12. What do you like about the alternative school program? What do you dislike?

13. What is your relationship like with teachers in the alternative and regular school?

14. What type of extra-curricular activities are you or have you been involved in during your school career?

15. If you are not or were not involved in extra-curricular activities, what are some reasons why?

16. Do you feel like you belong or are part of the regular school? The alternative school?

17. What determines whether or not you feel like you belong, or where you belong?

18. Tell me what you think makes a good teacher.

19. Are there things or happenings that have affected your happiness in school? Explain.

20. If you could change anything in your life, what would you change?

21. Do you plan to graduate from high school?

22. How would you describe yourself in terms of academic achievement?

23. Have you ever repeated a grade?

24. Tell me about your attendance in school.

25. According to your school records you have been at the alternative school _____ times. Can you tell me why you were sent here each time?

26. What kinds of progress do you feel you have made while being here?

27. Describe the other students in this school. What is your relationship like with them? Are they the same or different from students in your home school?

28. Do you work with the guidance counselor at your home school? Do you feel like having a guidance counselor in the alternative school would be helpful?

29. Tell me how the work you are assigned to do here is different than at your home school.

30. Describe the principal in this school compared to your home school.

31. How do your parents feel about you being in the alternative school?

32. Sometimes stressful things happen in life such as divorce or a death in the family. Have you had stress in your life? If so, has it affected you in school?

33. If you could change things about your regular school, what would you change? The alternative school?

34. When you think about the future, where do you see yourself in 5 years?

35. Tell me about your goals for yourself.

36. If you could suggest to teachers what you think they should teach or how you think they should teach, what would you tell them?

37. Do you think school administrators sometimes ignore things that go on in school?

38. Do you think teachers sometimes ignore things that go on in school?

39. Do you feel there is danger at your home school? At the alternative school?

40. Are you or other students ever threatened in school? If yes, give examples.

41. Can you choose where you sit in regular classes? At the alternative school?

42. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would you change?

43. Do you become angry easily? What makes you angry?

44. Do you ever feel like your peers make fun of you?

45. Do you get nervous when called on in class?

46. Do you worry about things in school? Grades? Tests?

47. Do you feel that you are an important part of your family?

48. Do you have an adult that you feel really close to, that you can always count on? More than one? Why can you count on them?

49. Do you feel like you have special ability or talent that you don't have the opportunity to show at school (music, art, etc)?

