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GENRE STUDIES: TEMPORARY HOMOGENEOUS GROUPING TO IMPROVE READING OR MERELY ANOTHER FORM OF TRACKING?

By

Brenda Wright Campbell

A dissertation submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

University of San Diego
School of Education
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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

For the last fifty years, raising the achievement levels of students thought to be "at-risk" has proven to be one of the most difficult and vexing problems facing educators. Although many different strategies have been tried with varying levels of success, no single at-risk solution has emerged that both promotes significant achievement gains and helps to narrow the achievement gap between people of color and whites.

This study examined the effectiveness of a particular district-wide literacy strategy in its first year that focused on literacy to educate students identified as "at risk". Specifically, this study used data gathered from two measures of reading achievement, the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT9) and the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT), to determine the impact that a special literacy block of classes, known as Genre Studies, had on the reading scores of 102 at risk children enrolled in a southern California secondary school. In addition to measuring the absolute success of these students, their relative success was also measured by comparing them with a matched sample of non-Genre Studies students from the previous year. Multiple regression analysis was also used to explain why some of the Genre Studies students gained more through the intervention than others.

Results suggest that only a small percentage of the Genre Studies students (9%) became eligible for regular English classes as a result of the two-hour literacy block intervention. In fact, attendance, course credits, and students' need for modified curriculum all had a negative affect on the change in Genre Studies students' SDRT reading scores, whereas grade point average and Hispanic ethnicity had a positive affect on the change in the SDRT reading score. In addition, Hispanic students, and white females gained at least a year's growth in reading as a result of the intervention; Asian females gained almost a year's growth, African American females, Asian males, and white males showed a decline in their reading scores, and African American males showed no growth at all for the year. The analysis also revealed that students who took a regular, one-hour English class for a year did no worse than the Genre Studies students who participated in the two-hour literacy block class for a year. Thus, this study concludes that in at least one secondary school in southern California, the stratification of

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Genre Studies students into a homogeneous group was in essence, a de facto form of tracking.

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To all of you: Thank you for encouraging and supporting me to start and finish this three-year adventure. These three years have sparked more to come, opening doors onto new journeys.

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Concluding Remarks

In the fall of 1998, I embarked on this quest for knowledge by entering the doctoral program in leadership studies at the University of San Diego. The time was right, because for a year I had been principal of a homogeneous grouped alternative learning school. This was an innovative concept of providing a last-chance education to students who were at risk. I felt uncertain about the quality of education these students were receiving, and I yearned for answers.

Every course offered an opportunity to extend my knowledge and pursue my areas of interest: – school reform, organizations, policy making, student achievement, and viewing leadership from different lenses. I researched leadership and educational reform, investigated the issues of ethics and leadership, wrote about adult development and women in leadership, studied educational policy making and implementation, analyzed organizational theory and change, and experienced leadership and the future. I designed an empirical study on educational reform and practiced quantitative methodology by analyzing student outcomes.

Essentially, the doctoral program and this dissertation reflect a tapestry of my professional and intellectual interests, with the intertwining of my career with my graduate study. My work gave me invaluable insights into my studies and my studies likewise gave me invaluable insights into my work. I'm now more personally, intellectually, professionally prepared to face the challenges of education and of society as the 21st century begins.

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GENRE STUDIES: TEMPORARY HOMOGENEOUS GROUPING TO IMPROVE READING OR MERELY ANOTHER FORM OF TRACKING?

CHAPTER ONE

In 1983, the release of A Nation At Risk (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) report generated a renewed sense of urgency and called upon concerned individuals and educators to solve an educational crisis. The report indicated that high school graduates couldn't read, do basic mathematics, or fill out an application; and functionally illiterate adults couldn't perform the basic skills necessary to get a job. Thirty percent of prison inmates couldn't read nor graduate from high school. The United States loss pre-eminence in commerce industry, science, and technological innovation. United States fell behind the Japanese in production of both automobiles and student math scores. As a result, the nation refocused its attention on the continuing pattern of inadequate educational performance of many of our children. These children, like the nation in which they reside, have been described as being at-risk.

Since this report conditions have not changed for the lowest 35% of the young people in the United States schools. The nation's educational reform movement of the 1990's has failed to increase the graduation rate of poor, immigrant, or people of color. Disproportionately high numbers of people of color, immigrant, and poor children perform consistently in the lower third academically in U.S. schools. The issues and concerns that affect these young people continue. The change in demographics of the United States suggests that there are urgent unmet educational needs.

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The United States population is rapidly becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse. One of every three students in American schools is from a group representing diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, in many parts of the United States today, people of color are the majority.

Unfortunately, diversity is linked closely to poverty. Some people even believe that poverty is synonym to low achievement. When in fact, poverty is linked with limited opportunities, exposure and access to knowledge. Poor children live in poor neighborhoods with poor friends. Poor students attend schools that receive less money to educate each student than do schools educating more of their affluent peers (Hodgkinson 1992). Furthermore, Hodgkinson reports the following facts:

- In 1990, 13 percent of all United States children were hungry, 25 percent were born to unwed parents, over 20 percent of all children under age 18 were poor, and 19 percent had no health insurance (Hodgkinson 1992, p.4).
- Every year, about 350,000 children are born to mothers addicted to cocaine during pregnancy. Children who survive have short attention spans, and poor motor skills. It cost approximately $40,000 for each to get ready for kindergarten (Hodgkinson 1991, p.10).
- The traditional family of a working father and housewife mother, and two children of school age constitute only 6 percent of U.S. households (Hodgkison 1991, p. 10).

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- Approximately one-third of preschool children are destined for school failure because of poverty, neglect, sickness, handicapping conditions, and lack of adult protection and nurturance (Hodgkinson 1991, p. 10).
- The U. S. has the highest rate of poor children and prisoners per capita among industrialized nations (Hodgkinson 1989; Pear 1992).

These statistics illustrates some of the circumstances that at risk children are placed in without having any control over. Acknowledging these pervasive issues, the U.S. Department of Education, 1993 issued a report entitled The Condition of Education that details some of the outcomes of these problems.

- Only one out of five poor children is enrolled in preschool, compared with more than half of those who are better off.
- Children from low-income families are more likely to drop out of school than their more affluent peers, and to be older than their classmates.
- Low-income students go to college right after high school at approximately half the rate of high-income students.
- High school dropouts from poor families are less likely to get jobs than are other dropouts (U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

Little appears to have changed in how United States students—regardless of their background are taught, resulting in similar outcomes.

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Background of the Issue

Historically, at-risk status has been used to refer to students with identifiable sensory, physical, or intellectual disabilities that are likely to interfere with learning in a school context. Other primary factors believed to define at risk are demographic variables such as race, language, culture, values, communities, and family structures that do not match those of the dominant Caucasian culture that schools were originally designed to serve and support. In the early 19th century, English Protestant education leaders were confronted with providing education for immigrants. They assumed that these immigrants could not share the values on which the schools had been built, and they struggled with providing a good education to every child in the country.

However, they had two visions of education, one for the "foreign" children and the other for native. These men assumed that there were fundamental differences among children based on ethnicity or skin color or religion or regional background. It was not a diversity to be embraced as enriching our common culture but a concern to be dealt with, and it provided the context for education reform. The tension between autocratic and democratic impulses expressed in their work defined the inequitable social vision within which the systematization of schools occurred (Cruikshank, as cited in Pool & Page, 1995, p. 24).

Levin (1989) described at-risk students as "those who lack the home and community resources to benefit from conventional schooling practices" (p.1). Although experts may not have intended for their at-risk description to focus on the deficiencies of students, Goodlad and Keating (1990) noted that, given this sort of definition, "it seemed

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natural and certainly easy to define the problem as arising from deficiencies in the students themselves" (p. 2). Furthermore, Goodlad and Keating stated:

For years it has been common practice to blame students when learning does not occur. School people have grown accustomed to asking first, what is 'wrong'with students and then, how do we 'fix' them? This thinking culminated in 1983 with the publication of A Nation At Risk, which asserted that fewer students than ever met acceptable academic standards and which criticized educators for not requiring more of the students in our schools. (p.vii)

Other definitions of at-risk students shift the blame from the students to school systems, programs, and other organizational and institutional features of school itself. For example, Pallas, (1989) defined educationally disadvantaged students as those exposed to inappropriate education in the school, family, or community. Typically, however, this term is used to describe students who come from a low socioeconomic background--minorities, the poor, and immigrants--in other words, those students who tend to achieve below some baseline standard and who are in danger of not completing their education.

Over the past 30 years, schools have responded to educationally disadvantaged students with various strategies, including ability grouping, grade retention, special education, and pull-out programs in which students are removed from their regular classrooms and offered remedial instruction in particular subjects (Legters, McDill, & McPartland, 1993). In addition, students at risk often attend schools where they are tracked into substandard courses and programs that have low expectations for their learning (Oakes, 1985; Wheelock, 1992). Yet, these various strategies have not

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significantly impacted the growing number of at-risk students in positive ways; the impact of tracking option, in fact, has been decidedly negative (Allington & Cunningham, 1996; Gamoran, 1987; Oakes, 1985; Slavin, 1990). Therefore, the pervasive question is: Which strategies work for providing an effective high quality education for students who are at risk?

Statement of the Issue

The review of the literature suggests that while traditional strategies may work to improve the achievement of some students that match the culture of the school, these strategies are ineffective for other students. Generally, traditional strategies are ineffective for students whose ethnic and cultural backgrounds are different from the predominant culture. "Students' ethnicity, social class, and language do not automatically determine their level of academic achievement" (Au, 1993, p. 2). Nevertheless, classrooms tend to be places where low-income or minority students who may speak a primary language other than standard American English, or who have background experiences undervalued by society, often do not achieve. Students with one or more of the characteristics associated with limited achievement enter school with different patterns of communication, different uses of language and literacy, and different interaction structures than those expected, valued, and reinforced by the school (Labov, 1972; Shannon, 1990). Often the result is a mismatch or cultural discontinuity between the learner's culture and the school culture. The National Commission on Excellence in Education report (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) called for the continuing pattern of inadequate educational performance of at-risk students to be changed. School districts must design their educational reform efforts to meet the needs of all children.

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Recently, a southern California school district had to respond to the nearly 2,000 eighth graders who were in jeopardy of failing because the district put an end to the long-time practice of social promotion. Eighth grade students needed to pass three out of four classes (e.g. English, math, science, and/or social studies) to be promoted to ninth grade. Traditionally, these students would have ended up only in summer school to make up the required courses. However, beginning in the 1999-2000 school year, those students unsuccessful in summer school (defined as scoring below grade level reading on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) were placed in literacy block courses when the next school year started. These courses are called Genre Studies.

At the high school level (9-12 grades), the Genre Studies course was designed to provide rigorous, standards-based literacy instruction, using English content for a range of reading levels. This instructional literacy block of two class periods (103 minutes) provides students with the opportunity to read and write in different genres. Readers and writers' workshops form the underlying structure of the course. In readers' workshop students learn reading strategies that the teachers model, and then apply them to their own reading. Similarly, in writers' workshop, students learn writing strategies that the teachers model, and then apply them to their own writing. Teachers design a balanced literacy approach of reading and writing by using strategies such as read-aloud, shared reading, and writing activities that support the reading. Class size is limited to 20 students to facilitate the teacher's ability to teach and closely monitor and evaluate students' progress.

Students reading below grade level are required to take this two-period Genre Studies course for the entire school year. In the spring, Genre Studies students are

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assessed again with the SDRT to determine their tenth grade placement. Those students who score at or above tenth grade level are enrolled in tenth grade regular English classes. Conversely, those students who scored 1 to 3 years below tenth grade level on the SDRT continue in Genre Studies for their tenth grade year.

Purposes of the Study

In many ways, the Genre Studies program can be considered admirable. Among other things, it channels resources such as books for students and staff development for teachers. On the other hand, the program is also built on homogeneous grouping and, as such, could be a de facto form of tracking whether students fail to achieve at or above grade level. Therefore, students must continue in the program until they graduate or drop out of school.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a district-wide strategy that focused on literacy to educate students identified as "at risk." This study sought to determine what impact Genre Studies classes had on improving students' academic performance in reading in one high school. Was Genre Studies merely temporary tracking for most students or did it represent more of the same sort of ability grouping that has been judged detrimental to students in the past? That is the issue this study was designed to address.

Specifically, this study has three goals:

First, the study examined whether the reading level of Genre Studies students improved, and the extent to which the students became eligible for placement in regular English classes. Essentially, the study sought to determine whether or not a form of

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homogeneous grouping at the secondary level could, under certain circumstances, improve students' reading scores.

Second, the study examined if there was any relationship between demographic and academic factors and the level of achievement of Genre Studies students.

Third, the study sought to determine if isolating below grade level students in literacy focused block classes can improve students' reading scores when compared to matched students who took regular English classes during the prior academic year.

Ultimately, the study provides insight into the general question of how to improve reading scores and thereby how to improve academic performance for students who are at risk.

Research Questions

The following research questions directed the proposed study:

1. a. What impact did the 1999-2000 Genre Studies classes have on the reading level of students as measured by the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) and Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT9)?

   b. What percentage of students was eligible to return to regular English classes the next year 2000-2001 as measured by grade level equivalent scores on the SDRT?

2. To what extent did the changes in reading level for Genre Studies students on SDRT and SAT9 vary by gender, ethnicity, attendance, and special needs (e.g., special education, English language learners), G.P.A., discipline problems, citizenship, and academic credits acquired?

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3. What was the difference, if any, between the SAT9 reading scores of matched students who participated in Genre Studies classes in 1999-2000 and comparable students who participated in regular English classes in the 1998-1999 previous school year?

Specific Terminology

Ability grouping – the process of sorting students based on present or past performance on an assessment (e.g. standardized tests).

At-risk students – Students with identifiable sensory, physical, intellectual, cultural, environmental, socioeconomic status that is likely to interfere with learning in a school context.

At-riskness – One or more risk-producing conditions or circumstances that causes students to be at risk.

Constructivism – A cognitive learning theory that focuses on the nature of the mental processes involved in thinking and learning. It claims that people must construct their understanding. People build a mental representation that imposes order and coherence on experience and information.

De facto form of tracking – The existence of tracking without lawful authority.

Educationally disadvantaged – Synonym to at-risk students.

Effort-based constructivism – The belief that intelligence grows as students are challenged to exert effort to construct and apply knowledge.

Genre Studies – Instructional literacy block classes designed to provide students with the opportunity to read and write in different genres in a workshop model.

Homogeneous grouping – The process of sorting and grouping students with the same past performance level of achievement.

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Independent reading – Students reading independently during workshop time to practice applying the skills of a good reader.

Knowledge-based constructivism – The theory that people use their prior knowledge to construct meaning and understanding of information.

Minilesson – Brief 10-30 minutes procedural, literary, strategy, and skill teacher-demonstrated lessons.

Read aloud – Reading a book or text aloud to students, which cultivates the joy of reading. Teachers model a good reader to improve students' reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.

Readers' and writers' workshops – Students replicate what "real readers and writers do: read, reflect, discuss, respond, write, revise, and edit in a workshop setting.

Shared reading – Expert reading to a learner or group of learners who sees the same text. Teacher reads the story while pointing to the words and asking questions.

Tracking – Hierarchical system of groups of instruction such as College Bound, General Education, and Vocational Education tracks.

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CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:

PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATING AT-RISK STUDENTS

In this chapter, various definitions and meanings of the term "at-risk students" are presented. The discussion begins with a focus on the students and then shifts to a focus on schools. In particular, this chapter discusses the work of public schools with at-risk students, beginning with a focus on underlying theoretical premises and then moving on to discussions of the structure and kinds of programs developed to serve these students. Specifically, normally ineffective practices for at-risk students such as tracking, homogeneous grouping, and the disadvantages and advantages of ability grouping are discussed. Concluding the normally ineffective practices for at-risk students section is a general overview of the characteristics of ineffective schools.

The discussion then continues with an examination of some of the reform movements such as Effective Schools' Research and the Coalitions of Essential Schools that led to untracking. Specifically, this discussion examines common practices that are effective for at-risk students, with a focus on the effective classroom and language arts literacy. Included in this discussion is a review of an empirical study on an innovative application of readers' workshop. This chapter continues with an examination of one districtwide systemic model for change to improve the academic achievement of at-risk students and then concludes with an introduction of another school district's educational reform efforts to replicate a districtwide strategy to improve the education of at-risk students.

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Historical and Contemporary Definitions of At-Risk Students

Overlapping terms and ambiguous constructs have been used to define at-risk students. For example, sometimes the term is a virtual synonym for low socioeconomic status; at other times the term is associated with someone educationally disadvantaged. Often the two constructs become intertwined when it is assumed that low socioeconomic status creates students who are educationally disadvantaged.

Two decades ago, Bronfenbrenner (1979) criticized the deficit model of public policy that, he argued, is the public's common perspective of social and educational problems. The deficit model suggests that it is the individual child, his/her family, or his/her ethnic group that is deficient and that therefore the focus is on the individual, not on the contextual circumstances that contribute to the problem.

Blaming Students' Deficiencies and School Related Conditions for At-Riskness

To state this point another way: Early definitions and characteristics of at-risk students assumed the students and their families were the source of the problem because they exhibited deficits. Since the beginning of public education, low-achieving students and school dropouts have been defined as problems of individual children or families (Cuban, 1989a).

The terminology used to describe students at risk (e.g., the term "educationally disadvantaged") is generally pejorative (Natriello, et al., 1990) and the at-risk term is often criticized because it suggests that the student has the characteristics of being "at-risk" instead of having been placed in circumstances that put him or her at risk. For example, students are identified by associating at risk with poverty, drugs, abuse, sexual activity, race, and ethnicity (Pellicano, 1987). Rossi (1994), for instance, found this term

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troubling because it has become almost standard practice in the field to refer to entire groups of children (e.g., Black or Hispanic children) as "at-risk" populations, implying that somehow these children are inherently "at risk." No child is inherently at risk, Rossi argued. Rather, children are put at risk by external disadvantages. For this reason, he uses the phrase "children (or youth) at risk" (rather than at-risk children) to refer to individuals who are subject to one or more risk-producing conditions or circumstances. If these conditions were to be eliminated or their effects were to be significantly reduced, the children in question would no longer properly be termed "at risk."

Often the term "at risk" has been used to refer to different subcategories of students. Sagor (1993) stated:

> Some experts on the at-risk problem speak only of the number of needs of children from abusive homes, others focus on the unique needs of the handicapped, while still others are offering suggestions on how to assist the gifted to more fully develop their talents. (p. 3)

Several experts have used both demographic variables and school-related conditions to define at-risk students. According to Regalin (1993), at-risk students are usually one or more years behind their age/grade level in basic reading or mathematics skills. They are also assumed to be ethnically, economically, or culturally disadvantaged. From this perspective, at-risk students are potential non-completers who, because of social, health, or educational factors are experiencing difficulty with learning, school achievement, progress toward graduation, or preparation for employment.

In fact, one common definition of the term at-risk students, used for example by Slavin (1989b), is simply those students unlikely to graduate from high school. Sagor

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(1993) agreed with Slavin's definition. He extends this notion by defining an at-risk student as "someone who is unlikely to graduate on schedule with both the skills and self-esteem necessary to exercise meaningful options in the areas of work, leisure, culture, civic affairs, and inter/intra personal relationships" (p. 1). Additionally, students who have failed one or more grades, or speak a language other than English are often considered at risk. Comer (1987) called this group "high-risk children" and defined them as students who underachieve both in school and as adults.

Slavin and Sagor's definitions encompassed students who have been absent from school without acceptable excuses, are parents, have been adjudicated delinquent, and are one or more years behind their age group in the number of credits attained or basic skill levels. Similarly, Brodinsky and Keough (1989) agreed with the need to define at risk by focusing on the combination of demographic variables and school-related conditions affecting students. They, like Comer and Slavin, focused on circumstances that produce the problem. For example, many at-risk students do not learn to read or compute, which often results in their learning to hate school. As a result, they become alienated from others and eventually drop out of school. While out of school, they tend to drift into crime and get hooked on drugs. In addition, some female students become sexually active, resulting in an increased risk of getting pregnant. Many of them become despondent and suicidal due to adverse conditions. All too often, failure becomes a way of life for these students. Since oftentimes they lack the incentive to acquire good work habits, they can drift into poverty and become dependent on welfare throughout their lives.

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Blaming School and Organizational Features of School for At-Risk Students

Several researchers have reframed the problem of "blaming the student," arguing that school systems, school programs, organizational and institutional features of school, the structure of schools, or the school environment/culture contribute to the conditions that influence students' academic failure (Boyd, 1991; Cuban, 1989a, 1989b; Kagan, 1990; Meacham, 1990; Pellicano, 1987; Sinclair & Ghory, 1987; Wehlage et.al. 1989). Reframing the problem has resulted in an emerging body of research that looks at school factors as potential causes of "at-riskness" (Richardson & Colfer, 1990). Among the school characteristics that have been identified as hindering the academic achievement of many students are inflexible schedules; narrow curricula; a priority focus on basic/lower-order skills; inappropriate, limited, or rigid instructional strategies; inappropriate texts and other instructional materials; over-reliance on standardized tests to make instructional and curricular decisions; isolated pull-out programs; and teacher and administrators' beliefs and attitudes toward both students and their parents and toward tracking. Associating at-riskness with these sorts of characteristics has the advantage of not blaming poor academic achievement on circumstances or characteristics over which students have little or no control. Additionally, this approach of examining schools does not absolve schools of their obligations to provide nurturing and effective educational environments for all students (Hixson & Tinzmann, 1990).

As the focus shifts from students to schools, in fact, experts are reporting a better understanding of the school environment. Sinclair and Ghory (1987) maintained that it is the school environment that either encourages or discourages student learning through a series of one-to-one or group (e.g., classroom) interactions. Similarly, Au (1993) argued

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that dissonance between student and school cultures, when it occurs, negatively affects the levels of individual achievement and general development. These historical and contemporary definitions are used to identify at-risk students. Educational services are then designed based on the perceived needs of these students whether they are deficient, need to be fixed, or the school system needs to be changed.

General Programmatic Prescriptions for At-Risk Students

Based on the historical definitions and labels for at-risk students, school districts have established educational models that identify students to be sorted and tracked. According to Sagor (1993), there are three major theoretical premises underlying most public school work with at-risk youth. These three premises assume one of the following views of the causes of at-riskness.

1. Clinical Pathology–at-riskness is the result of chemical pathology in the student.
2. Development Deficits–at-riskness is the result of developmental deficits in the history of the student.
3. Institutional Pathology – at-riskness is the result of alterable institutional insufficiencies.

Each of these perspectives is discussed below.

Clinical Pathology

Clinical pathology is the common perspective that guides most of the current practice in serving at-risk youth. This perspective is based on a medical model that presumes that where there is at-riskness there may be a corresponding defect in the child. These pathologies are presumed to be the result of deep organic processes that are not identifiable. However, the field of special education uses diagnostic terminology such as

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hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, and learning disability. Since it is assumed that these pathologies reside within the child, it is also assumed that clinical treatment will solve or at least manage the problem (Sagor, 1993). However, the same students tend to undergo treatment for years without being cured or showing significant signs of improvement. Sagor (1993) noted, with numerous years of treatment and no cure, it is difficult to determine the success rate of this kind of treatment.

Developmental Deficits

The developmental deficits perspective emerges from the belief that the at-risk child somehow missed out on experiences or skills that normally would or should have been acquired and mastered by his/her current age. Therefore, these deficits can be inferred to have been caused by inadequate schooling or a less than adequate home environment. This perspective argues that the deficit is an outgrowth of the child's interaction with his/her environment rather than the deficit residing within the child. Consequently, these problems, it is believed, can be corrected by environmental intervention (Sagor, 1993). According to Sagor, this theory assumes that these students are coming to school without the necessary skills that should have been acquired by their age.

Similarly, Hixson and Tinzmann (1990) named this developmental deficits theory the predictive approach to identifying an at-risk student population. Information used to identify these students is readily available at schools and agencies.

> Students who have certain kinds of conditions such as living with one parent, being a member of a minority group, have limited English proficiency, are defined as at-risk because, statistically, students in these categories are more

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likely to be among the lowest achievement groups or drop out of school altogether. (p. 2)

This approach is based on a belief in early intervention for preventing rather than remediating academic and related school problems. However, this approach tends to be also based on a deficit model of students, their families, and communities, and rarely leads to any examination of fundamental aspects of the school (Natriello et al., 1990).

More often, reliance on this approach leads even compassionate and well-meaning educators and policymakers to devise programs that identify the various ways in which children need to be changed in order to fit into existing school structures and programs (Goodlad & Keating, 1990). Furthermore, this approach is more problematic, since it often has the effect of lowering teachers' expectations of what students have the potential to achieve. Ultimately, use of such categorical indicators often places students in the position of being blamed for poor school performance on the basis of characteristics over which they have no control (Richardson & Colfer, 1990).

Institutional Pathology

Institutional pathology perspective comes from social and behavioral science theories and argues that when individuals or groups consistently receive differential treatment by social institutions they will demonstrate different behaviors. Therefore, from these perspectives, at-riskness can be attributed to the inappropriate treatment received by the child at home and school. Sagor (1993) suggested that these problems could be corrected by treating the flawed institutions. Much like Sagor's institutional pathology, Hixson and Tinzmann's (1990) descriptive approach addressed school-related problems when identifying at-risk students. This approach describes how students who

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consistently receive differential treatment such as remedial instruction in a pull-out program can establish a pattern of low performance. "Students who are already performing poorly or failing in school are at risk because they have not been able to successfully take advantage of the "regular" school program and will likely fall further behind or drop out" (p. 2).

The institutional pathology perspective reflects a monitoring/intervention strategy, which waits until school-related problems occur and uses these problems to identify the student as being at risk. Hixson and Tinzmann (1990) pointed out that this identification process is problematic because these students have established a pattern of performance, and the expectations of both teachers and students are severe so that successful intervention/remediation is less likely.

Common Practices That Are Normally Ineffective for At-Risk Students

One commonly used institutional pathological approach to educating at-risk students is tracking. Tracking is "the practice of dividing students into programs that rigidly proscribed their courses of study and that admitted little opportunity for mobility from program to program (Lucas, 1999, p.1). Tracking consists of the school characteristics such as inflexible schedules and narrow curricula, that hinder the academic achievement of at-risk students, resulting in uneven distribution of learning experiences and access to resources. This institutional pathological approach of tracking consistently treats students differently.

Institutional Practice of Tracking

Labeling, sorting, and tracking students are common practices of the educational system. More precisely, tracking is the result of educators labeling and sorting students

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into groups. Tracking is the process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes (Oakes, 1985). In theory, tracking is used to accommodate instruction to the variety of student needs, interests, and abilities. Many researchers (Gamoran, 1987; Goodlad, 1984; Goodlad & Keating, 1990; Oakes, 1985; Page, 1991; Page & Valli, 1990; Slavin, 1990; Wheelock, 1992) advocate the elimination of tracking and between class ability groupings. They note the negative effects of ability grouping to low achievers, citing problems of poor peer models, low teacher expectations, disproportionate number of people of color concentrated in low tracks, and slow pace remedial instruction. Conversely, favorable advocates suggest that ability grouping lets high achievers move rapidly and allows teachers to provide rigorously challenging curriculum and instruction.

Tracking or ability grouping is characterized by educators making some global judgment about how smart students are. Often teachers and counselors sort students into categories that are defined in terms of I.Q. (ability test) or achievement tests. Sometimes students are classified by their past performance and prediction of how well they are likely to learn (Oakes, 1985; Slavin 1990).

According to a study of 25 junior and senior high schools conducted by Oakes, in some schools students are classified and placed separately for each academic subject. For example, students can take an advanced class in math, and an average class in science. While in other schools a single decision determines a student's program of classes for the entire day, semester, year, and perhaps even all six years of secondary schooling. At the senior high school level, students are often assigned to academic, general, and vocational tracks; at middle/junior high school levels, students are often assigned to advanced, basic,

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and remedial tracks. Wehlage (1983) examined programs that stress only "basic skills" or "vocational education" or "career education" alone, and his findings indicated that these programs are too narrow in focus and thus of limited value.

Slavin (1990) called this process "ability-grouped class assignment." In essence, however it is done, tracking is the sorting of students who have certain predictable characteristics. For example, tracking in senior high schools usually involves different courses or course requirements. A student in the academic (college bound) track may be required to take more years of mathematics than a student in the general track, or may take a foreign language rather than an elective course (Slavin, 1990). Gamoran (1987) pointed out that when students in low tracks are not grouped with college-bound peers they are less likely to attend college than students in the high tracks.

Rationale for institutional practice of tracking. Supporting tracking are some powerful norms in the culture of schools and in the society beyond the school. Oakes (1985) argued that, first and foremost, the notion persists that natural ability is fixed very early in life, if not innate ability, and there is virtually nothing schools can do that might alter a student's fundamental capability. Second, since the normal curve is not viewed as the distribution of certain characteristics of a population but rather is seen as an accurate representation of the distribution of how well kids are likely to do in school, it creates grouping of students.

Research studies on tracking found that districts use achievement and/or I.Q. tests as a basis for sorting students. Oakes (1985) discussed the construction of standardized tests. The tests are comprised of items that separate people in terms of their responses. For example, take a standardized test of seventh and eighth grade reading achievement.

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In designing such a test some items are eliminated. As many as 60% of the items initially considered to be good indicators of reading achievement may be eliminated if it turns out that nearly all the seventh and eighth graders in the pilot group can answer them. With the elimination of what might be the best determinants of reading, we cannot be sure that the content of the test matches the curricular objectives of instruction. This process tends to make tests that are labeled achievement tests actually tests of general ability.

According to Kohn (2000), standardized tests do not provide objectivity. The testing process may appear to be scientific, but it emerges from the interaction of two sets of human beings: the invisible adults who make up the questioned and the students who take the test. Like Oakes, Kohn questions the content of the test, and whether it measures something important. Additionally, he points out that test anxiety is a large factor to consider when evaluating the significance of the scores.

> The more a test is made to 'count' in terms of being the basis for promoting or retaining students, for funding or closing down schools the more that anxiety is likely to rise and the less valid the scores become (p. 5).

On the other hand, some students do not take the test seriously. For example, students tend to fill in the ovals creatively or just randomly and receive low scores. As a result, this low score on a single test is viewed as their level of capabilities and they are therefore placed in low level classes (Kohn, 2000).

Oakes (1985) raised a second issue regarding the fairness of tests. "Are scores in fact based solely on meritocratic factors-achievement and aptitude-or are they based in part on students' race, social class, or economic position?" (p.11). Research on the issues of test content and test administration has concluded that both the substance of most

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standardized tests and the procedures used to standardize and administer them are culturally biased.

> That is, Caucasian middle-class children are most likely to do well on them because of the compatibility of their language and experience with the language and content of test questions, with the group against which the tests were normed, with testing procedures, and with most of the adults doing the testing. Lower class and minority youngsters are less likely to do well because of their language and experience differences. (p.11)

Kohn (2000) contended that this point of tests is culturally biased, by stating that standardized tests are biased because the questions require a set of knowledge and skills more likely possessed by children from a privileged background. Furthermore, he points out the discriminatory effect of norm-referenced tests, that they are designed so that knowledge gained outside of school provides a big advantage.

Labeling and sorting practice. Labeling and sorting students are a part of the tracking process, which can be delineated into four steps. First, students get placed in these groups in a rather public way as to their intellectual capabilities and accomplishments and separated into a hierarchical system of groups of instruction. Second, these groups are labeled and characterized in the minds of teachers and others as being high ability, average ability, and low ability. These groups are not equally valued in the school. These groups reflect judgments that adults have made about students' current and future abilities. Oakes (1985) noted that this kind of labeling and sorting of students is justified by appearance of special privilege i.e., small classes, programmed learning for slower students. Third, individual students in these groups come to be

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defined by others, both adults and their peers, in terms of these groups' types. For example, a student in a high-achieving group is seen as a high-achieving person, bright and smart. Conversely, a student in the low-achieving group is seen as a slow, below average, dumb person. Fourth, on the basis of these sorting decisions, students take their place in the hierarchy and the values associated with it.

Homogeneous grouping practice. There are several assumptions that undergird the premise of homogeneous grouping or tracking classes. Oakes (1985) reported, the first assumption is based on the notion that students learn better when they are grouped with other people who are considered to be like them academically. Similarly, these students supposedly know about the same things, they learn at the same rate, or they are expected to have similar futures. This assumption is expressed in two ways: first, that bright students' learning is likely to be held back if they are placed in mixed groups and receiving weakened curriculum. Second, that the deficiencies of slow students are most easily remediated if they are placed in classes together (Oakes, 1985; Braddock & Slavin, 1992).

The second assumption is that slower students placed in classrooms with bright students have negative consequences for slower ones. Slower students might feel inadequate by the intelligence of the smarter students. A third assumption is that students are placed appropriately, accurately, and fairly based on past achievement and innate abilities. A fourth assumption is that it is easier for teachers to accommodate individual differences in homogeneous groups (Oakes, 1985).

Instructional and curricular practice. Students are treated and experience school very differently according to these assigned groups. In observing classes, Oakes (1985)

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concluded that the instruction across tracks is probably more alike than it is different; typically teachers talk and students are passive. Secondary teachers use a very narrow range of teaching methods, excessively using some form of lecture or discussion (Goodlad, 1984). Furthermore, Oakes indicated that the instructional program is very different. Top-track students are engaged in experience-based learning with hands-on application whereas bottom-track students' instructional program is dominated by passive strategies and worksheets. Top track student classes are characterized as challenging, with problem solving and critical thinking activities. They are provided with deeply contextualized curriculum. On the other hand, bottom-track student classes are characterized by drill and skill worksheets, disconnected and fragmented curriculum. These students tend to work alone, reading out of the textbooks. Students in the low tracks receive a lower pace and lower quality of instruction than do students in higher tracks (Gamoran, 1989; Oakes, 1985; Page & Valli, 1990).

Wehlage's (1983) research provides analyses of six effective programs that successfully involved marginal students in several school contexts. These students participated in pullout programs, where they received instruction separate from the other students. He pointed out that alienation from the school, reinforced daily by teachers is one of the most important threats to the retention of at-risk students. "When otherwise normal adolescents who have sufficient intelligence to succeed in school... become alienated and rejects the school, should not educators attempt to find ways to respond constructively to this significant portion of their clientele?" (p.16).

Oakes (1985) pointed out that over the previous 20 years, the body of research by cognitive and developmental psychologists has shown that the rich, contextualized,

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problem-oriented curriculum that we usually think of as appropriate for the highest-achieving students is also the most promising kind of curriculum for children who have difficulty doing traditional school learning. According to Oakes, drill and skill curriculum traditionally offered to low-track students probably makes knowledge less accessible to low-achieving students than would a richer and more rigorous curriculum that resembles real-life problem solving.

Teacher assignment practices. The instructional program varies, as do the teachers who teach the different tracks of students. Research by Gamoran (1989) and Oakes (1985) indicates that teachers who are most effective and have more experience are assigned to teach the high track classes, whereas teachers with the least experience sometimes without the appropriate credentials and the lowest levels of preparation in their subject fields, are assigned to the low track classes. Nevertheless, research indicates there is one thing that all teachers have in common, and that is how to balance rich educational activities with classroom control. The complex dynamics of teachers resorting to drill and skill classroom activities in which students are kept separate and quiet for purposes of control help perpetuate low-level curriculum for low-track students. As noted by Oakes, students in low-track classes typically have a history of misbehavior, school difficulties, and school failure. Students in high-track classes tend to be motivated, autonomous learners and have retained some interest in school. More experienced teachers are assigned to teach in the high-track classes where students are considered high achievers and gifted.

Effects of ability grouping practice. Over the past 60 years, hundreds of studies have been conducted on the effects of ability grouping and tracking on student learning.

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These studies ranged from looking at various kinds of learning, to students of different ages and grades. These studies were different in size and used different methodologies. Oakes (1985, p. 7) stated, "The results differ in certain specifics, but one conclusion emerges clearly; no group of students has been found to benefit consistently from being in a homogeneous group." More specifically, Slavin's (1990) and Oakes's (1985) concluded that there is substantial evidence that indicate homogeneous grouping does not consistently help anyone learn better.

Slavin (1990) provided a comprehensive review of research on ability grouping. He examined 29 studies of tracking in secondary schools. Fifteen studies consisted of six studies that used random assignment of students to ability grouped or heterogeneous classes and nine studies that took groups of students; matched them individually on I.Q., achievement, and other measures; and then assigned one of each matched pair of students to an ability-grouped class and one to a heterogeneous class. The remaining 14 studies investigated existing schools on classrooms that used or did not use ability grouping.

Slavin (1987) stated that for ability grouping to be effective at the elementary level, it must create true homogeneity on the specific skill being taught, and instruction must be closely tailored to students' levels of performance (1987, p.323). For secondary level, he states: The lesson to be drawn from research on ability grouping may be that un-less teaching methods are systematically changed, school organization has little im-pact on student achievement (1990, p. 491).

Additionally, the research has shown that slower students do not develop positive attitudes about themselves and school when they are in homogeneous groups. Braddock

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and Slavin (1992) found that tracked low achievers had more feelings that their fate was out of their hands (external locus of control) than did untracked low achievers.

Oakes (1985) added:

> Rather than help students to feel more comfortable about themselves, the tracking process seems to foster lowered self-esteem among those teenagers. Further exacerbating these negative self-perceptions are the attitudes of many teachers and other students toward those in the lower tracks. Once placed in low classes, others usually see students in the school as dumb. (p. 8)

Wehlage (1983) argued that schools must provide students with successful experiences in order to counteract the messages of failure that they are constantly receiving. Furthermore, he stated that educators reinforce the message of failure by not expecting enough from the marginal student. Educators tend to place these students in "slow" classes and to deny them access to challenging experiences.

The research on the relationship between tracking and student attitudes and behaviors shows that student behaviors are influenced by track placement. Low track students participate less in extracurricular activities, exhibit more school and classroom misbehavior, and are involved more often in delinquent behavior outside of school. Lower-track students are more alienated from school and have higher dropout rates (Oakes, 1985).

Rosenbaum (1976) argued that ability grouping discriminates against minority and lower-class students. Ability grouping is perceived to perpetuate social class and racial inequities because lower-class and minority students are disproportionally

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represented in the lower tracks. Ability grouping is often considered to be a major factor in the development of elite and under-class groups in society (Rosenbaum, 1980).

Historically, evidence suggests that tracks were constructed on the basis of a unitary intelligence in accordance with Finney's (as cited in Lucas, 1999) views of training students. There is evidence of high schools during the period 1949–1963 where explicit overarching tracks such as college preparatory, general, general-commercial, and secretarial-commercial existed. This evidence clearly presents the intent behind the design of the system: "its original aim was to provide a means of differently socializing students" (p. 6).

Evidence strongly suggests that the late 1960s to early 1970s was a period of dismantling overarching tracking programs. By 1980 few schools assigned students to tracks. Oakes (1985) "found that out of 12 secondary schools in her national study of tracking in the United States, only four maintained the traditional form of broad program assignment, and more recent evidence suggests that an even smaller proportion of schools practice the traditional form of tracking" (Lucas, 1999, p. 7).

Recently, Loveless (1999), an advocate for tracking, used the same logic of advocates who support detracking to justify tracking. "Because the widening achievement gap contains at least one positive aspect–gains by high track students—schools could try to maintain the benefit that tracking brings to high-ability students while launching a concerted campaign to make low tracks more rigorous" (p. 28).

Loveless identified research that has revealed four potential effects of detracking that are counterproductive to achievement.

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- Detracking Losers - A study of 10th graders in the National Educational Longitudinal study of 1988 (NELS) sample. Low ability 10th graders assigned to heterogeneous math classes rather than the low tracks, gained about 5 percentage points on achievement tests. Detracking helped them whereas average students lost 2 percentage points from detracking, and high-ability students lost about 5 points (Argys, Rees & Brewer, 1996).
- Bright Flight - Parents of high ability students either flee or threaten to flee schools that are abolishing honors courses. High achieving students are a valuable resource; they raise schools' test scores act as role models for other students; and enhance schools' reputation as an institute for learning (Rochester, 1998).
- Algebra – Researchers at John Hopkins University analyzed NEL's data of 8th grade math students grouped in different ways (Epstein & MacIver, 1992). Students in heterogeneously grouped algebra classes at all levels (high, average, and low) didn't learn as much as students in tracked algebra classes.
- Status Distinctions -Tracking differentially allots status, and promotes stigma. But academic accomplishments also compete with other status rankings such as athletic prowess, good looks, knowledge of the latest fashion trends, and acting out of antisocial sentiments (Bishop, 1989; Steinberg, 1996).

Common Characteristics of Ineffective Schools for At-Risk Students

In general, literature on educating at-risk students indicates that schools tend to have three basic characteristics: lack of vision, teachers feel powerless, and the educational program is designed with a deficit model (Allington & Cunningham, 1996;

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Comer, 1987; Edmonds, 1979; Goodlad & Keating, 1990). A review of these characteristics is given below.

There are three basic ineffective characteristics of schools that serve at-risk students. First of all, most schools that educate at-risk students seem to lack a central purpose. For example, they use numerous programs that seem largely disparate and fragmented; each program has its own planning, implementing, and evaluating process; teachers view their responsibilities as being limited to good practices in self-contained classrooms; and resource teachers or remedial support specialists work in isolation from the teacher and the regular school program.

Second, existing schools for at-risk students communicate a sense of powerlessness or tend to blame factors beyond their control for the poor educational outcomes of at-risk students. Teachers and principals argue that federal and state governments, as well as the central offices of school districts, dominate decision making by establishing rules, regulations, directives, policies, guidelines, reporting requirements, and approving instructional materials that schools are mandated to comply with or be in noncompliance.

Third, schools with large numbers of at-risk students are oftentimes preoccupied with the deficiencies of their students, parental support, funding, and administrative support. It is this preoccupation with weaknesses and deficiencies that leads to low expectations and wholesale remediation, whereas good pedagogy begins with the strengths and experiences of participants and builds on those strengths rather than dwelling on the weaknesses.

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Common Practices That Are Normally Effective for At-Risk Students

The school reform movement of the 1980s embraced the principles that undergird untracking schools. Many scholars now believe ability grouping may actually reduce students' engagement and learning opportunities while stigmatizing students (Slavin 1989a; Oakes, 1985). The most promising alternative approaches focus on student assets (including their backgrounds and prior experiences), varied teaching strategies, and meaningful learning in collaborative settings.

Some of the reform movements that led to untracking are the Accelerated Schools Project, the Effective Schools Movement, the Coalitions of Essential Schools, John Goodlad's Partnership for School Renewal, Mortimer Adler's Paideia Proposal, the Montessori Movement, and the middle school movement.

Below is a review of literature on six of these major educational reforms.

The Accelerated Schools Project

The Accelerated Schools Project began in1986 created by Levin and a group of colleagues at Stanford University's School of Education. It was a 30-year project designed to respond to the needs of at-risk students. It started in two pilot schools and by 1993-94 it had grown to include over 500 elementary and middle schools in 33 states.

The Accelerated Schools Project was a comprehensive approach to school change that dismantled tracking and rigid ability grouping. Accelerated Schools enrolled large numbers of at-risk students into an enriched challenging learning environment over their more familiar remedial one. "The accelerated school is a transitional elementary school designed to bring disadvantaged students up to grade so they could take advantage of mainstream secondary school instruction" (Levin, 1987, p. 20).

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The project required specific approaches listed below:

1. Assess each child's performance at the entry of school.
2. Develop and establish a series of objectives.
3. Periodically evaluate on wide spectrum of standardized achievement tests.
4. Tailor assessments developed by school staff for each strand of curriculum.
5. Create curriculum that emphasizes language—reading and writing for meaning in all disciplines.
6. Apply curriculum to everyday problems and events.
7. Include instructional strategies such as peer tutoring and cooperative learning.
8. Encourage active parent involvement.
9. Provide an extended day program.

There were three major principles of The Accelerated Schools Project reform movement: (1) Unity of purpose (2) School-site empowerment, and (3) Building on strengths.

The Effective Schools Movement

Research on the effective basic characteristics of schools (conducted by The Effective Schools group) examined six areas of schooling: school effects, teacher efforts, instructional leadership, curriculum alignment, program coupling and educational change, and implementation. In the area of instructional leadership, administrative behavior, policies, and practices in the schools appeared to have a significant impact on school effectiveness. The administrative team provided a good balance between both management and instructional skills. The administrative team implemented a school

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wide plan to deal with the reading problem. Principals (instructional leader) provided teachers with a great amount support (Edmonds, 1979).

Edmonds, (1979) conducted research on schools serving the urban poor and found effective schools demonstrate the following characteristics:

1. Strong administrative leadership
2. A climate of expectation in which "no children are permitted to fall below minimum but efficacious levels of achievement"
3. An orderly, but not rigid, atmosphere that is "conducive to the instructional business at hand"
4. An attitude which makes it clear that "pupil acquisition of the basic skills takes precedence over all other school activities"
5. The ability to divert resources "from other business in furtherance of the fundamental objectives" when necessary
6. Means for frequent monitoring of pupil progress especially means, "by which the principal and the teachers remain constantly aware of pupil progress in relationship to instructional objectives."