50. Are you slow at finishing your work?

51. If you have brothers and sisters, do you get along with them? Do you pick on them?

52. Do you worry about things?

53. Do you wish you were different? How?

54. Are you ever mean to other people?

55. What do you think is your peers or classmates' opinion of you?

56. Do you feel people are ever disappointed in you? Who?

57. Do you ever feel picked on at school, home, or anywhere else?

58. Do you feel like people trust you? Do you feel you should be trusted?

59. Have you ever been involved with the legal system such as probation?

60. Do you worry about other people's opinion of you?

61. Is it hard for you to keep focused on your schoolwork?

62. Do you ever feel like you get punished for no reason or when you don't deserve it?

63. Do you feel like you get the attention you deserve from others at school, home, everywhere?

64. Do you have a problem getting along with others?

65. Do you have a temper? How do you show it?

66. Do you feel like your friends listen to your problems? Your family?

67. Do you feel that teachers treat you fairly?

68. Does your behavior disrupt others in class?

69. Do you often fail tests in school? Do you study?

70. Do you participate in group activities in school or enjoy working in groups when assigned?

71. Do you ever threaten others (students or teachers)?

72. Do you feel accepted by your peers? Your teachers?

73. Do you think about the consequences of your behavior before you act?

74. Do you obey your teachers' directions?

75. Do you think you have a positive or negative attitude?

76. Are you ever critical of other people (put them down)?

77. If you were not required to attend school, would you drop out? What would you do then?

78. Do you feel like you have control over the things that happen in your life?

79. Tell me about your family make-up such as who you live with, other relatives.

80. What is your parent/guardian's attitude toward school and its importance.

81. Do you think school is competitive?

82. Do you think rules in your home school are fair and consistently carried out with everyone?

83. How do you feel when you get suspended from school or sent to the alternative school?

84. How do your parents punish you for misbehavior? When you were younger?

85. What do you do most in your free or spare time?

86. What do you think schools and teachers could do to make school a success for you? For all students?

87. Is there something the schools and teachers could do to prevent you being sent to the alternative school again?

88. How much TV do you watch?

89. Do you fight or argue with your parents about house rules?

90. Are your parents interested in your activities, interests, friends?

91. Do you get to make decisions at school? At home?

92. Who brags on you at school? At home?

93. What is your favorite thing to do?

94. Do you feel like you have control over your life?

95. Do you ever feel depressed?

96. What reward or rewards would you work for?

97. What do you feel competent or good at?

98. How would you define success?

99. Who is responsible for solving your problems?

100. If you were in charge, what would you keep the same about school? What would you change?

101. If you could eliminate any subject in school, what would it be?

102. If you could choose only one subject to keep, what would it be?

103. Is it important to be popular in school?

104. Is there something you wanted to do as a kid that you didn't have the opportunity to do?

105. Can you think of a teacher or someone in school who took a special interest in you?

106. Do you ever feel like others put you down? Who? Why?

107. Tell me about peer pressure from your friends.

108. Who has the most influence on you?

109. What kinds of things cause conflict in your life? Can you control it?

110. Do you think the schools in this community meet the needs of young people today?

111. Are you satisfied with the teaching ability or competence of most of your teachers?

112. Have you, or any students you know, been unfairly treated by a teacher or administrator in your school?

113. Do your friends have good attitudes about school?

114. Are your courses in school relevant to your life?

115. Are you satisfied with the types of punishments given for misbehavior?

116. Are you satisfied with the grading system?

117. Do most of your teachers show an interest and concern for you and your needs?

118. Do you think schools are operated like prisons?

119. Tell me sources of conflict in your school.

120. Some experts who have studied the problem of crime and violence in schools believe there is a connection between it and the way students are treated by teachers and administrators. Do you agree or disagree?

121. Why do you think there is violence in schools?

122. Do you believe the schools need to change to meet the needs of young people today? Why ? How?

Sample Interview Questions
Alternative School Administrator

1. Describe the types of students who are usually sent to the alternative school.

2. Is the alternative school used for punishment or remediation?

3. Why do you think the same students are often sent to the alternative program repeatedly?

4. What aspects of your school do you feel makes students feel "connected" or part of the school?

5. Are students involved in decision making in your school?

6. How are rules determined and carried out in your school?

7. Do you encourage parent involvement? If yes, how?

8. What types of discipline problems are most prevalent in your school?

9. What intervention measures are in place to prevent discipline problems?

10. How would you define an at-risk student?

11. Do you feel the alternative program is an effective intervention?

12. What are the pros and cons of use of the alternative program?

13. Tell me how the classroom environment, curriculum, and student-teacher relationships are similar and different here and in the regular school?

14. What is your student-teacher ratio?

15. When a student is sent to the alternative program, what steps are in place to transition a student into the program?

16. When a student returns to the regular school, what steps are in place to transition the student back into the regular school?

17. What resources do you feel are needed for these students that are lacking in your school or school system?

18. What do you see as the overall goal of this program?

Sample Interview Questions
Regular School Administrator

1. What aspects of your school do you feel make students feel "connected" or part of the school?

2. Are students involved in decision making in your school? If so, how?

3. How are rules determined and carried out in your school?

4. What is your student-teacher ratio?

5. Do you encourage parent involvement? If yes, how?

6. What types of discipline problems are most prevalent in your school?

7. What intervention measures are in place to prevent discipline problems?

8. How would you define an at-risk student?

9. What steps do you take when dealing with a student with chronic discipline problems?

10. How do you decide whether or not to use the alternative program?

11. Do you think the alternative program serves more as remediation or punishment?

12. Do you feel the use of the alternative program is an effective intervention?

13. What are the pros and cons of use of the alternative program?

14. If you have a student who has been at the alternative school before, is that a factor in whether or not you utilize the program again?

15. When a student is sent to the alternative program, what steps are in place to transition the student into the program?

16. When a student returns to your school from the alternative school, what steps are in place to transition the student back into the regular school?

17. What resources do you feel are needed for these students that are lacking in your school or school system?

Sample Interview Questions
Alternative School Teacher

1. Describe the types of students who are usually sent to the alternative school?

2. Do you think the alternative school is used for punishment or remediation?

3. Why do you think the same students are often sent to the alternative program repeatedly?

4. What aspects of your school do you feel make students feel "connected" or part of the school? What about your classroom?