These findings indicate key characteristics of effective schools, which can be compared with practices that are used with at-risk students. This researcher created a chart using Edmonds Effective School's findings. This comparison chart illustrates the contrast between characteristics of effective schools and common ineffective schooling of at-risk student. These key characteristics are presented in Table 1.

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Table 1

Edmonds' Characteristics of Effective Schooling

Effective Schooling	Ineffective Schooling
1. High expectations	1. Low expectations
2. Clear, achievable goals	2. Lack of central vision/purpose
3. Clear rules for behaviors, fairly enforced	3. Lack of consistent discipline
4. Effective instruction and classroom management	4. Lack of teacher empowerment and accountability
5. Careful monitoring of student progress	5. Preoccupation with deficiencies and weaknesses
6. Emphasis that school is a place for learning	
7. Instructional leadership	

Note. Adapted from Effective schools for the urban poor, by R. Edmonds 1979, Educational Leadership, p. 23.

Clearly, there is a difference in the characteristics of effective and ineffective schooling for students. The accumulated knowledge from research and alternative programs for at-risk students appears to support the need to align schooling for students at risk to the findings and recommendations of the effective schools research.

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The Coalition of Essential Schools

The Coalition of Essential Schools began in 1984 by Theodore Sizer and a small number of practitioner colleagues. The Coalition was a partnership based on the premises of collaboration inquiry. All people involved agreed to translate Nine Common Principles into action in schools. A set of ideas that emerged from A Study of High Schools formed the following principles (Sizer, 1984):

1. Schools should focus on helping adolescents learn to use their minds well.
2. Schools' goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge.
3. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of adolescents.
4. Teaching and learning should be personalized.
5. School should be student-as-worker rather than teacher-as-deliverer of instructional services.
6. Students entering secondary school are competent in language and elementary mathematics. Diploma awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation, an Exhibition.
7. The tone of the school should express high expectations, trust, decency, fairness and tolerance.
8. Principal and teachers are generalists. Staff should have multiple obligations.

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9. Budget should include total student loads per teacher of 80 or fewer pupils, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, and competitive salaries.

John Goodlad's Partnership for School Renewal

John Goodlad's book, A Place Called School (1984), reported the status of schooling in the United States. Observations were conducted in over 1,000 classrooms; questionnaires and interviews involving thousands of students and teachers were reported in this book. Among many striking points, the chapter "Access to Knowledge" addresses the variety of ways in which the conduct of schooling fails to provide common learning experiences for all students.

According to Goodlad's research the lower tracks in high school marked by inferior teaching methods, course content, and class climate, as well as by negative and often abrasive relationships between teachers and students. Racial minority students disproportionately experience inequalities in access to knowledge in courses and classroom experiences. Goodlad noted how disparities in terms of access to knowledge that begin with ability grouping in the elementary grade continued in the later grades, producing wider gaps in learning with every passing year.

As a result of Goodlad's findings, he proposed several major principles embedded in his recommendations for improving schools:

1. Establish an agreement on a common core of studies.
2. Eliminate ability grouping on basis of past performance.
3. Implement heterogeneous grouping practices.
4. Rebalance decision-making power toward decentralization.

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5. Revise the selection and roles of principals.
6. Align the budget.
7. Examine and change teaching assignments, methodologies, and teacher education.
8. Reorganize personnel (i.e. instructional leaders, schools)

Padeia Proposal

Mortimer J. Adler, led a group of distinguished educators and others to compile the work of a one-track system with high standards for all students. These experts criticized the practice of tracking students into ability groups and proposed three main avenues that schools should provide for all students.

- Personal growth or self-improvement (mental, moral, and spiritual).
- An adequate preparation for discharging duties and responsibilities of citizenship.
- Learning the basic skills that are common to all work in a society.

Middle School Movement. In California, the document Caught in the Middle, published by the State Department of Education, (1987) provided the context for untracking middle-level schools. This report included recommendations for substantial reduction of tracking and the advice that no student should be tracked in grades 6-8 according to ethnicity, gender, general ability, primary language, or handicap. One southern California school district Board of Education approved a policy and developed Administrative Procedures for Students' Equal Education # 6020. The main purposes of this procedure were to provide guidelines for implementation of Board of Education policy with regard to equity in student placement in all classrooms at every grade level and to ensure implementation of grouping and counseling practices which result in equal

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access to educational opportunity for all students. This procedure stipulates that the Community Relations and Integration Services Division conduct required surveys of all classroom ethnic balance, review results of classroom ethnic balance surveys, and assists principals in site efforts to comply with Board of Education policy. Other recommendations are related to curriculum, instructional practices, academic counseling, "at-risk" students, staff development, organizing grade level houses.

Middle level schools participated in regional networks organized by the Office of Middle Grades Support Services at the California Department of Education. Through various collaborative means (e.g., monthly meeting, school visitation, staff development days) schools shared strategies for implementing heterogeneous grouping and curriculum reform. Initially 115 middle schools joined the network. By 1989 an additional 111 schools joined the second round of networking for middle-level reform.

In the wake of expanded knowledge of the effects of tracking and greater understanding with effective heterogeneous classroom methodologies, nationally schools began to switch from practices that result in unequal educational opportunity.

Wheelock (1992) called this process untracking schools, where ability grouping of students is replaced with mixed-ability classrooms. These grouping changes are made in tandem with shifts in curriculum teaching approaches and assessment strategies designed to enhance learning for more diverse groups of students. These schools also adopt routines and structures redesigned to extend expectations for success to all students and to foster a strong sense of the school as a community of learners. Moving into uncharted territory, untracking schools create new conditions for learning and teaching

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and, in the process, redefine their own character in relation to a true commitment to discover and nurture the genius in all their students.

To that end, current literature pays considerable attention to effective learning strategies as well as the role of the classroom teacher. Experts are examining effective classroom practices and researching their effectiveness. Ultimately, what happens in the classroom determines the effectiveness of any educational reform.

The classroom teacher has the task of instructing at-risk students; therefore, the pedagogical attitudes and instructional competencies of teachers are critically related to the educational success of socially disadvantaged students (Scales, 1992).

According to Johnson (1998), the literature on effective classroom practices for at-risk students identified 20 principles of instruction successful for at-risk students. These 20 principles of instruction are presented in Table 2.

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Table 2.

Johnson's twenty principles of instruction for effective classroom practices for at-risk students

1. Maintain High Expectations	**11. Actively Involve the Students**
2. Make Use of Praise and Minimize Criticism	**12. Encourage Cooperative Learning**
3. Capitalize on Learning Technologies	**13. Ask and Encourage Questions**
4. Balance Direct Instruction with Challenging Activities.	**14. Teach Self-Monitoring and Self-Management**
5. Teach Learning Strategies	**15. Provide Creative Opportunity for Practice and Review**
6. Accommodate Students' Learning Styles	**16. Integrate Skills and Concepts Throughout the Curriculum**
7. Establish an Experiential Base for Learning	**17. Build Student Interest and Enthusiasm**
8. Teach Vocabulary Directly	**18. Manage the Instructional Process Efficiently**
9. Focus on Meaningful Skills, Concepts and Activities	**19. Celebrate Cultural Diversity in the Classroom**
10. Use Examples and Demonstrations	**20. Facilitate Parental Involvement with School**

NOTE: From "Principles of Instruction for At-Risk Learners," by G.M. Johnson, Summer 1998, Preventing School Failures, 42, no.4, p.167.

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Seven of Johnson's 20 principles will be discussed below.

Principle 4: Balance Direct Instruction with Challenging Activities: Direct instruction had been the dominant teaching approach used by teachers to teach students who are at risk (Knapp & Shields, 1990). According to Choate (1993), direct instructional didactic approach is characterized by:

- Teacher controlled instruction
- Extensive opportunities for student practice
- Frequent teacher corrective feedback
- Careful structuring of academic tasks so that content is introduced in small, manageable steps
- Rapid pacing
- Whole group or homogeneous group formats

In the classroom, direct instruction manifests itself in teacher-directed drill low level and repetitive exercises requiring endless attention to worksheets. This emphasis on drill and practice limits at-risk students' experiences with higher order thinking skills (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989). Drilling and using worksheets on basic skills fail to develop advanced academic skills for at-risk students. At-risk students also need to be exposed to assignments that develop their higher level thinking skills. Teachers must strike a balance between direct instruction and integrated, challenging, student-directed school activities (Knapp & Shields, 1990). Students who are at risk must become critical thinkers who can analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information.

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<u>Principle 5: Teach Learning Strategies:</u> Learning strategies include selecting and organizing information, rehearsing material to be learned, relating new material to information in memory, and enhancing the meaningfulness of material (Schunk, 1996). Instruction in specific thinking, learning, and studying strategies is essential for learners at risk. Unlike effective learners who quickly and automatically develop strategies necessary to learn, many at-risk students need to learn "how to learn" (Mulcahy, Short, & Andrews, 1991).

Rather than wanting to remediate, teachers need to be proactive by helping students learn how to learn. Traditionally, the main educational thrust for at-risk students was remediation, which slowed down student progress. This emphasis puts these students farther and farther behind their classmates. The organizations and instructional strategies of schools with students at risk contribute to lowered expectations, expectations of student failure, and an inability to draw upon the talents of teachers and the contributions of parents.

<u>Principle 8: Teach Vocabulary Directly:</u> During the introduction of a lesson, classroom teachers of at-risk students should provide key words and phrases that are categorized and clarified. This method provides at-risk students with a meaningful structure for making connections, and comprehending information as it is subsequently presented (Meier, 1992). Additionally, teaching vocabulary should include sentences that provide definitions. Other successful strategies are cloze-type activities in which a key term is deleted, as well as games that require students to match terms with definitions (Thomas & Carmack, 1993). Words must be embedded in context to bring meaning to life.

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Principle 9: Focus on Meaningful Skills, Concepts, and Activities: Learning is enhanced when it has personal relevance and meaning (Choate, 1993). Students of color, and those with different social, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, can relate to relevant and meaningful curriculum. Effective school instruction builds on what students have learned and makes connections to real-life situations (Means & Knapp, 1991). Schema-building involves highlighting the connections that exist between and across concepts and the curriculum.

Principle 10: Use Examples and Demonstrations: Fundamental to the instructional process is teacher modeling and demonstrating how texts are constructed and used. Concrete and familiar examples and objects are particularly effective with at-risk students. Demonstrations and hands-on manipulatives are such concrete examples necessary for at-risk students that provide them with a clear picture of what is expected.

Principle 11: Actively Involve the Students: Students at risk learn skills and develop concepts by being actively engaged and not by watching or listening (Choate, 1993). Interactive, hands-on approaches to lesson delivery appeal to the senses and provide a reason to learn; active learning promotes attention and increased on-task behavior, which can decrease other incidences of disruptive behavior (Borich, 1992). Academic achievement as well as discipline often improve as students experience success and take an active interest in what they are doing.

Principle 18: Manage the Instructional Process Efficiently: Structuring a classroom environment increases the likelihood that teachers will enjoy teaching and students will enjoy learning (Choate, 1993). It is important for teachers to establish a positive community with affective filters (safe environment) to learn. For at-risk students,

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supportive teacher-student relationships include firmness, consistency, genuineness, acceptance, and understanding.

According to Johnson (1997) the probability of academic success will increase for at-risk learners, if teachers conscientiously implement the aforementioned 20 basic instructional principles. These general instructional principles are applicable to all subjects. Recently, the use of these instructional practices for improving the success of at-risk students has been focused on literacy.

Literacy Rationale

Literacy is a significant current topic being discussed in educational literature. Apparently, the shift in student population is occurring across the nation, causing a need to focus on literacy. Rapidly increasing numbers of linguistically and culturally diverse students comprise school districts' populations. More numbers of second language learners come from language and cultural groups that schools never educated. Declining socioeconomic levels of students born in the United States and the arrival of newcomers with a variety of educational levels complicate traditional issues of English language development, literacy, and academic inclusion.

These concerns are particularly felt among older, pre-literate and struggling readers. As students progress through the grade levels, the demands of academically rigorous subject matter combined with greater dependence on expository text make the attainment of literacy skills imperative. Older pre-literate and less proficient readers tend to be in upper grades: fourth through twelfth.

In the 1960s, researchers attempted to explain the growing inequalities in the life opportunities of youth from different social classes and racial groups. Anthropologists

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such as Giroux (1983) and McLaren (1989) pointed out that success might be culture-bound. Student achievement in school might be largely determined in terms of the values of the majority group. To date, experts continue to debate the perspectives on the issues of linguistic and cultural differences and literacy attainment. Experts agree that the school curriculum must develop language and literacy while promoting self-esteem. Oral and written language skills can definitely separate or unite students. This categorizing resulting from sorting and ranking students begins at school and carries over in to the larger society. "The schools we have are better at sorting and labeling at-risk children than accelerating their academic development" (Allington & Cunningham, 1996, p.1). Therefore, the strengths that these students bring to school must be embraced and they must be perceived as capable learners. It is essential that educators be cognizant of the culture of their students.

Cultural Influences on Learning

According to Banks (1993), different worldviews of the students and teachers meet in the classroom, and then inharmonious ideas emerge on how each stakeholder is to act, how material is learned, and what educational outcomes are acceptable. This incongruence of perspectives can be identified as differences in style in the following areas: (1) behavioral expectations and social interaction style, (2) communication style, and (3) learning style. These areas have implications that impact teaching. The first two stylistic dimensions are related to the classroom environment in which teaching and learning occur; the third dimension is in the development of appropriate instructional strategies. Banks pointed out that cultural diversity is probably one major element that

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teachers should concentrate on, because it has a substantial influence on how students approach the learning process.

Instructional Strategies to Develop Literacy

Simply stated, reading is bringing one's language and world knowledge to print. Upper grade students tend to experience difficulties with text but demonstrate a wide range of language abilities that they use in social settings. Cummins (1994) suggested that there is a fundamental distinction between conversation and academic aspects of language. Scholars point out the distinction between contextualized and decontextualized language as a fundamental principle of language and literacy development. According to Cummins (1994) there are two levels of language proficiency: (1) Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and (2) Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS involves using language for social, face-to-face everyday situations. BICS tends to be contextualized, providing clues to comprehension, whereas CALP involves language skills and functions of an academic or cognitive nature. There are fewer context clues and students must draw meaning from language itself.

The literature on developing literacy suggests that activities that build background knowledge with text and that foster academic language development which involves more than one of the five senses, integrate the four modes of language, and are motivating are needed for struggling readers.

Read Aloud

Several scholars (Allington & Cunningham, 1996); Atwell, 1998); Bomer, 1995) suggested that Read Aloud is a strategy to build background knowledge with text and to foster language development. Reading aloud to children provides a model for the reading

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process while students witness and cultivate the joy of reading (Mooney, 1990). Reading aloud allows students to listen and absorb the sounds of language. Reading aloud is a strategy that promotes communicative and academic competencies, including vocabulary development, exposure to varied story structures, genres, authors, and illustrators.

In discussing how read aloud strategy works, Atwell (1998) indicated that:

> When reading aloud I go for it, changing my inflection for the different characters and moods of a text. I change my face, too--smile, frown, show anger or surprise or that effect of suspense or enlightenment–and I modulate the volume, louder or softer, to match the mood.... I ask questions: What do you think might happen next? What do you already know about the main character? Is this character an antagonist or protagonist? What do you think the author is trying to get at here? Does this remind you of anything else you've read? Does it remind you of anything that's happened to you? I show the illustrations. (p.145)

Allington and Cunningham (1996) stated, "Reading aloud to children is one way to model fluent reading and thoughtful talk about books, stories, and responses" (p. 46).

Shared Reading

Shared reading is another suggested literacy strategy that promotes language development. Routman (1991) defined shared reading as any rewarding reading situation in which a learner or group of learners sees the text, observes an expert reading it with fluency and expression, and is encouraged to read along.

More specifically, shared reading is based on the bedtime story experience (Holdway, 1979). Students sit close together to share a good story or a poem. All students are encouraged to construct meaning through illustrations, language patterns,

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active participation, and enthusiastic reading by the teacher, until finally students can read the text independently.

Independent Reading

Independent reading is practice time for students to apply the skills and strategies previously modeled in read aloud and shared reading. Students select their independent reading book. Students choose where they will read: lying on the carpet, propped on pillows, or sitting in chairs at tables (Atwell, 1998).

Bomer (1995) promoted ownership with his students, by allowing them to self-select their books. Independent reading allows the teacher to get to know each student as a reader and encourages energetic reading agendas. Students come to prefer some authors and genres and build a mind's shelf full of books they want to read someday.

Guided Reading

Guided reading is a process used to develop independent reading. The teacher guides students to talk, think, and question their way through a text that is slightly above their independent reading level. Instruction is given on developing the cueing systems and concepts of print that students are working on. This guided reading process may also be adapted for older students who are now ready to use the resources within themselves and the book to gain, maintain, and consider meaning for themselves (Mooney, 1995). Essentially, reading strategies develop over time as teachers guide the students to use the semantic (meaning), syntactic (parts of speech), and graph phonemic cues (spelling-sound relationships) to gain understanding of text.

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Readers' and Writers' Workshops

Readers' and writers' workshops form the structure for the aforementioned instructional strategies to be modeled and demonstrated. Both workshops are components of a balanced literacy program designed for fluent readers who are working independently, with partners, or with the whole class. Students engage in daily reading and interactions with others about the reading. Readers' workshop replicates what "real readers" do: read, reflect, discuss, and respond. The processes and procedures may vary based on student needs and interests (Atwell, 1998).

Atwell (1998) and Bomer (1995) identified three major elements of readers' workshop:

- Time-Students are given time to independently read.
- Ownership–Students choose what they read. Guidelines are established. Sometimes the entire class works on the same piece of literature. Independent reading gives students private ownership over their reading.
- Response–Students are given regular opportunities to reflect on and respond to their own and others' reading.

The Steps in readers' workshop are as follows (Atwell, 1998):

1. Minilesson–A (10-30 minute) minilesson is presented on a specific aspect of reading. These lectures at the start of class are about procedures, conventions, craft, genre, and topic development.
2. Student read–Students read independently, with partners, or in small groups. The teacher may be reading or conferencing, responding to journals, or holding book talk.

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3. Writing journal entries–Students write an entry in their reading journal about the reading. The entry reflects a discussion about the book by making or verifying predictions, making personal connections. Students share their thoughts, feelings, concerns and questions about the story, characters, author, etc.
4. Responding to reading journal–Students are paired, or sometimes work in small groups to read each others' journal entry. They may be reading the same or different books. Students write a response to the entry on the journal page itself.
5. Book log-Completed books are listed on a book log.

Elements of writer's workshop are the same as reader's workshop: time, ownership, and response. Students are engaged in daily writing, for varied purposes, participate regularly in writing conferences with peers and the teachers, and write for real audiences.

The steps in writers' workshops are as follows (Atwell, 1998; Bomer 1995):

1. Minilesson–A (10-30 minute) minilesson forum for telling students about behaviors and traditions, and conventions of writers.
2. Students write–Students work on their writing; they may be at any stage of the process from prewriting to publishing.
3. Conferencing–As students write, the teacher conferences with a few students daily to discuss, monitor, and evaluate writing, and to help students identify their personal positions/perceptions as writers.

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4. Sharing–Students share their completed writing with a small group or the whole class.

The empirical study, "Making Literacy Real for 'High-Risk' Adolescent Emerging Readers: An Innovative Application of Readers' Workshop" by Taylor and Nesheim (2000-2001) is an example of a program utilizing reading strategies in the context of a readers' workshop. Structures such as readers' workshop and minilessons are discussed in this study. The pedagogical strategies read aloud, think aloud, and scaffolding are also discussed.

Managing the instructional process efficiently was one of the key elements present in the readers' workshop study. Au (1993) believed that teachers have the challenge to determine the best ways to tap learners' willingness to use reading and writing. This willingness is essential to the role in learners' demonstration of existing literacy practices and skills and in the learning of new ones. It is the teacher's responsibility to the emerging readers in his or her classroom to provide opportunities for literacy learning that readers find meaningful and interesting so they become willing and able to construct meaning from printed text (Taylor & Nesheim, 2000-2001). In the readers' workshop project, emerging readers were provided with meaningful opportunities to learn to read and write.

An Innovative Approach to Readers' Workshop

In "Making Literacy Real for 'High–Risk' Adolescent Emerging Readers: An Innovative Application of Readers' Workshop," troubled high school adolescent males participated in readers' workshop, a learner-centered approach to teaching reading (Taylor & Nesheim, 2000-2001). Students shared their reactions to readings, helping to

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make connections between the readings and their life experiences. Students also made their own reading selections and set goals for their future reading. Additionally, the genre of children's literature provided these students with entertaining and enjoyable material at their reading level. Ultimately during the workshop, students engaged in understanding their own as well as others' experiences as readers. Students' reflections on their reading experience affected the goals that they set for the readers' workshop.

In the Taylor & Nesheim (2000-2001) study, students developed a community during the readers' workshop, which became an important factor in their learning. Teachers modeled and supported students as they learned about themselves and one another through response, sharing, and input. Support and direction varied according to students' level, goals, and needs. This nurturing community environment of a readers' workshop resulted in students understanding that all classmates were valued regardless of their reading level.

In this study, readers' workshop formed the structure to develop a positive community of learners. The teaching of learning strategies was used in the readers' workshop community environment. Hagerty (1992) explained that, "A readers' workshop isn't just having students sit around and read" (p. 9). This was evident in the readers' workshop project. Students learned strategies that the teacher modeled and taught and then applied them to their own reading. They were given significant time to use these strategies with self-selected materials as they pursued their reading goals (Taylor & Nesheim, 2000-2001).

In the readers' workshop project, minilessons were designed to use the principle of direct instruction with challenging activities. Topics for the minilessons were

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determined by students' needs identified from running records and anecdotal records. In these short 15-to-20 minute minilessons, teachers modeled reading strategies or current needs of the students. These focused minilessons were aligned with what Atwell suggested should be the kinds of instruction. There are three different kinds of minilessons: procedural (how to give a book talk), literary (characteristics of different genres), and strategy and skill (strategies for contextual clues, making inferences, etc.) (Atwell, 1998).

The implementation process of the readers' workshop project involved three phases. Initially the teacher constructed a display of children's literature on a fireplace mantel. Students were given the opportunity to look at the books, browse through the illustrations, and independently read them. This display included such children's books as Cuadros de mi Familia, All Over the Sky, Curious George, and the famous Dr. Seuss book The Cat in the Hat (Taylor & Nesheim, 2000-2001).

Secondly, during pre-workshop, students participated in shared readings modeled by the teacher. During this minilesson, the method of teaching vocabulary directly was used. The teacher used syntactic, semantic, and phonemic "miscues" to model strategic corrections. Another strategy, "think-aloud," was used by the teacher to identify a word or phrase that did not sound right, and then talked through the textual and visual cues. In the actual readers' workshop, the strategies taught in the pre-workshop minilesson were reviewed and integrated within the workshop application. The teaching of meaningful skills, concepts, and activities was used in the readers' workshop project. Students had the opportunity to practice the strategies and skills modeled by the teacher in the minilesson, such as reading with dramatic voice effects and reading and thinking aloud,

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which are strategies that good readers use. Double-entry diaries, Venn diagrams for comparison/contrast, and story or character maps were modeled so that students could use them and respond to their own reading (Taylor & Nesheim, 2000-2001).

The project was built on the premise that literacy is the willingness and the ability to construct meaning from reading texts within a particular social context. This readers' workshop project prompted students to engage as readers and to experiment with new ways. The students' outcomes ranged from some of them trying new reading behaviors such as reading aloud with reflection, using different voices, and to using gestures to enhance the story, to other students beginning to pay attention and respond positively to their peers as they heard them read aloud. Finally, other students took steps toward becoming adult reading models for children in their lives. It was noted that for a classroom full of good readers, the above behaviors are not uncommon. However, these are unusual behaviors for at-risk adolescents who have demonstrated delinquent behaviors (Taylor & Nesheim, 2000-2001).

The context of the Taylor and Nesheim project is unique, but it is applicable to other at-risk programs. This project addressed some universal factors such as students having problems in school, truancy, significant discrepancies in their knowledge and skills, and reading below grade level. School districts across the nation struggle with these universal factors as they help to define at-risk students and design systemwide structures that are responsive to the needs of low achieving students.

Districtwide Systemic Model for Change: District #2 Reform Efforts

To a great extent literature discussing the educational reform movements of the 1980s and 1990s is available describing how individual schools and coalitions of schools,

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have changed their educational programs (Allington & Cunningham 1996; Wheelock, 1992). Few school districts have identified a serious strategy to bring about system wide changes in instruction. Nationally, school districts have struggled with defining at-risk students and designing systemwide structures that are responsive to the needs of low achieving students. However, Elmore and Burney (1997a, 1997b, 1998) have identified a school district that uses staff development in a nontraditional manner to foster change.

Community School District #2 is one of 32 community school districts in New York. District 2 has 24 elementary schools, 7 junior high or intermediate schools, and 17 Option Schools, which are alternative schools. The diverse student population is 22,000, of which approximately 29% are Caucasian, 14% black, approximately 22% Hispanic, approximately 34% Asian, and less than 1% Native American. It has been identified as the only district with a strategy that is focused and well developed, which has activities that are implemented in a comprehensive and strategic manner (Elmore & Burney, 1997a).

A review of the emerging body of literature on New York's Community School District #2 reveals an analysis of a single districts' attempt to use professional development to mobilize knowledge in a systemwide way to improve instruction. According to Elmore and Burney (1997a), District #2 model is an example for how districts can implement a strategic process for change to deepen teaching practice, improve the quality of instruction, and raise student achievement levels.

> In this sense, this case can be seen as an 'existence proof' that it is possible for local districts to be agents of serious instructional improvement [and]... a source of ideas for practitioners in other setting to use in thinking about their own school

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improvement effort (p. 3).

However, Elmore raises questions about its generalizability to districts in other settings. The major concern reported in this body of literature is the question of transferability and generalizability of ideas from District #2 to other districts across the country. The majority of this research was made possible by the High Performance Learning Communities (HPLC) Project at University of Pittsburgh's Learning Research and Development Center (LRDC). For this study's purposes, the essential content of the literature on District #2 was reviewed, concluding with what the literature reveals about teacher learning and outcomes in District #2.

Several reports describe the organizational structures as the model for change embedded in District #2 (Elmore & Burney, 1997a). Other documents characterize District #2 as nested learning community (Elmore & Burney, 1997b) and explain continuous improvements that refines the conditions (Elmore & Burney, 1998). Teacher learning and the role of standards are described in reports (Stein, D'Amico, & Johnstone, 1999; Stein & D'Amico, 1999). Several school case studies provide insights into the operation of nested learning communities (Stein, 1997; Johnstone & Levine, 1997; Burney & Nelson-Le Gall, 1997).

Collectively, these reports describe a single school district under the leadership of a new superintendent in 1987 that implemented a strategy for the use of professional development to improve teaching and learning in schools. According to Elmore and Burney (1997a), this strategy consisted of two components: (1) a set of organizing principles about the process of systemic change and the role of professional development

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in the process; and (2) a set of staff development activities, that focused on system wide improvement of instruction.

Essentially, the transformation process involved the exposure to updated sets of values and practices followed by daily reinforcement through learning by doing. District #2 established the priority that developing quality instruction was the focal point of all district activity and the primary responsibility of every district employee (Elmore & Burney, 1997a). This process perpetuated internal transformation of the district's culture, thereby establishing a community of learners.

Over the past decade, District #2 teachers, principals, and administrators continuously engaged in staff development that was focused on concrete classroom applications of building literacy skills, which involved opportunities for observation, critique, and reflection. The District identified skilled practitioners and consultants, which provided opportunities for group support and collaboration, and deliberate evaluation and feedback. The purpose of this staff development approach was to deepen instructional practices, resulting in student achievement.

While these reports do not provide in-depth analyses of the effects of these changes, and they do not suggest that the district was without struggles. Many principals were counseled out or left voluntarily within a 10-year period; there was an 80% attrition rate for principals. Elmore and Burney (1998) stated that over time or under changes in leadership, principal and teacher attrition, and political climate, the changes in the district might not be sustained.

Despite the above-mentioned struggles, the elementary students in District #2 showed growth in their achievement. Researchers Stein, Harwell and D'Amico (1999),

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examined the extent to which student achievement in literacy improved across all elementary schools in District #2 during the 1997-98 school year. They investigated the extent to which changes in student achievement appeared to be related to whether or not schools participated in the Focused Literacy Network. Findings indicated that:

1. On average, all elementary schools improved on most measures of literacy achievement as measured by the California Test of Basis Skills (CTB), with larger average gains in reading than on writing.
2. Thirteen schools in the Focused Literacy Network made larger gains in literacy achievement than did the other schools in District #2.

Researchers predict that if continued in future years, this trend could close the achievement gap between them and their counterparts (Stein, Harwell, & D'Amico 1999). Recognizing the success of this largely elementary school district, a southern California school district used its model as a template to drive its educational reform efforts.

Innovative Educational Reform of a Southern California School District

General Blueprint

A southern California school district recently implemented a plan to improve the academic performance of at-risk students. The "Blueprint for Student Success in a Standards-Based System" is a comprehensive plan for changing the organizational structure of the district's schools and the entire system to support teaching and learning for all students. This plan is a southern California school district's response to the ongoing debate over the advantages and disadvantages of social promotion vs. retention.

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The Blueprint addresses the problem of social promotion, a practice where more than 40% of district students at some grade levels have been promoted to the next grade even if they do not read and compute math at the level required for success in that grade [Southern California School District], 2000b, p.1).

This Blueprint plan consists of three strategies: prevention, intervention, and retention, which are designed to provide all students the best pedagogy, the richest learning environment, and sufficient time to meet high standards.

1. Prevention strategy—to prevent students from falling behind. To improve the district's capacity to raise achievement for all children. Through extensive professional development, well-defined curriculum, and content standards teachers will deepen their knowledge and expertise in conveying the curriculum to students.

2. Intervention strategy – to help students improve their skills and catch up to grade level. A comprehensive set of strategies within and beyond the instructional day and year will be provided for identified academic struggling students.

3. Retention strategy– to retain and place students in an intensive accelerated program. An accelerated program will be provided for students who are significantly below grade level to catch up early in their school career [Southern California School District], 2000a, p. 5).

The Blueprint embraces the premise that all children can learn, but it extends this belief by stating, "it is another thing to make sure they do learn." (p. 5). Therefore, the Blueprint is based on the following set of guiding principles [Southern California School District, 2000a]:

- Systemwide focus of district work and resources on instruction.

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- Early and continuing support and interventions are provided to students to enable them to meet standards.
- Teachers make promotion decisions based on objective criteria and professional judgment.
- Retention is carried out at entry rather than exit grade levels.
- Massive investment is made in professional development with the goal of developing and sustaining a powerful instructional program focused on reading and mathematics.
- Enhanced parent education and involvement programs are provided, especially for parents of at-risk students- [Southern California School District], 2000a, p. 5).

There are several components to the Blueprint for organizing the school district to accomplish the goal of achievement for all students. The district projects that each component of the plan will be completely implemented over a multiyear period.

Theoretical Framework

The southern California school district's Blueprint for Student Success in a Standards-Based System (2000a) is based on a new core of learning and social theory. According to Resnick and Hall (1998), knowledge-based constructivism is this new learning theory for the Blueprint. Since the 1960s, beginning with Newell and Simon's (as cited in [Southern California School District], (2000a) landmark studies of human problem solving, a body of cognitive science research has focused on the nature of the mental processes involved in thinking and learning. There are three tenets of knowledge-based constructivism: learning theory, learning to be intelligent, and socializing intelligence.

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First, the knowledge-based constructivism learning theory confirms Piaget's claim that people must construct their understanding.

> To know something, indeed even to simply memorize effectively, people build a mental representation that imposes order and coherence on experience and information. Learning is interpretive, it is inferential, and it involves active processes of reasoning and a kind of 'talking back' to the world–not just taking it as it comes. Competent learners engage, furthermore, in a great deal of self-management of their cognitive processes, which is, in forms of cognition known as metacognitive and self-monitoring. (Resnick & Hall, 1998, p.14)

Cognitive scientist research indicates that knowledge not only enables thinking, but also actually makes learning possible. This repeated finding about the centrality of knowledge in learning connects to the constructivist theory of learning, for one has to have something to construct with. It is Resnick and Hall's (1998) argument that the constructivist theory suggests that education for the informational age should focus on the processes of learning and thinking. Therefore the pedagogy of Genre Studies is based on cognitive research. For example, cognitive research on reading indicates that phonemic encoding is essential to fluent reading (i.e., skilled readers make fluent use of the alphabetic code; they do not go directly from print to meaning). Many children need direct instruction to learn the code; some form of phonics instruction is needed.

Additionally, the research suggests that if children are taught the principles of the code (how speech functions in separate sounds, the phonemes), they do not have to be taught each spelling pattern. Instead, after children learn some basic print-sound agreements, they will rely on inference and their cognitive intelligence to figure out the

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rest. Although these strategies are mostly for primary grades, Resnick and Hall (1998) suggested that these strategies are transferable to secondary students. Furthermore, the issue of how to organize practice so it enhances the figuring-out process is where there is a fundamental debate between advocates of language-based and code-based approaches to teaching reading.

Also, Resnick and Hall (1998) pointed out that the cognitive study of comprehension and learning from text shows there are identifiable skills for understanding text. "These involve inferencing, 'unpacking,' creating relationships–both within the text, and between text and life experiences" (p. 17). The writers stressed that these learnable skills have to be taught systematically. These skills of emotion and intelligent interaction with text–a kind of "arguing back" and questioning the author, are called accountable argumentation.

The second tenet of knowledge-based constructivism is the implication that people can learn to be intelligent, that our 1920s theory of inherited aptitude (natural ability) should no longer guide educational practice. Instead, the new aptitude theory of effort-based learning should guide educational practice. This research has been examining thinking processes or knowledge structures that form habits of the mind. Social developmentalist research examines the relations between effort and ability. "Two broad classes of goals have been identified: performance-oriented and learning-orientation" (Resnick & Hall 1998, p.18).

> People with learning goals generally strive to develop their ability with respect to particular tasks. Learning goals are associated with a view of aptitude as something that is mutable through effort and is developed by taking an active

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> stance toward learning and mastery opportunities. Learning goals are associated with a view of ability as a repertoire of skills continuously expandable through one's efforts (Resnick & Hall, 1998, p.19).

This view of aptitude has been labeled by Dweck and Leggett (as cited in Resnick & Hall, 1998) as an incremental theory of intelligence. Essentially, learning goals are associated with the belief that effort and ability are related, so that greater effort creates more ability.

The third tenet of knowledge-based constructivism is socializing intelligence. "Socialization is the process by which children acquire the standards, values, and knowledge of their society" (Resnick & Hall, 1998, p. 20).

> Children develop cognitive strategies and effort-based beliefs about intelligence when they are continuously pressed to raise questions, to accept challenges, to find solutions that are not immediately apparent, and to rationally defend their proposals. When we do not hold children accountable for this kind of intelligent behavior, they take it as a signal that we do not think they are smart and they often come to accept this judgment. The paradox is that children become smart by being treated as if they already were intelligent. This is a hallmark of knowledge-based constructivist pedagogy (Resnick & Hall, 1998, p. 20).

Resnick & Hall's above belief in an effort-based system grounded in knowledge-based constructivism serves as the foundation to the establishment of Genre Studies courses. This system develops the capacity for all students to reach high standards of achievement.

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Genre Studies Literacy Block

At the secondary level, Genre Studies classes are a part of the intervention strategy of the Blueprint. Students entering ninth grade who are achieving below grade level form a homogeneous group and are placed in two-period Genre Studies classes, ([Southern California School District], 2000a). These students scored 1 to 3 years below grade level on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT). The two-period Genre Studies course provides students with more time on task to participate in a workshop format, where they can read and write using a variety of materials at a range of reading levels.

The Genre Studies model consist of 20% of time for minilessons, 70% of the time for students to practice, and 10% of time for students to share. First, students participate in a minilesson. The daily minilesson consists of teacher-directed instruction for 15-30 minutes. There are three different kinds of minilessons: procedural (how to give a book talk), literary (characteristics of different genres), and strategy and skill (such as strategies for contextual clues, making inferences). The minilesson is carefully crafted so that content and/or skill are introduced in small manageable steps. Topics for the minilessons are determined by students' needs identified from running records and anecdotal records. Using read aloud and shared reading strategies in these short minilessons, teachers are supposed to model what "real readers" do. However, teachers tend to model one reading strategy in isolation of others, resulting in students becoming strategy-caller readers.

Genre Studies is designed to provide rigorous, standards-based literacy instruction. This rigor translates in the classroom as skill building. Efforts are concentrated on

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compensating for things not learned in the past. Although students use graphic organizers such as KWL charts and clustering to access their prior knowledge, generate writing ideas, organize information, and plan for further learning, students appeared to have limited prior knowledge. Therefore, teachers spend a great deal of time developing students' repertoire of knowledge. Limited time is spent on developing higher level thinking skills.

Genre Studies teachers use scaffolding to help students gain a better perspective of how concepts fit together. For example, the following scaffolds are used in Genre Studies: modeling, bridging, contextualization, and schema building. Students are taught to make personal and text-to-text connections to their reading. Multicultural literature is available for student selection. Students are encouraged to read books that have relevance to them. Independently as well as in literature circles, students make connections to their reading. This means connecting the reading to their own life, to happenings at school or in the community, to similar events at other times and places.

Contextualization is another strategy used to help Genre Studies students construct meaning of unfamiliar words. Students identify these unfamiliar words in their reading and develop word walls to define them. While reading, students find words that are puzzling or unfamiliar and mark them. Then later, they jot down their definitions, either from a dictionary or some other source. Students also identify words that are repeated a lot, used in an unusual way, or key to the meaning of the text.

Secondly, the above-learned strategies that the teacher modeled are practiced during readers' and writers' workshops. Students are given 70% of class time to apply these strategies with self-selected materials. While Genre Studies students are actively

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engaged in the readers' or writers' workshop learning process, teachers are conferring with students. As they are working independently, the teacher provides corrective feedback. Conferring with students on a continuous basis helps to focus students and hold them accountable for their learning. Developing the learner's willingness and interest are challenges faced by teachers who teach at-risk students, using high interest materials and short minilessons help to capture students' attention.

Thirdly, 10% of class time is allocated for students to share. Students share their completed work with a group or the whole class.

Essentially, Genre Studies is designed to provide a balanced literacy (reading and writing) instructional program for homogeneous grouped at-risk students. The classrooms are student centered, characterized by students engaged in the learning process with access to materials and supplies. These principles are integrated into the process of building a positive community as Genre Studies students participate in the readers' and writers' workshops.

Summary

The literature describes an array of historical and contemporary perspectives about educating at-risk students. The report, A Nation at Risk (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) initiated the concept of at risk, and school districts began labeling students at risk. Historically, school districts tended to focus on the students' deficiencies when designing educational programs for at-risk students. For the past two decades 1980s and 1990s schools and districts have reformed their educational practices. Prior to this time, for most of this century, high school tracks provided different instruction to students in different tracks, and socialized them to accept their place in the hierarchy and

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the values associated with it. American schools have consistently assigned children from privileged families to college-bound tracks, and those who are poor and people of color to the vocational or low tracks (Goodlad & Keating, 1990; & Oakes, 1985).

Recently a body of research has emerged, reframing the problem to consider the institutional practices that impede student achievement. Most high schools have dismantled their overarching tracking programs with the flexibility for students to enroll in classes in different subjects at different levels. In a fully detracked school, students learn in a heterogeneous setting with other students of varying ability or age. Teachers no longer pace their instruction to the average student, but individualize learning through personalized assignments and collaborative practices.

Additionally, a new cognitive theory is emerging that challenges the concept of innate ability and the bell curve theory.

> Human beings can become intelligent and can learn intelligent behavior. What students derive from the classroom depends to a great extent not on an "I.Q. factor" but on academic environments that equip them to use their intelligence as lifelong learners, citizens, parents, and workers (Wheelock, 1992, p.13).

Based on this new thinking, some school districts have begun designing and implementing educational models and practices around new conceptualized alternatives. In one district at the secondary level, this new knowledge translates in a Genre Studies program that unites reading and writing. Reading in different genres directs the reader's attention explicitly toward the writer's craft. Teaching students the various modes of inquiry for the crafts of real readers and writers is the focus of developing literacy.

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Priority is given to helping students read better (i.e., flexible in the range of ways they can identify meaning from texts). A large amount of space and time is given to students to manage their own work. Curriculum decision is based on purposes that teachers construct from reflecting on what their students can do and what they need to learn to do. Finally, different social arrangements (e.g., independent, partnered, small group) with an adult and/or peers are designed to engage students in particular combinations of reading, writing, and conversing.

Therefore the question becomes whether or not the newer design/reform in high schools provides students with opportunities and mobility that the older system did not.

To study how in-school stratification works after the dismantling of track programs, if any, of the instructional, social, and institutional conduits continue to channel advantages to some and disadvantages to others, Lucas (1999) suggests two dimensions to investigate which are scope and mobility. The first dimension is concern with whether placement within one hierarchy is associated with placement in another hierarchy.

> In research on tracking one may regard students' simultaneous placement in two different hierarchies as an issue of scope a' la Sorenson (1970). Scope is defined as the amounts of time students spend with the same set of peers. Therefore when students occupy similar levels of courses in different subjects it is plausible to infer that scope is high (Lucas, p.14).

If the overlap is high, then the association is high and the scope is high. Conversely, scope might be low if students were placed in different vertically

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differentiated curricula according to differences in their preparation of study in various subjects. Students would spend time with different sets of peers when the scope is low. Now that schools no longer explicitly assign students to overarching tracking programs, it is necessary to ask whether the association has changed.

A second essential dimension to investigate to determine how the stratification system works is mobility. Students should have the flexibility to move to different subjects at different levels, thereby spending time with different sets of peers.

According to Lucas (1999), if one finds that despite the change in school practice students are still in the same level of course across subjects, then one might surmise that de facto tracking works to segregate students. This kind of pattern would facilitate continued differential socialization and suggest that any changes in the school/economy/polity relation are unrelated to changes in the in-school stratification system. Moreover a finding of continued segregation would mean that tracks may continue to provide contexts within which norms differ systematically and that despite the decline of formal programs de facto tracks may have institutional effects. (p.15)

This study sought to examine one southern California school district's educational reform efforts to provide a quality education for at-risk students. Did this district reform education to provide better life chances to deserving disadvantaged children or does de facto tracking exist?

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CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

In this chapter, the research design and methodology are presented. In particular, this chapter discusses a large urban district's reform strategy to improve students' academic performance. The discussion begins with the primary purpose and research design including the research site and participants, delimitations and limitations of the study, and the significance of the study. This chapter concludes with a methodological discussion of how the three research questions will be answered, paying special attention to the statistical techniques used and model specifications.

Research Design

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a districtwide strategy that focuses on literacy to educate students identified as "at risk." Specifically, this study sought to determine the impact that a literacy block of Genre Studies classes had on improving student academic performance as measured by the gains, if any, on two reading diagnostic tests: Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) and Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT9). These test score gains were also used to examine the extent to which students became eligible for placement in regular English classes. The variations in these gains were then examined to determine the effect, if any, that demographic and academic factors had on the students' level of achievement. Finally, the study sought to determine whether or not isolating below grade level students in a literacy-focused block class could improve students' reading scores when compared to a matched set of students who took regular English classes during the prior academic year.

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All students enrolled in the southern California school district are required to take the state-identified standardized test, the SAT9, which provides an assessment of basic skills. The SAT9 was the only required test administered in 1997-98 to students in the district. At the end of the 1998-99 school year all eighth graders also were given the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) to determine their reading level. Students who scored 1-3 years below their eighth grade level on the SDRT were placed in Genre Studies classes in the ninth grade. Before the inception of Genre Studies classes, these students were placed in regular English classes. At that time, schools used different assessments at each site to determine the reading levels of their students.

Currently, all eighth graders in southern California school district complete two reading assessments instruments, the SAT9 and the SDRT. The SAT9 provides national grade percentile ranks. Scores are categorized in three areas: below average, average, and above average. These categories allow for comparisons with other states and the nation. The SDRT gives grade equivalent scores, which indicate the student's grade level reading score. These grade-equivalent scores have been an integral part of the 1999-2000 districtwide reform strategies to improve students' academic performance since the district has used the SDRT scores to place students into Genre Studies classes. This study examined the effects of this Genre Studies reform strategy in terms of impact on both SDRT and SAT9 scores.

Research Site and Participants

The southern California school district is one of the largest school districts in the nation. It is a large urban district with a population of approximately 142,000 students.

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This 2000-2001 population is comprised of approximately 100,000 students of color and 42,000 Caucasian students. The present study was conducted using one of the 16 high schools in southern California school district. The high school population size 1,608 students, and closely reflect the district's diversity: African American (12%), Asian (16%), Hispanic (43%), and Caucasian (29%). Approximately 60% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunches based on low family income. Although this high school has received the Golden Bell award[1], recognizing its achievement, a large number of students are performing below the 50th percentile on the state required standardized test, SAT9.

Based on the Academic Performance Index (API) that the state of California uses to evaluate school performance, this school is, in fact, classified as underachieving. Despite a high suspension rate [2], the attendance rate is 94%, which is considered quite good. Additionally, the school has a low transient rate, which means that only a small percentage of students transfer out of the school. As such, students tend to complete their high school years at this school. More than two thirds of the student population participates in the Magnet Program or the Volunteer Ethnic Enrollment Program (VEEP), which means that only about 500 students live in the residential area of the school.