5. Are students involved in decision making in your school? If yes, how? In your classroom?

6. How are rules determined and carried out in your school? In your classroom?

7. Do you encourage parent involvement? If yes, how?

8. What types of discipline problems are most prevalent in your school? In your classroom?

9. What intervention measures are in place to prevent student discipline problems?

10. How would you define an at-risk student?

11. What steps do you take when dealing with a student with chronic discipline problems?

12. What mechanisms are in place to promote decision making and self-discipline among students in your classroom?

13. Do you feel the use of the alternative program is an effective intervention?

14. What are the pros and cons of the use of the alternative program?

15. When a student is sent to the alternative program, what steps are in place to transition a student into the program?

16. When a student returns to the regular school, what steps are in place to transition the student back into the regular school?

17. Tell me how the classroom environment, curriculum, and student-teacher relationships

are similar and different here and in the regular school?

18. What resources do you feel are needed for these students that are present in your program? What needed resources are lacking?

19. What do you see as the overall goal of this program?

Sample Interview Questions
Regular Classroom Teacher

1. What aspects of your school do you feel make students feel "connected" or part of the school? What about in your classroom?

2. Are students involved in decision making in your school? If yes, how? In your classroom?

3. How are rules determined and carried out in your school? In your classroom?

4. Do you encourage parent involvement? If yes, how?

5. What types of discipline problems are most prevalent in your school? In your classroom?

6. What intervention measures are in place to prevent student discipline problems?

7. How would you define an at-risk student?

8. What steps do you take when dealing with a student with chronic discipline problems?

9. What mechanisms are in place to promote decision making and self-discipline among students in your classroom?

10. Do you feel the use of the alternative program is an effective intervention?

11. What are the pros and cons of the use of the alternative program?

12. Why do you think some students are sent to the alternative school repiticiously?

13. When a student returns to your classroom from the alternative school, what steps are in place to transition the student back into the regular program?

14. What resources do you feel are needed for these students that are lacking in your school or school system?

15. Do you feel there is a stigma for students who attend the alternative school?

APPENDIX C

Functional Assessment Interview

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STUDENT-ASSISTED FUNCTIONAL-ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW

Student_____ Date_____

Interviewer_____

Section I

1. In general, is work hard for you?	Always	Sometimes	Never
2. In general, is your work too easy for you?	Always	Sometimes	Never
3. When you ask for help appropriately, do you get it?	Always	Sometimes	Never
4. Do you think work periods for each subject are too long?	Always	Sometimes	Never
5. Do you think work periods for each subject are too short?	Always	Sometimes	Never
6. When you do seatwork, do you do better when someone works with you?	Always	Sometimes	Never
7. Do you think people notice when you do a good job?	Always	Sometimes	Never
8. Do you think you get the points or rewards you deserve when you do a good job?	Always	Sometimes	Never
9. Do you think you would do better in school if you received more rewards?	Always	Sometimes	Never
10. In general, do you find your work interesting?	Always	Sometimes	Never
11. Are there things in the classroom that distract you?	Always	Sometimes	Never
12. Is your work challenging enough for you?	Always	Sometimes	Never

Section II

1. When do you think you have the most problems with_____ in school?

   (Target Behavior)

   Why do you have problems during this/these time(s)?

2. When do you think you have the fewest problems with _____ in school?

   (Target Behavior)

   Why do you not have problems during this/these time(s)?

3. What changes could be made so you would have fewer problems with_____?

   (Target Behavior)

Page 2 - Student-Assisted Functional-Assessment Interview

Section II (continued)

4. What kind of rewards would you like to earn for good behavior or school work?

5. What are your favorite school activities?

6. What are your hobbies or interests?

7. If you had the chance, what activities would you like to do that you don't have the opportunity to do now?

Section III

	What do you like about:	What do you dislike about:
Language Arts		
Math		
P.E.		
Science		
Social Studies		

FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS INTERVIEW
TEACHER REPORT

Briefly describe the student's behavior(s). It is helpful to be very specific in your description. Describe what the child does, not what he/she doesn't do. (Example: Instead of "hyperactive" say "he gets out of his seat and runs around the room every few minutes, and will touch or push other children as he is running"; instead of "doesn't follow directions" say "when asked to put up toys he will continue to play or run out of the room").

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Choose one behavior that concerns you most.

_____

For that one behavior:
　　　Describe how often the behavior happens (frequency).

_____
_____

　　　Describe how long the behavior continues when it happens (duration).

_____
_____

1. When the behavior occurs, I respond by:

_____
_____

2. What are some situations (settings/activities) in which the behavior DOES happen?

_____
_____

3. What are some situations in which the behavior DOES NOT happen?

_____
_____

4. What, in your opinion, initiates the behavior?

_____

FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS INTERVIEW
PARENT REPORT

Briefly describe the student's behavior(s). It is helpful to be very specific in your description. Describe what the child does, not what he/she doesn't do. (Example: Instead of "hyperactive" say "he gets out of his seat and runs around the room every few minutes, and will touch or push other children as he is running"; instead of "doesn't follow directions" say "when asked to put up toys he will continue to play or run out of the room").

_____
_____
_____
_____

Choose the one behavior that concerns you most.

_____

For that one behavior:
Describe how often the behavior happens (frequency).

_____
_____

Describe how long the behavior continues when it happens (duration).

_____
_____

1. When the behavior occurs, I respond by:

_____
_____

2. What are some situations (settings/activities) in which the behavior DOES happen?

_____
_____

3. What are some situations in which the behavior DOES NOT happen?

_____
_____

4. What, in your opinion, initiates the behavior?

_____
_____

APPENDIX D

Audit Agreement

January 25, 1999

Dr. Rick Osborn
School of Continuing Studies
East Tennessee State University
Box 70659
Johnson City, TN 37614-0659

Dear Dr. Osborn,

This letter is to confirm our agreement for you to serve as the auditor for my qualitative study of at-risk students who are served in an alternative school setting. An audit trail is documentation of the research process followed in the case study. This documentation includes the source and method of recording raw data, data reduction and analysis products, process notes, and instrument development information (Borg, Gall, & Borg, 1996). Other considerations include the findings being grounded in the data, logical inferences, and evidence of triangulation. For validity and reliability purposes the study should provide the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author's conclusions "make sense" (Firestone, 1987). Your role will be to examine the data and ensure that the information is accurately interpreted.

You will be provided the following items to examine: a copy of my prospectus, audio tapes of interviews, transcriptions of interviews, field notes, and a copy of Chapter 4.

Thank you again for agreeing to serve as the auditor for my study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Tammie Feathers

September 29, 1999

I have completed my responsibilities as auditor for Ms. Feathers' qualitative study of at-risk students served in an alternative school setting. She and I met prior to her data collection to discuss her study in depth. We discussed where her biases might lie, and how she would need to account for them as she proceeded. I was convinced at that point that she was well-prepared to conduct qualitative research. Afterwards, we communicated frequently, and I examined her data, interpretations, and conclusions. I have also reviewed drafts of her entire study. Suggestions I made for revisions have been incorporated into her final draft. Throughout the process, Ms. Feathers was a deliberate and careful researcher.

I am satisfied that Ms. Feathers has been accurate in her research and data collection, and she has been credible in her interpretation of her data. Her conclusions "ring true" and, for me, represent the reality under investigation.

Rick Osborn, Ph.D.

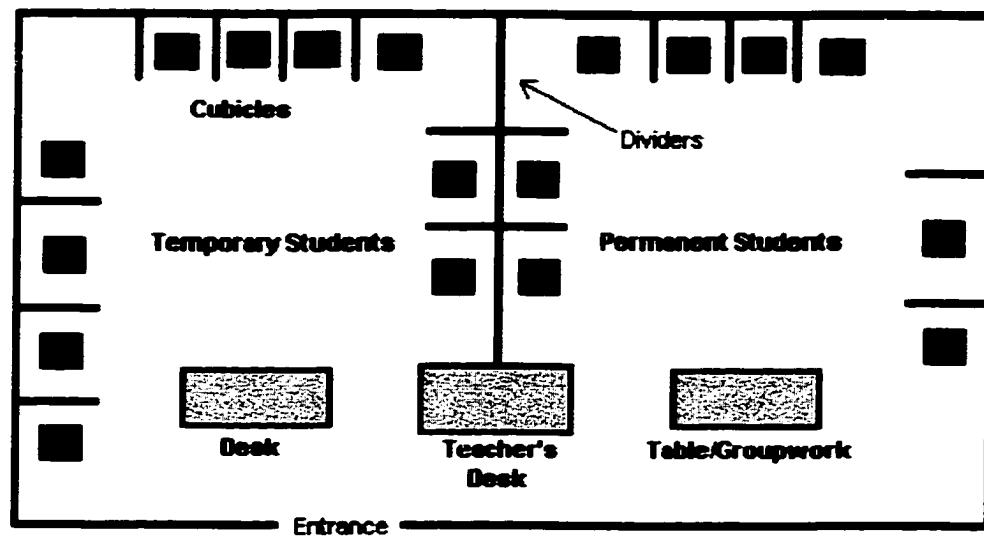Assistant Dean for Cross-Disciplinary Studies