Initially, the population for this study included all 183 ninth grade Genre Studies students from the 1999-2000 school year. Only those students with both SDRT pre-and post-scores comprised the actual sample for calculations. Pretest refers to the test administered at the end of the student's eighth grade and posttest refers to the test

[1] The Golden Bell Award Program recognizes outstanding programs in school districts that reflect the depth and breadth of the education necessary to address students' changing needs.
[2] Suspension rate is the percentage of days that students are suspended from school for disciplinary reasons.

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administered at the end of the following ninth grade year. A total of 102 Genre Studies students had both pre-and postscores.

In addition, out of 183 students, 122 Genre Studies students had both pre and post SAT9 scores. A comparable group of students who participated during the 1998-99 school year in regular English classes, the last year before Genre Studies was implemented, were matched with Genre Studies students to determine the difference, if any, between their SAT9 reading scores and the scores of their counterparts. Since these students are enrolled in southern California school district, the researcher followed district procedures to obtain data.[3]

Methodology

The following three research questions were investigated:

1. a. What impact did the 1999-2000 Genre Studies classes have on the reading level of students as measured by the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) and Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT9)?

   b. What percentage of students was eligible to return to regular English classes the next year 2000-2001 as measured by grade level equivalent scores on the SDRT?

2. To what extent did the changes in reading level for Genre Studies students on SDRT and SAT9 vary by gender, ethnicity, attendance, and special needs (e.g.,

[3] The district procedure for conducting research in a single school requires the researcher to obtain approval from the school principal. I presented and discussed the research proposal with the principal and he gave me permission to conduct this study.

As a teacher working at this high school, I have access to the school personnel and student records. Working with the principal, vice principals, and head counselor, I obtained the necessary student data for the study. All of the data were generated from the school site.

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special education, English language learners), G.P.A., discipline problems, citizenship, and academic credits acquired?

3. What was the difference, if any, between the SAT9 reading scores of matched students who participated in Genre Studies classes in 1999-2000 and comparable students who participated in regular English classes in the 1998-1999 previous school year?

The following procedures were used to investigate the above three questions.

First, to determine what impact Genre Studies classes had on student reading levels, pre and post reading scores on two tests, the SAT9 and SDRT, were used. In this manner, students' pre and post reading levels were compared and a *t* Test was used to test for the difference in the pre-and posttest scores to see if their reading level changed significantly as a result of the specialized classes. Students were expected to gain 1 year of growth on the SDRT with one year of instruction; any more months of growth were considered significant. Students were expected to score at the 50th percentile on the SAT9, which is considered to be average. Therefore, scores above the 50th percentile are considered significant. To minimize the measurement error inherent in any single test, two reading instruments were used. Using two measures of the same construct gives better reliability. In constructing these pre and posttest measures, it can be determined what percentage of the students' reading scores improved to the extent that they were permitted to participate in regular tenth grade English class. Students who score at or above the tenth grade reading level on the SDRT are placed in regular English classes during the following year.

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Second, the study focused on the determinants of the change in the scores of Genre Studies student. Specifically, the study examined the extent to which changes in the overall mean score of the SDRT and SAT9 reading tests can be explained by gender, ethnicity, attendance, and special needs (e.g., special education, English language learners). In this analysis, multiple regression models were used with the change in SDRT reading level serving as the dependent variable in one of the models and the change in SAT9 reading test score as the dependent variable in the other. Both dependent variables were regressed against the students' attendance and a series of dummy variables representing gender, ethnicity, and special needs.

The independent variables used in the regression models were operationalized as follows. Gender was be represented by a single dummy variable, while ethnicity was measured using a series of three dummy variables, one for African American, one for Asian, and one for Hispanic, with Caucasians serving as the omitted category. Attendance was represented by the percentage of days students showed up for class. A dummy variable distinguishing between students requiring a modified curriculum and those using a regular curriculum represented special needs. Grade Point Average (G.P.A.) was represented by the actual overall numerical grade point average. The number of referrals each student received represented overall discipline problems. The citizenship score used was the actual citizenship grade average, calculated by using the citizenship grades from all classes in which they received a grade for citizenship. The actual number of units each student earned was represented by academic credits earned in the 8th or 9th grade. Essentially four variables (gender, ethnicity, modified curriculum,

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and academic credits) were calculated by using dummy variables. Three variables (attendance, G.P.A, and discipline problems) were continuous variables.

For each of these regression models, the relative importance of each independent variable was calculated using a t test performed at the 95% level and the overall fit of the models was explained using such goodness-of-fit statistics as R2 and adjusted R2.

A third set of procedures in the study compared eighth grade SAT9 reading test scores of 122 students who participated in Genre Studies classes in 1999-2000 with the scores of a matched sample of students who participated in regular ninth grade English classes the previous year (1998-99) when no Genre Studies classes were offered. To establish the match selection of students, the 1999 spring SAT9 reading score of the 122 students who participated in Genre Studies was matched as closely as possible to those student's 1998 spring SAT9 reading scores who participated in regular English classes. This matching strategy is made possible because SAT9 data were obtained from the same grade level students attending the same school. Therefore, repeated measurements were obtained from the same set of test scores. The variance of interest (reading scores) became the difference between the values of the students rather than the values of the students themselves. Furthermore, the students took the same SAT9 test and scores were accessible. Genre Studies student data were collected for the school year 1999-2000, which was the first year of the district's program, and matched with students' data from the previous year, 1998-1999. The spring 2000 SAT9 reading scores of Genre Studies students were matched with 1999 spring SAT9 cores of regular English students. Then the SAT9 reading scores of these matched students were compared to determine if there is a significant difference in achievement in reading between students who participated in

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Genre Studies and those who did not. The model constructed consisted of the matched group of non-Genre Studies students with equal SAT9scores, to Genre Studies students. The matched population is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 **Matched Population**

Assessment	SAT 9 Test Score (end of 8th grade)	SAT 9 Test Score (end of 9th grade)
Genre Studies	Spring, 1999	Spring, 2000
Regular English	Spring, 1998	Spring, 1999

The methodology of this study involved gathering data from a single school within the southern California school district from 1998 to 2000 and used both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research questions about what gains were made by students in both the Genre Studies group and the matched sample, and inferential statistics was used to test the differences between the groups. Multiple regression analysis helped to explain the extent to which differences in individual performance were due to demographic and academic factors.

Significance of the Study

As the nation becomes increasingly diverse and urban, many experts concur that the continuing pattern of inadequate performance by a significant proportion of our children will not improve unless educational leaders address issues of at-risk students. The researcher's intent was that the results of study will inform leaders in large diverse school districts about a particular districtwide strategy to use for students who are at risk and have special needs, so that appropriate placement and classroom strategies may take

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place in a proactive manner. Gathering information related to which academic and reading strategies work should be a valuable step toward the development of a comprehensive program to improve the education of students who are at risk.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This study focused on student outcomes in their reading scores and test scores. Quantitative data were be used to compare these outcomes over a period of time. Data were collected for 102 students who participated in 1999-2000 Genre Studies courses for one year. The study included the population of Genre Studies students with both pre-and posttests scores, which added analytical depth. This population represented the characteristics of at risk students. The large number of Genre Studies classes at the same grade level (ninth) provided the researcher with enough data to estimate the change in student outcomes with a relatively high degree of precision.

Additionally, the uniqueness of Genre Studies classes imposed limits on the study. This study examined the strategy of providing a literacy-focused Genre Studies program for students who are at risk. The study did not separately analyze the effects of student's learning styles, family background and educational history. Therefore, there is limited transferability to these above aspects of at risk students. For example, the students' outcome cannot specifically be attributed to student's family support system. The Genre Studies strategy as a whole concept and not its individual components can be transferable to other school districts. The findings of this study may prove useful in designing related programs for similar student populations in large urban districts.

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The quickness of the establishment of Genre Studies classes may also have imposed limits on the study. Staff members may have had limited understanding of the entire Genre Studies components (i.e., readers' and writers' workshops, minilessons, and reading strategies), but the conceptualization of this program may be generalizable to other programs.

Background of the Researcher

First and foremost, I am a product of an exemplary educator, my mother. She raised her six children to be high achievers. Officially, I began my career as an educator 27 years ago. I entered my first teaching position in 1974 as an English teacher. During these 27 years, I have worked as a teacher, resource teacher, coordinator, vice principal, and principal.

My past experiences have afforded me opportunities to acquire a broad-based knowledge of instructional programs that cover the entire educational spectrum: Gifted And Talented Education; General Education (English, History, Achievement Goals Program, Chapter1/Title 1); Dropout Prevention, At-Risk Student Programs; Dropout Recovery and Zero Tolerance Program.

As a GATE Resource Teacher, I developed the skill of Strategic Planning with programmatic structural implementation linked to accountability. As the GATE Curriculum Task Force Chairperson for 3 years, I implemented a process to develop a GATE Curriculum Framework. This process involved team building of all grade level district-wide teachers organized in five content areas. Through shared decision-making, teachers decided, based on effective research, what skills and concepts were important to

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teach gifted students. The success of my leadership is evident by the publication of the district's GATE Curriculum Framework.

As the district's first board-appointed Student Success Programs Coordinator, Dropout Prevention Programs assigned to work with the Deputy Superintendent, I provided major leadership in reducing the district's dropout rate. I coordinated all the district's dropout prevention and recovery programs.

As an administrator, I have in-depth experience designing and managing all aspects of school operations. Specifically, I have designed three of the four Alternative Education Schools in a large urban district. In all of these experiences, I implemented the vision of collaborative community-based schools. I succeeded in establishing high expectations as a basic operating principle for staff and students. Under my leadership, the pedagogy of maintaining traditional methods on instruction while also utilizing varied teaching/learning strategies (e.g., learning styles, multiple intelligences, cooperative learning, Socratic seminars, and interdisciplinary curriculum) were realized.

The outcomes of these three schools included: improved student attendance; increased community support; improved student performance (grades, credits, test scores and graduation). In particular, one school was recognized by the State Department of Education for making the biggest one-year improvement in reading. In another one of these schools the State Department of Education awarded a High Risk Youth Education and Public Safety Program grant for 450,000.00 for each year at the duration of 5 years. Among other things, these experiences confirmed my belief that all children can learn. When given the right environment, quality instructional program and support, all students do achievement. There are four main lessons that I learned: (1) More of the same deficit

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model is not good enough. (2) Quality homogeneous grouping can only work with strong disciplinarians. (3) Teacher burnout is a reality when teaching at-risk homogeneous grouping of students. (4) Students need comprehensive support systems inside and outside of school.

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CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSES: STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN GENRE STUDIES

In this chapter, analyses of the data are presented. The discussion begins with a review of the purposes of the study and research questions, and then moves on to data collection and the methodology used to analyze the data. The discussion continues with the actual data analyses and concludes with a summary of the analysis.

Purposes of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a districtwide strategy that focuses on literacy to educate students identified as "at risk." Specifically, this study sought to determine the impact that a literacy block of Genre Studies classes had on improving student academic performance as measured by the gains, if any, on two reading diagnostic tests: Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) and Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT9). These test score gains were also used to examine the extent to which students became eligible for placement in regular English classes. The variations in these gains were then examined to determine the effect, if any, that demographic and academic factors had on the students' level of achievement. Finally, the study sought to determine whether or not isolating below grade level students in a literacy-focused block class could improve students' reading scores when compared to a matched set of students who took regular English classes during the prior academic year.

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Research Questions

These purposes were investigated using the following three research questions.

1. a. What impact did the 1999-2000 Genre Studies classes have on the reading level of students as measured by the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) and/or Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT9)?

   b. What percentage of students was eligible to return to regular English classes the next year (2000-2001) as measured by grade level equivalent scores on the SDRT?

2. To what extent did the changes in reading level for Genre Studies students on SDRT and SAT9 vary by gender, ethnicity, attendance, special needs (e.g., special education, English Language Learners); and G.P.A., discipline problems, citizenship, and academic credits acquired?

3. What was the difference, if any, between the SAT9 reading scores of matched students who participated in Genre Studies classes in 1999-2000 and comparable students who participated in regular English classes in the 1998-1999 previous school year?

Data Collection

Data were gathered from a single high school within a southern California school district, over a 2-year time period, 1998-99 and 1999-2000. Specifically, two kinds of information were collected–test score data used to measure the effectiveness of the Genre Studies classes, and select academic and demographic measures used to describe the students.

During the school year 1999-2000, 183 students were enrolled in Genre Studies classes. Scores from two assessment tools were obtained for this group of students.

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Stanford Diagnostic Reading (SDRT) pre and post reading scores were available for 102 students to conduct this study. Eighty-one SDRT student scores were not available because the district did not administer the SDRT to English Language Learners (ELL) in Bridging Genre Studies classes (classes comprised of all ELL students). However, SDRT scores were obtained for ELL students mainstreamed in other Genre Studies classes. Therefore, 56 percent of the total Genre Studies population was used to address the first research question using the SDRT assessment.

To address using the second assessment (SAT9) in research question #1, Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT9) scores were obtained for 132 Genre Studies students, comprising 72 percent of the total Genre Studies population. Additionally, Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT9) test scores were obtained for the matched population of 122 non-Genre Studies students. These scores, representing 67 percent of the total Genre Studies population, were used to address the third research question.

Academic and demographic data were also collected to determine to what extent these variables helped explain changes in students' reading levels. These data included: overall grade point average for all six classes, numbers of discipline referrals, percentage of days students attended school, overall citizenship for all six classes, modified curriculum needs for special education or English language learners, academic credits earned from all six classes, gender, and ethnicity.

The demographic characteristics of the 102 Genre Studies students with SDRT scores consisted of 4 groups of students—African American, Asian, Hispanic, and Caucasian. As shown in Figure 1, Hispanics comprised the largest group with 52

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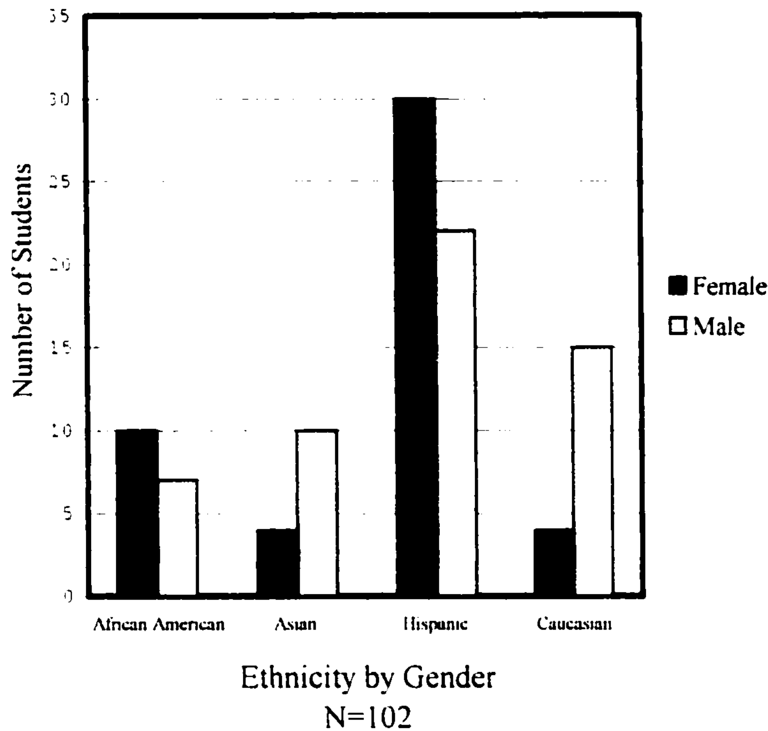
students while Asians were the smallest group with 14 students. There were a total of 54 males and 48 females (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Demographic characteristics of Genre Studies Students



Methodology

The study's methodology used the following procedures to investigate the three research questions. In the first part of the study, the actual gains of Genre Studies students as measured by the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) and the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT9) were analyzed to determine to what extent students had improved their reading scores as a result of participating in this intervention.

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In the second part of the study, descriptive statistics were used to present an overview of the nontesting data. This was accomplished by presenting means for the academic and demographic variables in the study. Then multiple regression analysis was used to explain the extent to which differences in individual performance were due to demographic and academic factors. Specifically, the study examined the extent to which changes could be explained by gender, ethnicity, attendance, special needs (e.g. special education, English Language Learners); and G.P.A., citizenship, credits earned, and number of referrals.

Two models were constructed. The first model used the change in SDRT reading scores as the dependent variable, while the second model used the change in SAT9 reading scores as the dependent variable. These changes were calculated as the difference between the student's pre and post scores on either or both reading assessments. In separate models, the two dependent variables were regressed against the students' series of demographic and academic variables.

The third part of the study sought to determine if isolating below grade level students in literacy-focused block classes could improve students' reading scores when compared to a matched sample of students who took regular English classes during the prior academic year. Since Genre Studies is designed to improve students' reading and writing, two measures of growth were used to assess students' improvement. The national standard of expected student growth was applied. Students are expected to gain 1 year of growth with one school year of instruction on the SDRT; any more months of growth is considered significant. Students are also expected to score at the 50th percentile

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on the SAT9, which is considered to be average; therefore, scores above the 50th percentile are considered significant.

Data Analyses

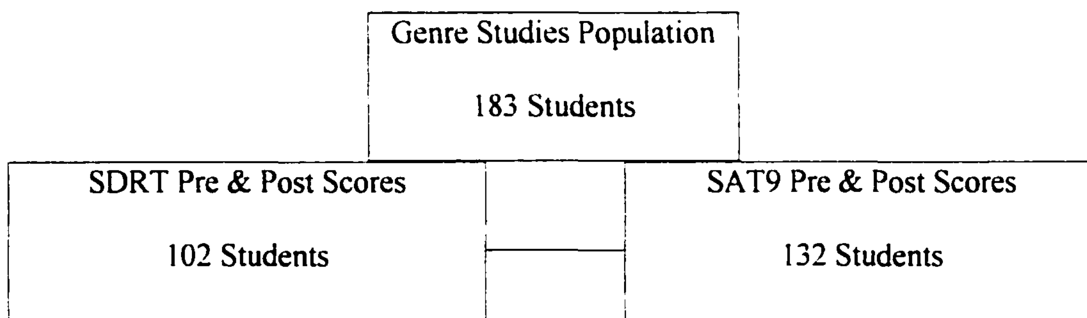
Research Question One

The first research question had two parts to it. Each part is reported separately.

1. a. What impact did the 1999-2000 Genre Studies classes have on the reading level of students as measured by the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) and/or Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT9)?

To address this question, pre and post SDRT and SAT9 scores were used for the 102 students. A *t* test was used for an analysis of variance between pre and post test of the SDRT and SAT9 reading scores. This paired-sample *t* test was used because the same group of students took the same reading tests. Students' scores on their SDRT spring 1999 test was compared to the same students' scores on their SDRT spring 2000 test. Similarly, the same students' scores on their SAT9 spring 1999 test were compared to scores on their SAT9 spring 2000 test. As shown in Table 1, 30 more of the Genre Studies students had pre and post SAT9 scores than pre and post SDRT reading scores.

Figure 2. Student Assessment Population



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Specifically, students' reading scores on the SDRT and SAT9 test were compared to the same tests scores after 1 year of receiving the intervention. The difference between Genre Studies students' SDRT pretest (spring 1999) and SDRT posttest (spring 2000) scores from 102 students was used to calculate the gain scores. As shown in Table 1, the results of the *t* test indicated that Genre Studies students gained about a half point on their SDRT test (.50), and the *t* value of 2.50 was greater than the critical value at the 95 percent confidence level. Thus, the null hypothesis of no gain (or loss) on the test was rejected.

Table 1. Paired-Sample *t* Test: Mean Gain Difference in SDRT

N	Mean	*S.D.*	*t* value
102	.50	2.0	2.50

One hundred and thirty-two Genre Studies students' SAT9 pretest (spring 1999) and SAT9 posttest (spring 2000) scores were also used to calculate the gain in reading. The SAT9 scores of 132 students comprised the sample population, representing 72 percent of the total 183 Genre Studies students. The results of the *t* test indicated an average loss of 2.02 points on the SAT9 and a *t* value of −1.93, which was significant at the 95 percent confidence level. Thus, the null hypothesis of no gain (or loss) on the test was rejected (see Table 2).

Table 2. Paired-Sample *t* test: Mean Gain Difference in SAT9

N	Mean	S.D.	t value
132	-2.02	12.03	-1.93

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The results of the *t* test to determine the impact that Genre Studies had on students' SDRT scores was statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. Thus, the null hypothesis of no gain or loss on the SDRT reading scores was rejected. However, this result reflects the SDRT reading scores of the 11 students who had a pre score (spring, 1999) at or above the ninth grade level. These students were included in this study because they participated in the Genre Studies classes, and according to district policy, students placed in Genre Studies must remain for the entire school year. Nevertheless, when they were removed from the sample, the results were almost identical: the remaining students gained a half point (.50) on their SDRT test and had an average loss of 3.10 on their SAT9 test.

On the other hand, the results of the *t* test to determine the impact Genre Studies had on the SAT9 showed statistical significance at the .95 percent confidence level. Genre Studies students scored 2 points lower on the SAT9 test. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no gain (or loss) on the SAT9 test scores was rejected.

1. b. What percentage of the students was eligible to return to regular English classes the next year (2000-2001) as measured by grade level equivalent scores on the SDRT? Initially, the population for this study included all 183 ninth grade Genre Studies students from the 1999-2000 school year. Only those students with both SDRT pre-and post scores were used in the sample. As shown in Table 3, a total of 102 Genre Studies students had both pre-and post scores. Eighty-one students had either a pre score or a post score therefore they were not included in the study.

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Table 3. Genre Studies Students SDRT Pre and Post Scores

Number	Pre Score Only	Post Score Only	Pre & Post Both
183	10	71	102

The SDRT post measures were used to determine students' eligibility. Students who scored at or above the 10th grade reading level on the SDRT were placed in regular English classes. Using the standard of 1 month's growth per 1 month's instruction, the students' gain as measured by the SDRT was used to determine what percentage of students was eligible to return to regular English classes. Out of 102 Genre Studies students with matched pre and post SDRT scores, 20 students had a post SDRT grade equivalent score at or above the 10th grade. These students were eligible to take regular English as a result of their improved reading scores.

Out of the initial 183 students, 23 students (12%) were eligible for 10th grade regular English classes. Eleven of these students were eligible at the beginning of the school year because they had a pre score at or above grade level. Three students didn't have a pre score but had a post score at or above the 10th grade level. Nine students became eligible as determined by their growth measure of their pre and post scores (see Table 4).