East Tennessee State University

APPENDIX E

Alternative Classroom Diagrams

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Elementary Classroom
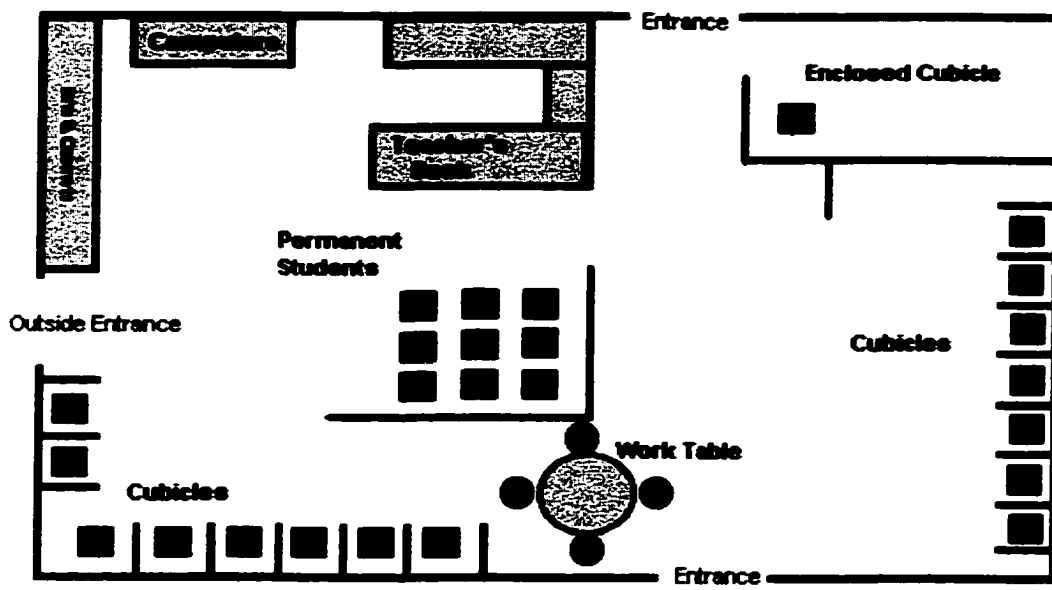
High School Classroom

VITA

TAMMIE NORTON FEATHERS

Personal Data:
Date of Birth: December 3, 1960
Place of Birth: Greeneville, Tennessee
Marital Status: Married

Education:
Public Schools, Greene County, Tennessee

Tusculum College, Greeneville, Tennessee; Elementary Education, Special Education, Early Childhood Education, B.S., 1983

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee; Special Education, M.Ed., 1987

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee; Elementary and Secondary Guidance and Counseling; certification, 1993

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee; Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Ed.D., 1999

Professional
Experience:
Special Education Teacher, Holston Home for Children, Greeneville, Tennessee, 1983-1985

Special Education Teacher, Greene County Schools, Tennessee, 1985-1992

At-Risk Intervention Teacher, Greene County Schools, Tennessee, 1992-1994

Elementary Guidance Counselor, Greene County Schools, Tennessee, 1994-1995

Special Education Teacher and Guidance Counselor, Greene County Schools, Tennessee, 1995-1996

Guidance Counselor, Greeenville-Greene County Center for Technology, Greeneville City Schools, Tennessee, 1996-Present

Professional
Organizations:
Alpha Delta Kappa
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
National Education Association
Phi Delta Kappa