Table 4. Genre Studies Students Eligible for 10th Grade English Classes

Number	Percentage	Pre Score Only	Post Score Only	Pre & Post Scores
183	12	11	3	9
102	9	11	0	9

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As mentioned earlier, 11 of the previous 20 students' pre SDRT scores were at or above grade level, yet they were participating in Genre Studies classes. The gender and ethnicity of these 11 students are as follows: 4 Asian males, 4 Hispanic males, 1 Hispanic female and 2 Caucasian males. All of these students' post scores ranged from 10th grade to post high school (13th grade). However, these 11 students remained in the study because they had participated in Genre Studies classes. In fact, their level of performance does not bias the data, since Genre Studies was designed with the goal of increasing student's literacy skills, thereby closing the achievement gap. Eliminating these students would fail to present accurate data. Furthermore, the high school's practice was to not transfer students out of Genre Studies until the end of the school year. The primary purpose of determining the effectiveness of the Genre Studies strategy would be compromised without the SDRT data on these students.

Furthermore, 9 of the 11 students' SAT9 scores were available for this study. Two students didn't have pre and post scores for the matched population. A total of 132 Genre Studies students had SAT9 pre and post scores that included 9 of these 11 students with SDRT pre scores at or above grade level. It should be noted, that SAT9 scores were not used to determine student placement in Genre Studies classes.

As shown in Table 5, out of the 9 Genre Studies students eligible for regular grade 10 English and who initially scored 1 to 3 years below grade level, 4 ethnic groups were represented. The gender and ethnic composition of those students was as follows: 1 African American student, 3 Asian students, 3 Hispanic students, and 2 Caucasian

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students. Five males and four females scored at or above the 10th grade level on the spring 2000 SDRT test.

Table 5. Ethnic/Gender Composition of Students at or above Grade 10

Ethnicity	Gender	Pre SDRT Score (Spring, 1999)	Post SDRT Score (Spring, 2000)	Gain
African American	Male	8.4	10.7	2.3
Asian	Male	8.3	10.1	1.8
Asian	Male	8.8	10.7	1.9
Asian	Female	7.4	10.7	3.3
Hispanic	Male	4.5	12.8	8.3
Hispanic	Female	7.1	12.1	5.0
Hispanic	Female	7.2	10.5	3.3
Caucasian	Male	7.1	10.2	3.1
Caucasian	Female	8.1	10.1	2.0

Nine percent of the total 102 students became eligible for placement in regular 10th grade English class. The average reading grade equivalent growth for these nine students was 3 years and 4 months. All except one student were 1 to 3 years below grade level. The one student whose reading score improved 8 years and 3 months suggests that this student may not have taken the test seriously when taking it for the first time.

An analysis of 102 Genre Studies students with both 1999 (pre) and 2000 (post) SDRT grade equivalent scores indicated the following growth. Only 2 percent of the students showed 4 or more years of growth in their reading scores. These students

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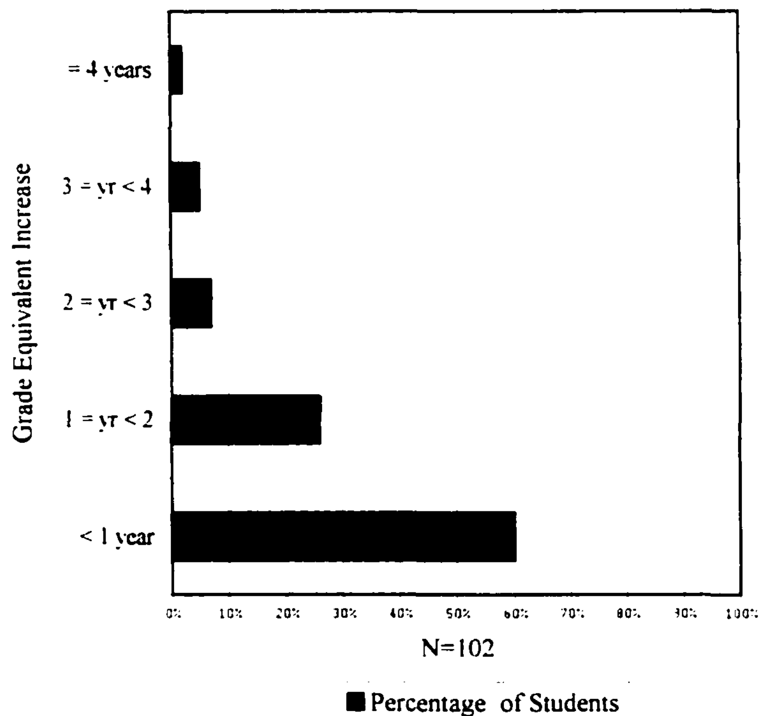
became eligible for 10th grade regular English class. Other analysis of the data indicated that 26 percent of Genre Studies students showed 1 year but less than 2 years of growth; 7 percent showed 2 years to less than 3 years of growth; and 5 percent showed 3 years to less than 4 years of growth. More than one half (60 percent) of Genre Studies students showed less than 1 year's growth (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage of Population at Each Level of Improvement



A further analysis of these data was conducted by calculating the mean score of Genre Studies students' SDRT pre and post gains. Then the rate of growth measure was used to analyze the data. By using this calculated rate of growth measure of 7/9 of a year's growth, the data revealed some interesting results. Genre Studies students participated in a 2-period literacy block class for 1 year, which means that their reading score should increase by 2 years using the normal standards. Using the calculated rate of

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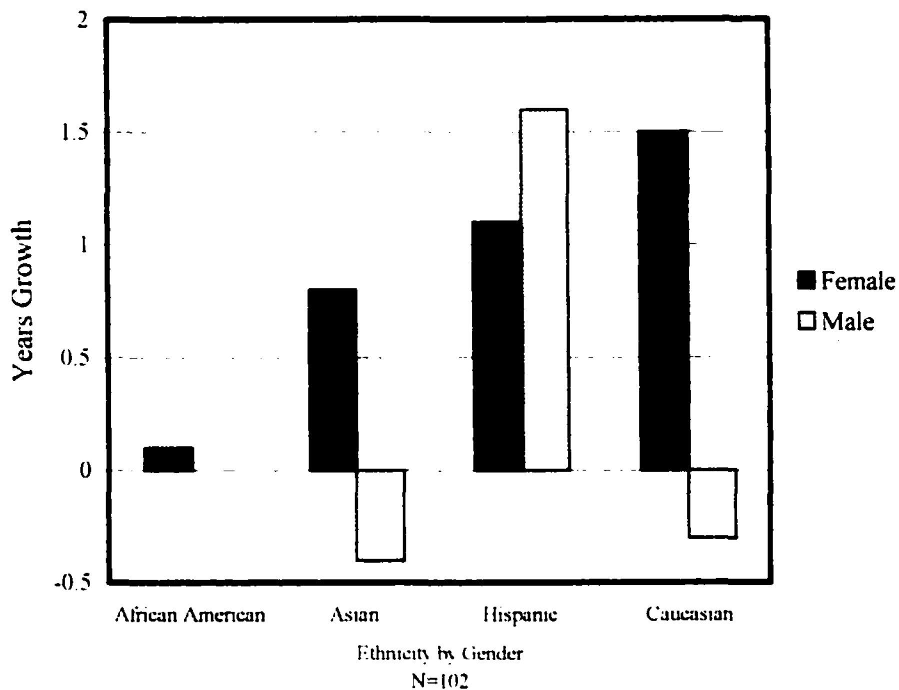
growth measure of 7 months in a 9-month instructional program, Genre Studies students should have showed 14 months growth. The results of this intervention indicated that one group did not show any growth, two groups lost growth, and two groups showed growth (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: SDRT Year's Growth



On average, both the Hispanic males and females, and Caucasian females showed more than a year's growth. Additionally, Asian females showed almost a year's growth. However, African American females, Asian males, and Caucasian males showed a decline in their reading scores, while African American males showed no growth at all for the year. Typically, a year's growth would be standard measurement for a year's instruction; however, Genre Studies is designed to raise students' reading scores by

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providing a 2-period (double class time) literacy focused instructional program. Therefore, the results indicate that Genre Studies students did not improve their reading level to the level of expected growth linked to the number of instructional months. Furthermore, the increased time produced a full year's growth for only certain groups of students while other students' reading scores decreased.

Research Question Two

2. To what extent did the change in reading level for Genre Studies students on SDRT and SAT9 vary by gender, ethnicity, attendance and special needs (e.g. special education, English language learners), G.P.A., discipline problems, citizenship and academic credits acquired?

To address the second research question, descriptive statistics are first presented for each of the academic variables by gender and ethnicity. Following this, two regression models are presented that examine the impact that Genre Studies had on the different groups of students.

Academic and select demographic variables were used to describe the Genre Studies students. These variables included: overall grade point average for all six of their classes, numbers of discipline referrals, percentage of days students attended school, overall citizenship for all six classes, modified curriculum needs for special education or English language learners, academic credits earned from all six classes, gender and ethnicity. The overview of the non-testing academic and demographic data for 102 Genre Studies students is as follows:

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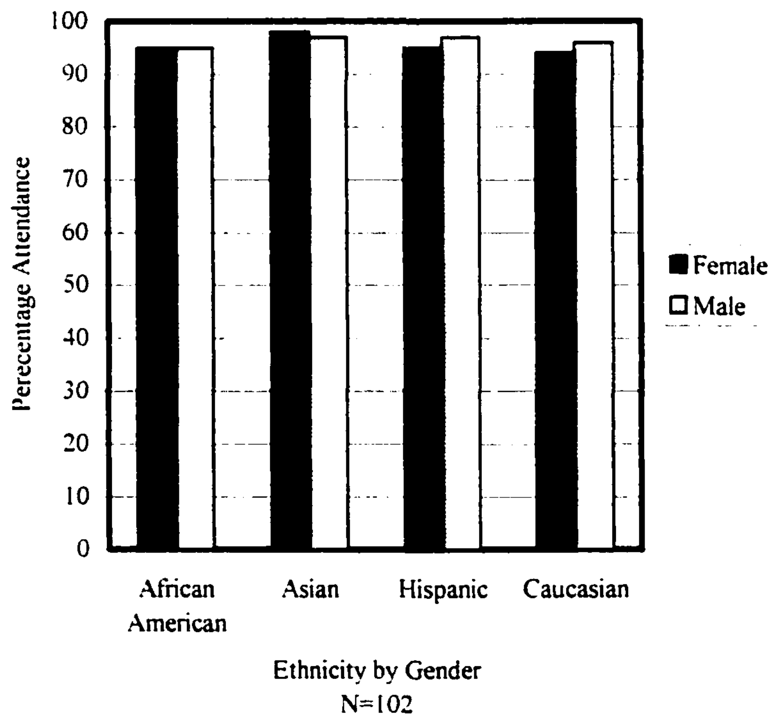
Attendance

The school year for all students consists of 180 days. The study used the percentage of school days that each Genre Studies student attended school. On average, all 102 students had excellent attendance, ranging in the 90th percentile. As shown in Figure 5, there is little variation in attendance rate by gender and ethnicity. For example, both African American males and females had an attendance rate of 95 percent while Asian females average attendance rate was only 1 percent higher than Asian males. On the other hand, both Hispanic and Caucasian male attendance rate were 2 percentage higher than their female counterparts. The attendance chart reflects 102 students.

Figure 5: Average Yearly Attendance Rate by Ethnicity and Gender



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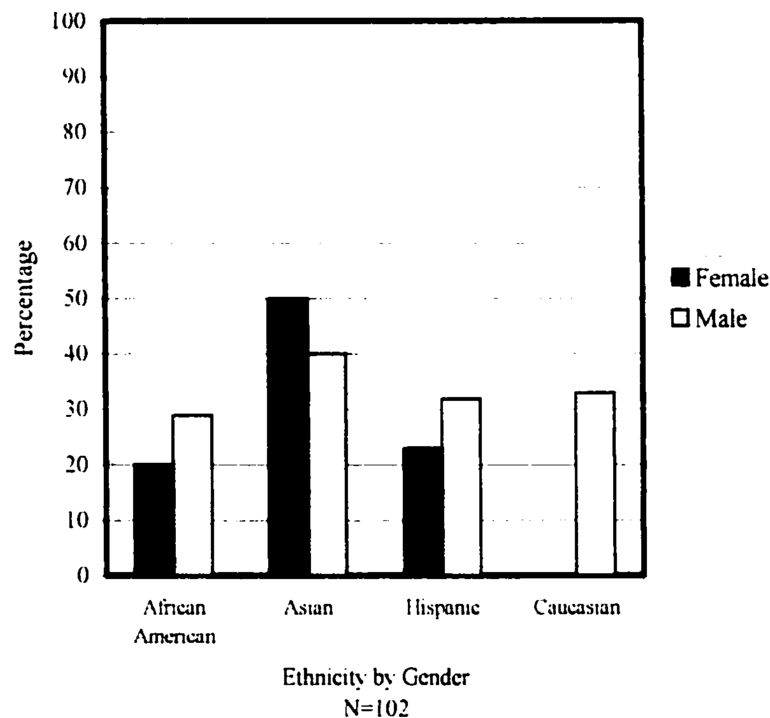
Modified Curriculum

School-wide, a modified curriculum is provided to students who are classified as needing special education services and students who speak a primary language other than English, classified as English Language Learners (ELL). As shown in Figure 6, out of the 102 Genre Studies students, all groups of students except Caucasian females had modified curriculum needs.

Figure 6: Percentage of students with Modified Curriculum



The data revealed that on average the Asian students had the highest need for a modified curriculum. However, it should be noted that the Asian students comprised the smallest number of Genre Studies students.

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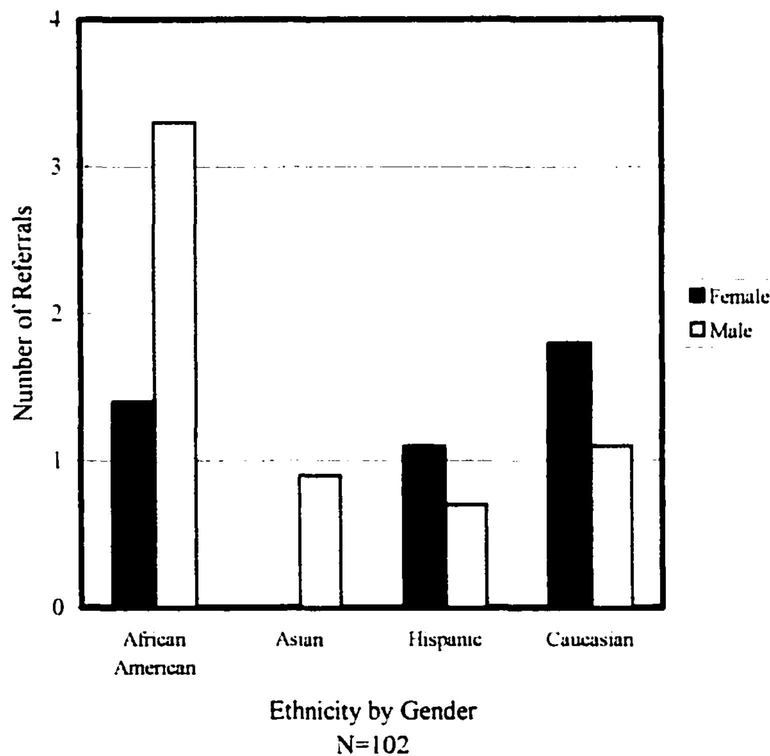
Referrals

Teachers issue referrals to students who they consider are causing a discipline problem. Typically, their citizenship grade is lowered depending on the extent of the student's disruptive behavior in class. Data are presented separately by gender and ethnicity. As shown in Figure 7, African American males received significantly more referrals than any other group of students and Asian females received no referrals at all. District reports reveal the same information about African American male students. Districtwide, African American males tend to receive a disproportionate number of referrals.

Figure 7: Average Number of Referrals



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Citizenship

Citizenship grades are given by teachers to evaluate students' behavior in the classroom. There are five levels of performance: E (excellent), G (Good), S (Satisfactory), N (Needs Improvement), and U (Unsatisfactory). The overall citizenship data by ethnicity and gender are presented in this section. An examination of Figure 8 shows that among the males, only Asian and Caucasian groups received E's. Hispanic males received the highest percentage of G's, Caucasian males received the highest percentage of S's, and African American males received the highest percentage of N's. None of the males in the study received a U (see Figure 8).

Correlating referrals with citizenship marks the African American males group, who received the highest number of referrals, also was the highest of all the groups of students who received citizenship marks of N (need improvement).

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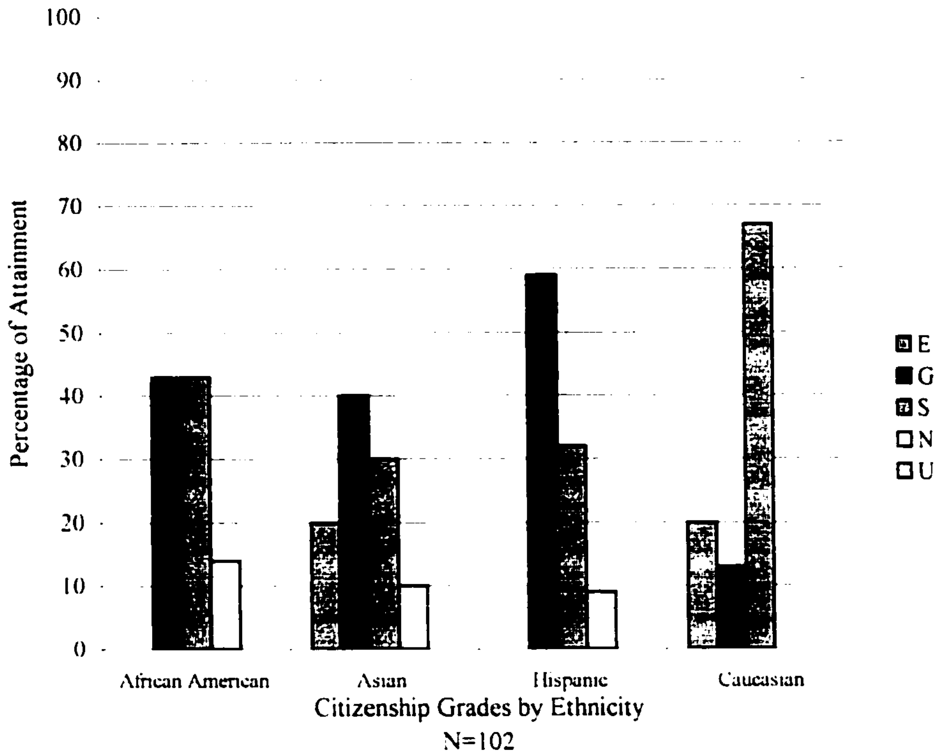
Figure 8: Male Citizenship Distribution



The overall average citizenship data for females indicated that out of a total of 10 African American females none received an E. However, out of 4 Asian females, 75 percent received an E. Among the largest ethnic group (Hispanic females) 11percent received an E. Out of 4 Caucasian females, 25 percent received an E. No African American student received an E (excellent) overall citizenship grade, whereas the Asian females on average received the highest overall E (excellent) citizenship grade (see Figure 9).

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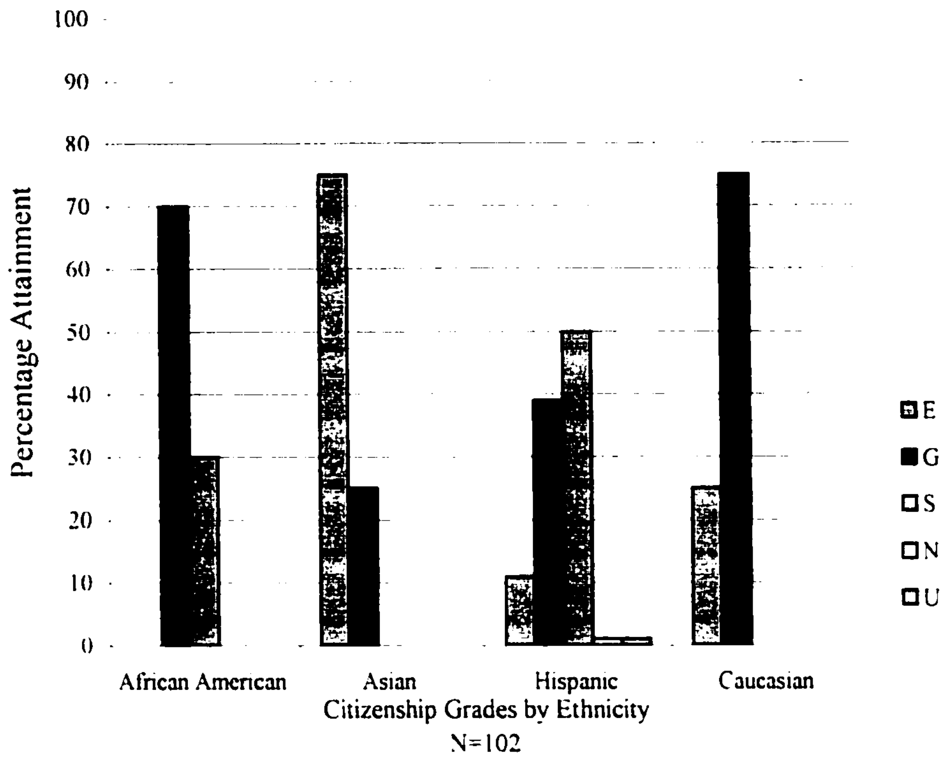
Figure 9: Female Citizenship Distribution



Grade Point Average (GPA)

The high school in this study used the standard grading scale of A as the highest grade with descending order of B, C, D, and F. Students earn a credit toward graduation if they earn a D or better academic grade for each course.

Analysis of the data for GPA by ethnicity and gender are presented in Figures 10 and 11. For ease of presentation, Genre Studies students' GPAs were converted to a letter grade by using the following ranges (i.e., 1.51 – 2.50 = C, 2.51 – 3.50 = B). The percentages of males for letter grade by ethnicity revealed that Caucasian males received more B grades than the other three ethnic groups of male students, while 50 percent of

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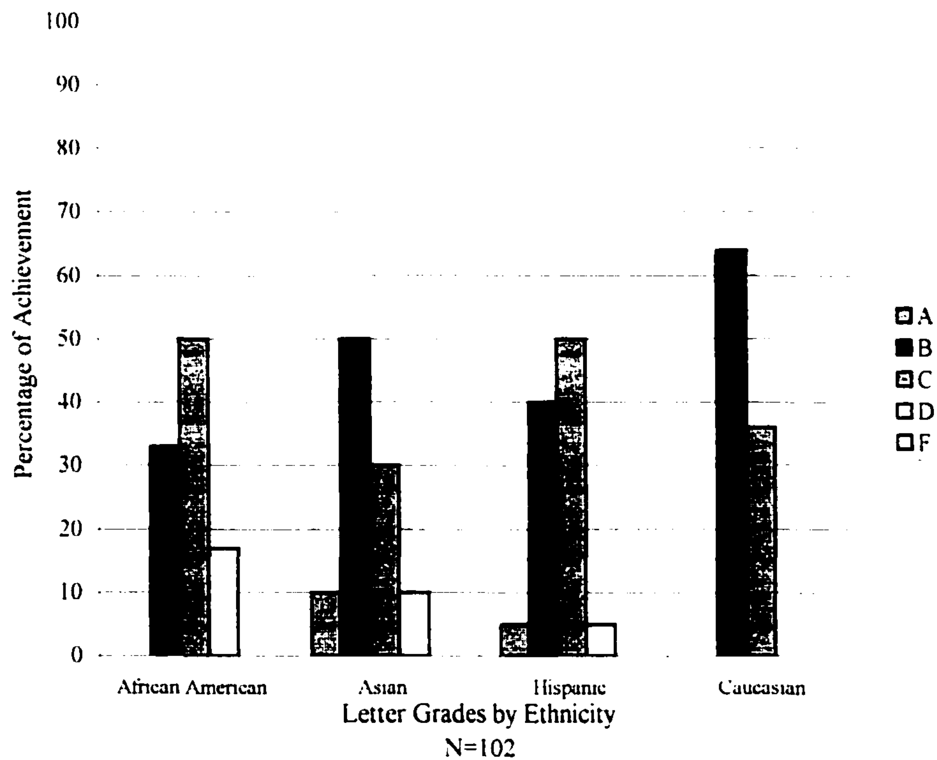
African American and Hispanic males received a GPA of C. All male groups (100 percent) received a GPA of D or better (see Figure 10).

The Asian males received the highest GPA average. The Caucasian males' overall G.P.A. was concentrated in the B and C grades. They received more B grades than any other group. The highest G.P.A. for both Hispanic males and African American males was C. The highest G.P.A. for African American males was D, as compared to all other groups of students.

Figure 10: Male Letter Grade Distribution



The grade point average data for females by ethnicity indicated that over 60 percent of Caucasian females, and 50 percent of the Asian females received a G.P.A. for

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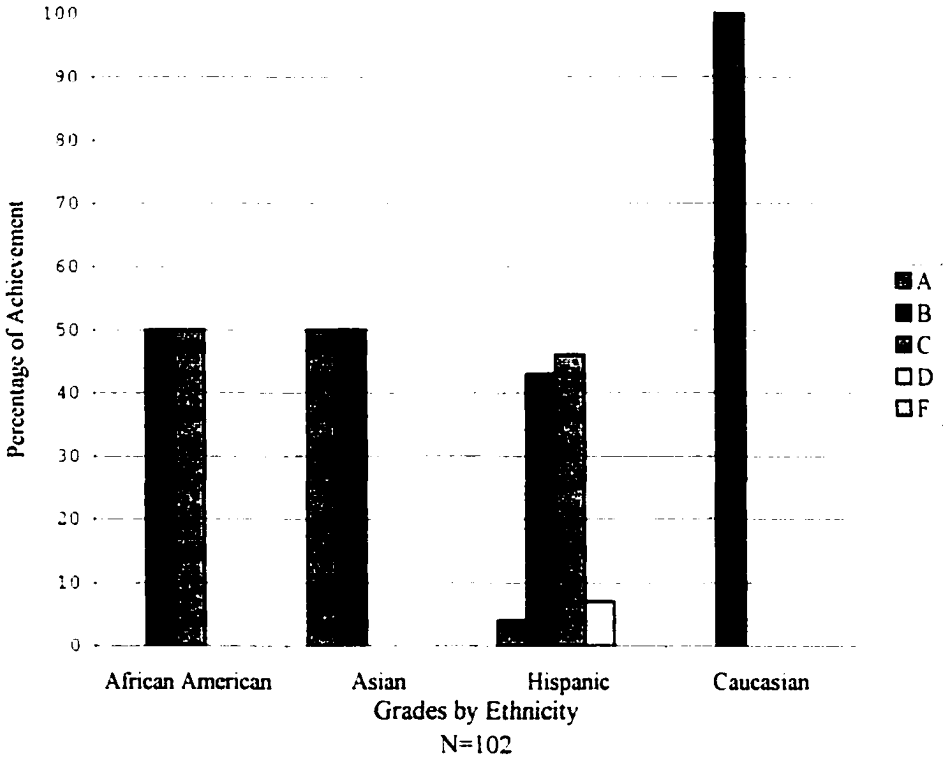
the letter grade of B. Both African American and Hispanic females received more G.P.A. letter grades of C than any other group (see Figure 11).

All Caucasian females (100 percent) received a B grade point average. African American females' overall grade point average was split: 50 percent of them earned a B average and 50 percent received a C average. Similarly, Asian females' overall grade point average was split, but 50 percent received an A average and 50 percent received a B average. Hispanic females' GPA were primarily B and C grades.

Figure 11: Female Letter Grade Distribution



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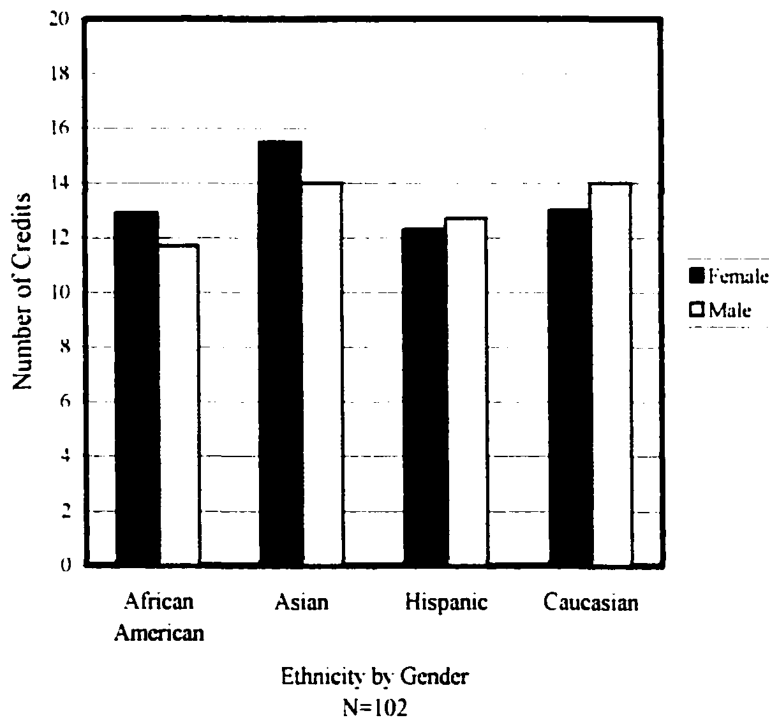
Credits

Most students begin to earn credits in the ninth grade. Students earn a credit each semester for each class if they receive a grade of a D or better. They are able to earn up to 12 credits per year. Also, students may earn credits in summer school.

Analysis of the credit data for the year 1999-2000, reported by ethnicity and gender indicated that African American males earned 11.7 credits and females earned 12.9 credits. On average, Asian males earned 14.0 credits and females earned 15.5 credits. Hispanic males, on average earned 12.7 and females earned 12.3 credits. On average, Caucasian males earned 14.0 credits and females earned 13.0 credits (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Average No. of Credits Toward Graduation



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The data revealed that on average all Genre Studies students earned 12 credits in the year 2000 toward graduation except the African American males. Some students had received few credits before entering ninth grade. Not all of these credits reflect college-bound class credits. Genre Studies students could receive four English credits if they passed the Genre Studies Literacy Block 2-period classes, which means that they had a double credit for English but not for an elective or for a recognized college class credit.

Regression Model Statistics

Using inferential statistics, these demographic and academic variables were then analyzed in two regression models. In the first model demographic and academic variables were regressed against the SDRT reading scores, and in the second model these variables were regressed against the SAT9 test.

The results of the first regression model indicated that 24 percent of the variation in SDRT reading scores was explained for the 102 Genre Studies students. In terms of the significance of the independent variables, at the 90 percent level of confidence, attendance had a negative impact on the change in the SDRT reading score. Although Genre Studies students had excellent attendance, increases in attendance were associated with decrease in SDRT reading scores—specifically an increase in attendance of 1 percent was associated with a 0.1 percent loss in their SDRT scores. This suggests that because students sit in the classroom does not mean that what they are doing is conducive to learning. Also at the 90 percent level of confidence, Hispanic students tended to gain 1 unit more on the SDRT than non-Hispanic students.

For those Genre Studies students who needed a modified curriculum, the result indicated that at the 95 percent level of confidence, these students scored lower on their

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SDRT reading test than students who did not need modified curriculum. All Genre Studies students except Caucasian females needed modified curriculum. Specifically, modified curriculum was associated with 0.9 percent loss in their SDRT scores. On the other hand, at the 95 percent level of confidence, grade point average had a positive impact on the change in the SDRT reading score. Specifically, a 1-unit increase in grade point average (such as from a "C" to a "B" or a "B" to an "A") was associated with a 1-point gain in the change in their SDRT score. In the study's example, all Caucasian males and females, Asian females and 50 percent of African American females received high GPAs. At the 97 percent level of confidence, academic credits also had a significant effect on the change in SDRT scores; every additional credit, was associated with a loss of 0.3 percent less in students' SDRT scores (see Table 7).

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Table 7. Relationship of Academic and Demographic Factors to SDRT Reading Scores

Variables	B	SE B	T
(Constant)	10.17	6.21	1.64
Gender	2.064E-02	.43	.05
African American	-.39	.75	-.51
Asian	.19	.73	.26
Hispanic	1.08	.61	1.77***
Referral	.15	.12	1.23
Attendance	-.11	.07	-1.68***
Modified Curriculum	-.93	.46	-2.03**
GPA	1.020	.50	2.03**
Credits	-.29	.13	-2.25*
Citizenship	.60	.46	1.32

* p < .01
** p < .05
***p < .10

The results of the second regression model to determine to what extent students' performance on the SAT9 test was due to demographic and academic variables indicated that 9 percent of the variation in the change in students' SAT9 reading test scores was explained by these factors for the 102 Genre Studies students. The data indicated with 97 percent certainty that attendance had a negative effect on the change in SAT9 test score.

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In both regression models, attendance had a negative impact on change in students' SDRT reading scores and SAT9 reading scores. Although Genre Studies students attended school regularly, their SAT9 reading score decreased. Specifically, an increase in attendance of 1 percent was associated with a 0.7 percent loss in their SAT9 scores (see Table 8).

Table 8. Relationship of Academic and Demographic Factors to SAT9 Reading Scores

Variables	B	SE B	T
(Constant)	60.13	33.86	1.78
Gender	-3.07	2.21	-1.39
African American	-3.40	5.19	-.66
Asian	2.43	4.48	.54
Hispanic	2.37	4.17	.57
Referral	.70	.62	1.12
Attendance	-.75	.35	-2.16*
Modified Curriculum	-1.83	2.16	-.85
GPA	1.80	2.58	.70
Credits	.34	.68	.50
Citizenship	.54	2.10	.26

* $p < .01$

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The results of the second regression model to determine to what extent students' performance on the SAT9 test was due to demographic and academic variables indicated that 9 percent of the variation in the change in students' SAT9 reading test scores was explained for the 102 Genre Studies students. The data indicated with 97 percent certainty that attendance had a negative effect on the change in SAT9 test score. As mentioned earlier with the SDRT reading scores regression model, although Genre Studies students attended school regularly, increases in attendance were associated with smaller gains on the SAT9 (see Table 8).

Research Question Three

3. What was the difference, if any, between the SAT9 reading scores of matched students who participated in Genre Studies classes in 1999-2000 and comparable students who participated in regular English classes in the 1998-1999 previous school year?

In the third part of the study, inferential statistics were used to compare the gains of Genre Studies students to a matched sample of regular English students using paired sample *t*-tests.

To create a comparison group for the Genre Studies intervention, the SAT9 1998-1999 spring scores of the Genre Studies students were closely matched to the SAT9 1997-1998 spring scores of students who participated in regular English classes. After this comparison group was created, the SAT9 scores used for the matching were then used again with the SAT9 scores from the following year to create for each student a measure that described the 1-year change in their SAT scores. The change in SAT9 scores for these two groups were then statistically compared through the use of a group *t* test. Results revealed that the mean gain score for Genre Studies students was –1.52,

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compared to the mean gain score of -4.00 for regular English students. In other words, students who took Genre Studies averaged a loss of 1.52 points on their SAT9 score, whereas regular English students averaged a loss of 4 points on their SAT9 score (see Table 9).

Table 9. Group – *t* test: Mean Gain Difference in Matched SAT9 Reading Scores

Variables	***N***	**Mean Gain**	***S.D.***
Regular English	122	-4.00	13.75
Genre Studies	122	-1.52	12.28

To determine if these differences were significantly different, an independent sample *t* test was performed. Since the resulting *t* value of 1.49 was less than the critical value (1.65) at the 90 percent confidence level, the null hypothesis of no differences between the gains of the two groups was accepted. Thus, there were no statistical differences between the two groups in terms of their mean loss gains on their SAT9 scores.

Findings

All grade level students except 12th grade are required to take SAT9 California state mandated test. This test is used by the state to rank schools, and not for student placement. In this southern California school district, students are placed in Genre Studies as a result of scoring 1 to 3 years below grade level on the SDRT test, not the

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SAT9 test. Nevertheless, both groups of students (regular English and Genre Studies) showed a statistically similar loss of points on the SAT9 test.

It should be noted that the California State Department of Education changed its mandatory standardized test from the CTBS to the SAT9 in 1997. All students were administered the SAT9 test for the first time in the spring of school year 1997-1998. Therefore, the matched pre SAT9 test scores are those of students taking SAT9 for the first time. To determine which students took the standardized test for the first time creates confounding variables, primarily because the district does not keep track of standardized test scores for transfer students. The odds of determining what, if any, standardized test transfer students took are low. Changing the CTBS test to SAT9 and taking this different test for the first time does not suggest any bias in this study because most states require standardized tests which are designed to measure the same areas. Additionally, students take various tests throughout their educational experience that use similar question format and stems.

Another point should be noted. There is an element of test familiarity present with those students who took the SAT9 test twice. There is an expectation that these students will do better the second time because they are better acquainted with test components such as time, wording, and multiple-choice questions.

However, at the high school level there are two other factors that could cancel out the benefits of test familiarity. First of all, high school students tend to take the test seriously when administered for the first time. However, there is a strong tendency for high school students to not take the test seriously the second time. Kohn (2000) reported that students oftentimes fill the ovals with random answers and thus receive low scores.

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These low scores on a single test are then considered students' level of capabilities and the students are placed in low-level classes. Secondly, at the high school level, students are involved in taking high stakes testing. Students realize that there are more important tests such as the college SAT, PSAT, and AP tests. High school students are motivated to do well on these high stake tests; whereas they view the SAT9 is least important. Students know that the SAT9 is primarily used to rank the schools, whereas the high stake testing will affect their personal future.

Conclusion

The data reveal that, on average, Genre Studies tends to have an adverse affect on the African American, Asian, and Caucasian male groups but not the Hispanic male group. Specifically, only two variables—grade point average and Hispanic ethnicity in regression model #1—had a positive impact on the change in the SDRT reading score. As expected, higher grade point averages were associated with greater gains in their reading scores. Hispanic students also gained more on the test than non-Hispanic students–specifically a grade level higher. Apparently, the dominant instructional delivery system designed in Genre Studies matched the cultural learning style of Hispanic students. On the other hand, attendance, course credits, and students' need for modified curriculum all had a negative impact on the change in Genre Studies students' SDRT reading scores. In regression model #2, only one variable had any significance—attendance—that also had a negative impact on the change both in the students' SAT9 and SDRT reading scores.

Attendance is usually viewed as a positive influence on the academic achievement of students. One slogan commonly used by schools is "miss school, miss out." Although

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the average percentage of days attended by Genre Studies students was 90 percent, in both regression models it had a negative impact on improving students' reading scores. This result may suggest that physical attendance in class does not mean that students are actively engaged in learning. Another explanation could be that students are learning remedial skills whereas a higher level of skills is needed to improve their reading scores. Additionally, students could be passing Genre Studies with a minimal level of work accomplished, thereby earning a D and a credit.

Ninth grade is the first year in which most students begin to earn their credits toward graduation. Some students earn high school credits in eighth grade by taking honors classes. It is reasonable to expect that higher number of credits will have a positive impact on improving students' reading scores. However, students can receive one credit for earning a D grade, minimally passing, which could explain the negative impact of the change in their SDRT reading scores shown in regression model #1.

The need for modified curriculum also had a negative effect on the change in students' SDRT reading scores. Genre Studies classes are comprised of English Language Learners (ELL), special education students, and other students. It is reasonable to expect that the need to differentiate the curriculum could adversely affect the reading scores, primarily because both some new and some veteran teachers have not been trained, if they have not obtained GATE (Gifted And Talented Education), Special Education, and SDAIE (Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English) certification.

Furthermore, there is no statistically significant difference between students participating in Genre Studies and a set of matched students that participated in

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traditional English classes. However, since Genre Studies classes are two periods long, students are expected to catch up by at least 2 years of growth in their reading. A 1-year growth would be equivalent to one normal school year growth, whereas the additional year would be considered catch-up growth. However, the degree to which these students can catch up to their grade level is determined by how many years they are behind. For some students, it could mean being enrolled in Genre Studies for all of their high school experience and still not catch up, signifying that Genre Studies is a de facto form of tracking. This suggests that some students must continue in the program until they graduate or drop out of school. Only 9 percent of Genre Studies students became eligible to take regular English classes as a result of participating in this intervention. Sixty percent of Genre Studies students' reading scores improved less than 1 year or decreased. Clearly, most students are not achieving at the standard 2-year growth in this 2-period instruction time block. At this rate of improvement the achievement gap between students who are tracked based on their past performance and grade level-achieving students could widen. Certainly the data showed that not all students benefited from participating in Genre Studies.

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CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS EDUCATIONAL REFORM STRATEGY?

This chapter first presents a summary of the study's purposes, methodology, and summary of key findings. The chapter continues with a discussion of the findings as they relate to themes/issues presented in the literature. Implications of this research for educational policy and practice are also discussed. This chapter concludes with recommendations, suggestions for further study, and a conclusion.

This study researched the outcomes of one high school in a school district whose Genre Studies program was considered to be exemplary to see what educational practitioners and policymakers, locally and elsewhere, could learn from the district's efforts, challenges, and successes.

The Study

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study were threefold. First, the study examined whether the reading level of Genre Studies students improved and the extent to which students became eligible for placement in regular English classes. Essentially, the study sought to determine whether or not homogeneous grouping at the secondary level can, under certain circumstances, improve students' reading scores. Second, the study examined what relationship, if any, demographic and academic factors had on Genre Studies students' reading level. Third, the study sought to determine if isolating below grade level students in literacy focused, block classes improved students' reading scores when

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compared to a matched set of students taking regular English classes. The study sought to provide insight into the general question of how to improve reading scores and thereby how to improve academic performance for students who are at risk.

Below is a review of the methodology used in the study and a summary of the key findings from the quantitative analysis of the data that were collected and interpreted.

Methodology

This study used quantitative data gathered from two measures of reading achievement, the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT9) and the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT), from a single high school within a southern California school district. Descriptive statistics were used to address the gains made by ninth grade students in both the Genre Studies group and a matched sample of students who did not participate in Genre Studies. Inferential statistics were also used to test for differences between the groups. Finally, multiple regression analysis was used to explain the extent to which differences in individual performance were due to demographic and academic factors.

Summary of Key Findings

Analysis of the data revealed that based on two measures of success—the SDRT and SAT9–the Genre Studies intervention strategy was unsuccessful. Specifically, after the year-long program was over, Genre Studies students scored about 2.0 points lower on the SAT9 and only gained .5 point on the SDRT, well below the expected rate of growth. Furthermore, only nine out of the 102 Genre Studies students became eligible for regular 10th grade English class, excluding the identified 11 students who had a pre SDRT score at or above 9th grade level. Out of the initial 183 students, 23 students (12%) were

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eligible for 10th grade regular English classes. Eleven of these students were eligible at the beginning of the school year because they had a pre score at or above grade level. Three students didn't have a pre score but had a post score at or above the 10th grade level. Nine students became eligible as determined by their growth measure of their pre and post scores.

Demographic and academic variables were also analyzed to determine to what extent these variables helped explain changes in students' reading levels. There were three academic variables that had a negative relationship to the change in Genre Studies reading scores– attendance, modified curriculum, and academic credits. Although Genre Studies students had excellent attendance, increases in attendance were associated with decreases in SDRT reading scores–specifically an increase in attendance of 1 percent was associated with a 0.1 percent loss in their SDRT scores. Additionally, students who needed a modified curriculum were associated with 0.9 percent loss in their SDRT scores. Moreover, academic credits also had a significant effect on the change in SDRT scores; increased credits were associated with a 0.3 percent loss in their SDRT scores.

On the other hand, two variables—Hispanic ethnicity and grade point average-had a positive relationship to the change in Genre Studies reading scores. Hispanic students tended to gain 1 unit (i.e., one grade level) more on the SDRT than did non-Hispanic students. Additionally, a 1-unit increase in grade point average was associated with a 1-point gain in the change of Genre Studies students' SDRT score.

In analyses of both of SDRT and SAT9 tests, attendance had a negative impact on the change in Genre Studies students' reading scores. Specifically, an increase in attendance of 1 percent was associated with a 0.7 percent loss in their SAT9 scores.

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To determine if isolating below-grade-level students in literacy-focused block classes could improve students' reading scores, a matched comparison group was first identified and then analyzed. Results revealed that students who took Genre Studies averaged a loss of 1.5 points on their SAT9 score, whereas students in regular English averaged a loss of 4 points on their SAT9 score. However, there was no statistical difference in these scores, suggesting that both Genre Studies and regular English students performed at the same level of change in their SAT9 scores. However, it is important to note that Genre Studies students participated in a two hour English Literacy Block class, which doubled the time that regular English students participated in their English class. As shown by this study's findings homogeneous grouping of low performing students did not improve students' reading, in fact it presented other challenges.

Discussion Of Findings

Several themes/issues emerged from an interconnection of the findings of this study with the literature on homogeneous grouping and tracking and how they affect student achievement. Specifically, homogeneous grouping, inflexible schedules, tracking, and overreliance on standardized tests to make instructional and curricular decisions were interconnected with the findings of this study.

Challenges of Homogeneous Grouping

Students entering ninth grade who were achieving below grade level formed homogeneous groups and were placed in two-period Genre Studies classes. The two-period Genre Studies course provided students with more time on task to participate in a workshop format, where they could read and write using a variety of materials at a range

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of reading levels. Typically, students improve their reading with more time on task to read and write. Then why weren't the gains in the reading score better?

The ultimate finding of the study reveals that, at least during the first year of implementing the policy, isolating below grade level, homogeneously grouped students in literacy focused block classes did not improve students' reading scores when analyzed as a group, as well as when compared to matched counterpart students.

Genre Studies appears to have had very little impact on the improvement of reading scores for African American males and females. These African American students showed no growth after 1 year's instructional time. Thus, these students are falling further below grade level than the initial 1-3 year below level that qualified them for Genre Studies. Similarly, Genre Studies appears to have a negative impact on the improvement of reading scores for both Caucasian and Asian males. Like the African American students, these students are falling further below grade level.

A similar study conducted by Braddock and Slavin (1992) revealed similar findings to the findings produced in this study. That study examined eighth graders who attended schools in which ability grouping was or was not used. Over a 2-year period of time, the researchers examined many outcomes for these students when they reached the tenth grade. High, average, and low achievers in the tracked schools were compared separately from their counterparts in the untracked schools. The data indicated that students in the low track performed significantly less well than did similar low achievers in untracked schools on composite and core subject achievement tests (reading, mathematics, science, and social studies).

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Genre Studies was designed to provide rigorous, standards-based literacy instruction. In a reduced class size of 20, students received a personalized balanced literacy (reading and writing) instructional program. These homogeneously grouped low performing students received more time in two-period literacy block classes. Genre Studies students' high percentage of attendance could be attributed to a small learning community designed with personalized instruction. Additionally, more time on task in a two-period class time could improve student achievement. The study's data revealed that grade point averages were associated with greater gains in Genre Studies students' SDRT reading scores.

Several institutional pathological issues were discussed in the review of literature in chapter 2. Among the school characteristics that have been identified as hindering the academic achievement of many students are inflexible schedules, tracking, and over-reliance on standardized tests and curricula decisions (Kagan, 1990; Meacham, 1990; Oakes, 1985; Rosenbaum, 1980; Sinclair & Ghory, 1987; Slavin, 1989a, 1989b).

Inflexible Schedules

Genre Studies students' schedule is locked in. Students below grade level are programmed in a literacy block schedule: two periods of Genre Studies, two periods of Algebra Exploration, history, and physical education. As predicted by high school teachers and some principals, there is a reduction and elimination of electives both from the schedules of low performers and from the school as a whole. These students are placed in the lower level track. Incoming ninth graders who do not have SDRT scores to determine placement are automatically scheduled in Genre Studies. Moreover, students who participated in an eighth grade Genre Studies at their middle school and entered

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ninth grade without SDRT scores are also scheduled into ninth grade Genre Studies. Little or no effort is taken to obtain their SDRT scores or retest the student; therefore, a pattern is being established of automatically placing students in Genre Studies rather than regular English. As reported in the analyses part of this study, some ninth grade students' initial SDRT scores were at or above grade level, yet they too were stuck in Genre Studies classes.

An inflexible schedule creates a problem because students are only allowed to change their class schedule after second semester. Furthermore, even if students score at or above grade level on the SDRT pretest, they are not taken out of Genre Studies. Basically, as Slavin (1990) and Oakes (1985) reported about tracking, some counselors or educators have, as a result of past performance, made global judgments about these students, and predictions of how well they are likely to learn. For example, students in the study who scored post high school 13th reading grade level were denied the opportunity to participate in the high achieving classes.

Genre Studies students spend more than 50% of their time with the same set of peers: two periods Genre Studies, two periods algebra exploration, history, and physical education. In some cases the master schedule design and /or counselor decisions did not allow any flexibility in these students' schedule to take other courses. Lucas (1999), states that a high scope of association occurs when students overlap more than one half of their day in the same classes. The association of these students has not changed; they are still tracked with the same students. Genre Studies students were not placed in any vertically differentiated curricula. They did not have the flexibility to move to different subjects at different levels. Counseling as well as scheduling barriers prohibited Genre

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Studies students from moving from one group or track to another. Genre Studies, therefore, is just another form of de facto tracking.

Furthermore, the study's' data revealed that attendance had a negative affect on the change in both reading assessments (SDRT and SAT9). Although Genre Studies students had excellent attendance, results indicate that attendance was associated with a loss in Genre Studies students' reading scores. This study result could be attributed to inflexible scheduling resulting in a high association of the same low achieving students in several classes each day. Genre Studies students could possibly attend school regularly to socialize with their friends, rather than improve their academic performance.

Tracking

Tracking has far-reaching ramifications. Over three decades, national tracking has adversely affected millions of people's lives. During the decades of Chapter 1 of the ESEA, recently known as Title1, students who scored below the 50th percentile on standardized test were placed in the low track. This sorting of students into homogeneous groups became a national institutionalized pathological practice.

As shown by this research, student achievement did not improve; this intervention strategy had an adverse affect on many students. Within a 2-period of block-scheduled time, only three groups of students achieved one year's growth, which means Genre Studies students could be tracked for all 4 years of their high school experience, depending on whether their reading level continues at 1 to 3 years below grade level on SDRT. Additionally, Genre Studies students' schedule will not allow them to take college preparatory courses. The priority focus on literacy eliminates their opportunities to take

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advanced English, math, and science classes. Tracking results in uneven distribution of learning experiences and access to resources.

Overreliance on Standardized Tests to Make Instructional and Curricular Decisions

Placement into Genre Studies classes is based on students' performance on a single assessment, the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) and not on the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT9). The SDRT assessment score determines whether students enter or remain in Genre Studies. No consideration is given to grades, SAT9 scores, or any other assessments. The California State Department of Education requires students to take the SAT9. The SAT9 test measures the state grade level standards that students are supposed to be taught. Genre Studies students (2001-2002) will soon have to pass the California High School Exit Exam, which also measures the state standards, before they can graduate. Yet all teachers, not just Genre Studies teachers, are teaching the district's standards, which are not aligned with the state's standards. These students are being taught certain standards but being assessed by different standards. Overreliance on standardized tests has swept through the nation. Kohn (2000) criticized this demand of high stakes standardized testing and points out several negative issues with standardized testing. One issue found in this study is that students who score low on a single standardized test are placed in low track classes.

Implications

Although there is a wealth of information about how to change schools, success in changing schools successfully is not widespread. School districts seem to continue the pattern of status quo. Much of the literature examining school reform with a focus on

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literacy is on elementary schools. How to best organize classrooms to develop literacy in all children is a complex question, especially at the secondary level.

The southern California school district's educational reform efforts evaluated in this dissertation were designed with good intentions, if the findings of this study are not a reflection of implementation issues occurring during the first year, it would seem that the good intentions were implemented with ineffective practices. The literature certainly supports such an analysis. Allington and Cunningham (1996), Comer (1998), and Oakes (1985) argue that two powerful norms prohibit widespread educational reform from improving education for all children. The first norm, some experts believe, is that natural ability is fixed early in life, if not innate, and that there is virtually nothing that school can do to alter a student's fundamental capability. The second norm is the idea of a normal distribution being viewed as accurate representation of how well children are likely to do in school, instead of the real distribution of certain characteristics for particular populations. Therefore, social class and racial inequities are perpetuated because lower class and minority students are disproportionally represented in the lower tracks in schools. This study examined the efforts of one district's efforts to change these fundamental views.

A southern California school district's Blueprint for Student Success (2000) advocates a new theory. The Blueprint embraces the premise that all children can learn, and focuses on making sure they do learn. Furthermore, it is based on a new core of learning and social theory called Knowledge-Based Constructivism. This theory is grounded in an effort-based system. Based on cognitive science research, adherents believe that knowledge not only enables thinking but also actually makes learning

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possible, resulting in people learning to be intelligent. The Blueprint suggests that the 1920s theory of inherited aptitude (natural ability) should no longer guide educational practice. Instead, the new aptitude theory of effort-based learning should guide educational practice. This effort-based learning is achieved through learning goals that are associated with a view of aptitude as something that is mutable through effort and is developed by taking an active stance toward learning and mastery opportunities. Learning goals are also associated with a view of ability as a repertoire of skills continuously expandable through personal efforts.

Advocating and embracing this new way of thinking and guiding educational practice is a profound step towards conceptualizing an educational system where all children can and will learn. However, implementing a stratification of students based on a single test score to form the organizational structure defeats the fundamental purpose for the reform of closing the achievement gap among students. Students who are below grade level and considered at-risk are homogeneously grouped in Genre Studies classes in the district's plan. Both the literature and district personnel expressed concerns about the adverse effects of homogeneous grouping low performing students, such as the reducing-eliminating electives/core college bound classes and grouping the lower quartile students with no role models. This grouping denies low performing students the opportunity of socializing with higher performing students in regular classes and creates a stigma associated with tracking. But no matter how they may try to disguise the fact to themselves and others, this program is based on homogeneous grouping. If the results in future years are similar to the results during the first year of implementation that was

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studied, very few students will escape from the low track they have been placed into despite the intention for this to happen.

The Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (CTP), a national research center, conducted a research study on the attitudes and experiences of teachers, site administrators, and peer coaches/staff developers within this southern California school district. This CTP report indicates that overall, teachers and principals seem to agree that this southern California school district's reform efforts of improving teaching and student learning provide a central purpose. Hightower & McLaughlin 2000 state:

> High school teachers (and some principals) were questioning four aspects of the district's reform plan: (1) homogeneous grouping of the low-performing students; (2) focus on literacy/reading at what they believe to be the exclusion of other content areas (in cases, pitting department against department); (3) the reduction/elimination of electives both from the schedules of low performers and from the schools as a whole, because of reallocation of resources; and (4) predicted increased dropout rates as a result of the intensive focus on low-performing students. In a nutshell, this program doesn't seem to be designed for secondary schools. (p. 26)

According to the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (CTP), a national research center, which conducted an evaluation of the reform initiative in the district, high school teachers in this district also expressed concerns about the issue of academic tracking of low-performing students through Genre Studies. They questioned both the social and academic merits of this new district policy. "Grouping the lower quartiles with no role models [goes against the research]" (Hightower & McLaughlin, 2000, p.10).

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Furthermore, they believe Title 1/Chapter 1 programs have taught that homogeneous type of grouping is not advantageous for students. This grouping denies them the opportunity of socialization with other students and creates a stigma associated with tracking (Hightower & McLaughlin, 2000).

Furthermore, in general the teachers and principals in this southern California school district felt excluded from the design and implementation of the reform efforts. They believed the "top-down" nature of the reform failed to build "buy-in" from site administrators or teachers. Teachers and principals felt a loss of professionalism or credibility as individual practitioners; they noted a sense of angst and fear that pervaded the district's reform environment. Hightower and McLaughlin (2000) reported that, "Most stated or implied that such a climate has taken a toll on professional morale; some noted that it has served to erode trust between the district central office and individual schools" (p. 17).

The study findings show that Genre Studies students did not significantly improve their reading scores; it is possible that teachers were not motivated by the "top-down " fear tactic approaches. The loss in SDRT and SAT9 reading scores indicated in tables 2,7,8,9 in chapter 4 could be attributed to lack of teacher "buy in."

Recommendations

A recurring theme presented in the literature for improving schools is to create schools that reduce the risks for students. Schools are needed that do not perpetuate the type of traditional practices that actually increase the risk that some students face in attending school. According to Cuban (1990), too often educational reformers have failed to learn from the past. Instead, school reform—again, again, and again—returns

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after a few years to practices found lacking in the past but seemingly lost from our institutional memory. Certainly if the findings from the first year of implementation of the Genre Studies program hold in subsequent years, the following recommendations should be taken seriously.

Heterogeneous Classes

First and foremost, a recommendation based on this study's findings is that at the secondary level Genre Studies classes should be taught in heterogeneous, not homogeneous student groupings. The study's results indicated that Genre Studies did not improve students' reading level to the expected growth of 1 year for every year of instruction. Specifically, Genre Studies students only gained a half point on their SDRT test (.50) and averaged a loss of 2 points on their SAT9 reading scores (see Tables 1 and 2, in chapter 4).

Research concludes there is substantial evidence that indicates homogeneous grouping does not consistently help anyone learn better. Based on this belief, homogeneous grouped Genre Studies students who are considered to be academically alike know about the same things, and learn at the same rate and are not being socially challenged. Reportedly, Rosenbaum (1976) argued that ability grouping perpetuates social class and racial inequities because lower class and minority students are disproportionally represented in the lower tracks; this is the case with Genre Studies.

The most profound finding of this study is that although Genre Studies students attended school in the range of the 90th percentile, increases in attendance were associated with a loss in their SDRT and SAT9 reading scores (see Tables 7 and 8, in chapter 4). According to Resnick and Hall (1998), "Socialization is the process by which

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children acquire the standards, values, and knowledge of their society" (p. 20). Furthermore, the high scope of association with the same group of students in similar classes, without mobility to move from one track/class to another, socializes students to do less than what they are capable of performing. Genre Studies students are tracked together for literacy, exploration algebra, history and physical education. Thus, Genre Studies students' high attendance could be attributed to their desire to socialize with their friends and not necessarily to improve their academics. Evidently, socialization is as strong as peer pressure, especially without more capable student influence as role models.

In heterogeneous classes teachers differentiate instruction appropriately to accommodate varied levels and provide different social arrangements for practice. Instruction across levels should be active, concrete, hands-on, highly structured, and both visual and auditory. "Intelligence grows as students are challenged to apply learning in settings where they interact with others who have strengths different from their own" (Wheelock, 1992, p. 13). The advantage of heterogeneous grouping is that below level students will see, interact, and model their peers who have developed language skills at a higher level.

All ninth grade students should be held accountable to the same set of standards, whether they are district or state standards. Furthermore, all ninth graders will eventually have to pass the same state administered High School Exit Exam to graduate from high school. Although the class that promotes subtle inequities is called Genre Studies, the students are receiving English 1-2 credit. Genre Studies students are graded by teachers according to the standards of all other ninth grade students. The Genre Studies' strategy

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of isolating below grade level students shows minimal improvement in students' reading scores.

Implementing Genre Studies strategy in heterogeneous classes and holding students accountable for their learning will improve student achievement. According to Resnick and Hall (1998), educators underestimate the abilities of students. "Children develop cognitive strategies about effort-based beliefs about intelligence when they are continuously pressed to raise questions, to accept challenges, to find solutions that are not immediately apparent, and to rationally defend their proposals" (p. 20). Students should be taught how to use assessment results to modify their learning. Students should be responsible for setting learning goals and monitoring their own progress to achieve these goals. Students should also monitor their progress with learning the grade level subject standards.

Coordinated Assessment Program

A second recommendation based on the study's findings is to realign the assessments used for student placement and evaluation of student performance. The data revealed a difference between the two academic variables G.P.A. and credits. As expected, higher grade point average was associated with greater gains in Genre Studies students' SDRT reading scores, but not with the SAT9 reading scores. Conversely, course credits had a negative affect on the change in Genre Studies students' SDRT reading scores. After a year of two periods of literacy intervention, it is reasonable to expect higher G.P.As and academic credits to correlate with the success rate of students becoming eligible for regular 10th grade English classes. As shown in table 5, the

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study's finding showed only 9 percent of the Genre Studies students became eligible for regular 10th grade English classes.

At the district, secondary school, and classroom levels, systematic structures to review and monitor student achievement should be implemented. Formal and informal data on student achievement, including assessment of student performance standards, should be routinely gathered. These data should reflect assessment of the students' strengths and areas of improvement. These data should be analyzed to evaluate student performance and identify appropriate strategies and activities to improve instruction. Teachers should use the data to employ a variety of assessment tools to modify the curriculum and instructional practices. The study revealed that students who qualified to receive a modified curriculum lost 0.9 percent in their SDRT reading scores (see Table 7, in chapter 4).

At the school site level, a coordinated assessment and evaluation system should be developed that includes reviewing and assessing incoming 9th grade students to obtain appropriate placement. Continuous review of a variety of assessments by all departments of every student should be implemented. These student assessment profiles should be shared and discussed interdepartmentally and should drive the state standards based curriculum for all students.

School-Based Support System

A third recommendation based on the study's findings is to establish a comprehensive family-centered support system for students who are at risk. The study's data revealed that all groups of students except Caucasian females had modified curriculum needs. Students who are classified as needing special education services and

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students who speak a primary language other than English are eligible to receive a modified curriculum (see Figure 6, in chapter 4). The need for modified curriculum had a negative effect on the change in students' SDRT reading scores (see Table 7, in chapter 4). High academic achievement is most likely when schools, homes, and communities all contribute to students' ability, willingness, and opportunities to invest in education. Academic failure is most likely when a student has few or no sources of encouragement, practical support, and educational opportunities.

Test scores of Genre Studies students were matched with those of students who took regular English classes. The data indicated no statistical differences between the two groups' mean gains scores. Both groups of students performed low on the SAT9 reading test (see Table 9, in chapter 4). The significant difference is that Genre Studies students participated in literacy focused instructional 2-period classes with trained teachers. The findings of this educational reform strategy did not prove successful for improving student achievement. There is a need to analyze improving student achievement from a different perspective.

The literature discusses a school-based support system to address students who need additional support. In 1979, Bronfenbrenner introduced the concept of ecology. He pointed out that the multiple social systems that young people participate in have an "ecological" relation to each other. The levels of parental and community resources may influence neonatal health and abilities at birth, developments at homes may lead to changes in student behavior, and changes in community demographics and responses may directly or indirectly lead to changes in school environment.

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Hixson and Tinzmann (1990) also suggested an "ecological approach" that recognizes education as a process that takes place both inside and outside the school. This ecological approach is therefore affected by the

- Social and academic organization of the school.
- Personal and background characteristics/circumstances of students and their families.
- Community contexts within which students, families, and schools exist.
- Relationship of each of these factors to the other.

The Center for the Study and Teaching of At-Risk Students (C-STARS) has developed such a model based on the ecological approach for intervening with students who are low achievers, which is Interprofessional Case Management.

Initially, a case manager identifies the students. Then an interprofessional case management team outlines a plan. Community agencies help the student and his/her family. A strategy is implemented to monitor the student's progress. True collaboration among all parties involved is crucial for the program's success. This school-based interprofessional case management model has been successfully field tested in elementary and secondary schools in a variety of urban and rural communities. Many of the Interprofessional Case Management program components and services are a part of the support that Genre Studies students receive who are qualified for a modified curriculum.

This Interprofessional Case Management program is a service modality that coordinates several different human service systems, including education, that share common client populations of at-risk children and their families. Case management

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approach is a series of actions and a process to ensure that clients of human services receive the services, treatment, care, and education opportunities to which they are entitled. It is the only method used by service providers for the multiple and concurrent problems for which clients have difficulty in accessing and using services available from different professionals and service systems. Children and their families who need case management services typically have two things in common:

1. They experience several concurrent problems that require assistance from more than one service.
2. They have special difficulty in accessing available help effectively.

C-STARS defines school-based interprofessional case management as:

- A series of logical and appropriate interaction within a comprehensive service network of schools, social service, and health agencies, responsible for the well being of common client populations of children and families. These interactions maximize opportunities for children at risk of school failure and their families to receive a variety of needed services in a supportive, efficient, and coordinated manner while empowering parents and guardians (Smith & Stowitschiek, 1992).

Functional components of the C-STARS model are the following:

- Assessment – identify causes of identified students' personal and academic difficulties.
- Development of a Service Plan – develop a plan of coordinated multiple services both in and out of school by the case management team, tailored to each student.

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- Brokering – link identified students and families to needed schools and other services. Brokering involves more than simply making a referral, it also provides prereferral counseling and family outreach activities. In times of crisis, a team member accompanies the student and if necessary, family members to the referral agency.
- Service Implementation and Coordination – deliver or broker the delivery of selected services on-site, in family homes, or at community-based agencies. Ensure that all services to a student are working together for that student's benefit and that appropriate communication is taking place.
- Advocacy - advocate for students and families by:
    1. assisting and mediating student-family communication within or outside service agencies or school.
    2. helping students and families negotiate different bureaucracies.
- Monitoring - one member of the team is designated the primary professional care giver; this person follows through for the student and, if necessary, the student's family. This is the person with whom they can comfortably communicate and turn to.

Suggestions for Further Study

Implementing a literacy focused strategy to educate students who are performing below grade level is of interest at the national, state, and local levels. For this study, the researcher chose to focus on the first year inception of Genre Studies as an educational reform strategy in a southern California school district. This research project only investigated one high school, within one large urban school district, that implemented this

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educational reform strategy. Analyzing the performance of first year's Genre Studies students, the researcher compared the outcomes of Genre Studies students' experience with a matched sample group of nonGenre Studies students' experience in regular English classes. In addition to conducting studies to determine if the patterns discovered during first year implementation hold during subsequent years, many additional questions not investigated are equally interesting.

Continuous in-depth and longitudinal quantitative research studies are desperately needed in education. There are few quantitative studies that delve deeply into daily student assessment embedded in instructional practices to modify curriculum that will improve student achievement. Furthermore, there are few studies that cover a long enough time span to investigate how reform efforts are sustained, how they translate in the secondary classroom, or what long-term effects there may be for students, staff, and the educational community. Continuing study of this high school and other high schools from this southern California district might include the following:

- A quantitative research study conducted to determine what impact Genre Studies had on improving the reading scores for students who participated for two years. The school year 2000-2001 was the second year. The previous year's ninth graders who scored below grade level are participates in the tenth grade Genre Studies, and the majority of these students had the same teacher.
- A quantitative research study conducted on the effects of the achievement of high school students programmed to the same teacher for two or more consecutive years.

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- A longitudinal research study conducted to determine what percentage of the first year's (1999-2000) ninth grade Genre Studies students graduate entered college, or dropped out of school before graduation.
- A longitudinal research study conducted to determine the differences between SDRT and SAT9 reading scores of a heterogeneous group of students participating in Genre Studies compared to a homogeneous group of students participating in Genre Studies.

One way to ensure continuous research studies is for educators to conduct quantitative research within their own settings. The researcher strongly encourages that classroom teachers and school support staff begin conducting quantitative research to investigate the effectiveness of their educational programs, instead of waiting for external forces to determine educational changes.

Conclusion

As designed, the Genre Studies literacy focused intervention strategy is not a promising educational reform. In fact, Genre Studies is another form of tracking, if as happened during the first year of implementation, students who enter the program are unlikely to exit it. Implementing this study's recommendations will strengthen the design of this intervention strategy, eliminate the tracks and support "at-risk" students.

A comprehensive approach is needed for successful educational reform. Like the medical profession, multiple assessments and evaluations of the client are needed to prescribe treatment. One size/treatment doesn't fit all, especially at the same dosage. The holistic diagnostic approach of analyzing how the environment both inside and outside the school affects the success of the clients is strongly recommended. Essentially

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implementing Genre Studies strategy in heterogeneous classes, utilizing continuous multiple assessments, and holding students accountable for their learning surrounded by a family-centered support system will improve student achievement.

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